

Ranch House Style Guide

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ALABAMA

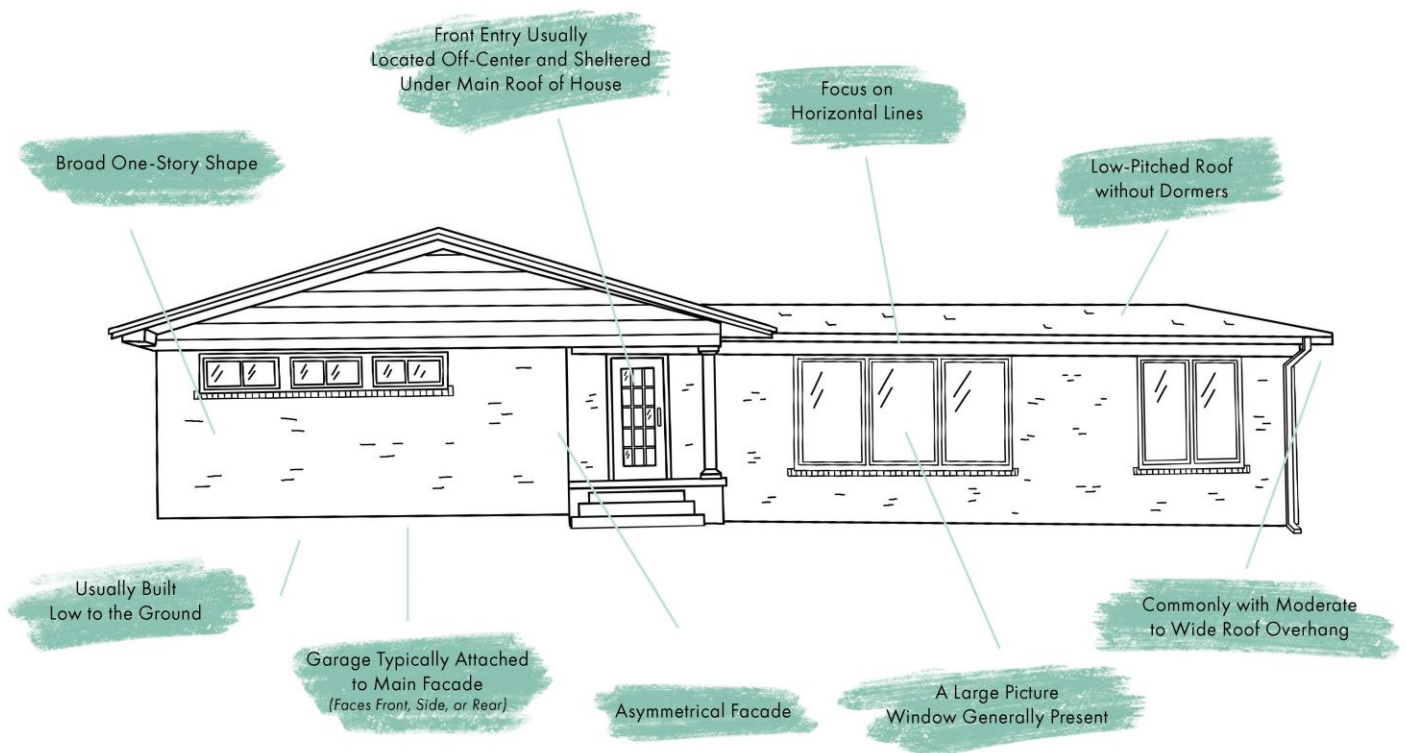


Ranch House (1945-1975)

As seen in McFarland Heights, Wood Avenue, Cherry Street, Locust Street,
and College Place historic districts.

Summary of Characteristics

The Ranch House became popular at the height of the automobile age when land often in newly developed suburbs was relatively cheap, and residents no longer required sidewalks to access commercial hubs or public transit lines. Broad, typically one-story houses with streamlined design elements replaced earlier bungalow and more traditional forms; usually appearing low to the ground with a low-pitched roof without dormers; commonly with a moderate roof overhang. The front entry was typically off centered on an asymmetrical façade with a large picture window often present, and as reliance on automobiles rose, many ranch houses incorporated an attached garage.



Roof pitch and form

Ranch houses are defined first by their form. Roofs can be hipped, cross-hipped, cross-gabled, side gabled, and to a lesser extent split-level. Ranch forms include Linear, Linear with Clusters, Compact, Courtyard, Half-courtyard, Rambling, and Alphabet, meaning the house form takes the shape of a letter, such as "Y" or "V." This is best seen from an aerial view. Roofs on Ranch houses are always low-pitched, in some cases appearing almost flat.





Notice the low, almost flat-looking roof pitch on these examples. The above is an example of the split-level form.



This Compact Ranch with a gable-on-hip roof form was designed to fit a smaller lot. The large picture window on the façade helps identify this house as a Ranch rather than an American Small House.

Windows and Entryways

Windows and doors of Ranch houses vary depending on the house's applied style, however, there are some commonalities. A variety of pre-manufactured windows were available for purchase by the time the Ranch house was popular, therefore one house may exhibit several different types and sizes of windows. Windows can be wood but were often metal (steel or aluminum), and are typically horizontal regardless of material and composition. At least half of all Ranch houses feature a large picture window on the front. These can either be single pane and fixed, meaning they do not open, or can be comprised of multiple lights where some part of the window may open.

The front entry is almost always sheltered beneath the main roof or a small entry porch and are sometimes obscured from view, a significant departure from earlier styles. Doors can be wood or metal and come in a variety of styles. Some high-style examples feature a double-entry door. A door on a Colonial Revival Ranch may feature a more elaborate door surround, such as sidelights and transoms, pilasters, or Columns as porch supports. Simple, low masonry planters are common and typically located near the entry.



Large picture windows, emphasis on horizontal lines, and entryways that are "tucked in" to the house or beneath the roofline are common characteristics of the Ranch house.



Fences, Carports, and Backyard Features

Garages are generally attached and can face the front, side, or back of the house. Older Ranch houses (1940-50s) may have had only a single car garage, while later examples (1960-70s) may feature two-car or even three-car garages. Carports are also common on Ranch houses, especially those that are Contemporary in style, and may be supported by simple metal posts, metal hairpin posts, or more decorative concrete block walls, often featuring geometric patterns.





Large, private outdoor patios in the rear of the house are more common than front or side porches on Ranch Houses. Often accessible by sliding glass doors or French doors on the back of the house, these patios are often stone or brick and may feature a free-standing masonry grill. Large windows sometimes face the rear patio, in contrast to earlier styles that faced the more public façade or street side of the house.

Fences around these more expansive and sometimes rambling Ranch house lots are common. They are often low, metal chain link.



Applied styles

Ranch houses with little to no applied decoration are very common and may be called Plain or plainly styled.

Styled Ranch houses may exhibit the streamlined aesthetic of the Modern era, and perhaps more commonly in the Southeast, Ranch houses may exhibit applied characteristics of more traditional styles as well, such as Colonial Revival. The Colonial Revival

style may present itself on a Ranch house simply by the presence of a traditional window arrangement, shutters, or a traditional door surround with pilasters or columns. Other applied styles include to a lesser extent: Spanish Colonial Revival and Rustic.



Both houses feature a Colonial Revival door surround. The one to the left has columns and a pedimented portico, while the example below features pilasters.



The Contemporary style can be seen on some Ranch houses in Florence's historic districts and has roots in the Usonian style, best exemplified by the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Rosenbaum House in McFarland Heights. Elements of the Contemporary style include accentuated roof lines, wide overhanging eaves, metal windows, sliding glass doors (sometimes in multiples to create a window-wall, as seen on the back of the Rosenbaum house), and fixed plate glass windows of irregular shapes fitted into the gable ends of the house.



Notice the fixed plate glass windows in the front-facing gable of this Contemporary Courtyard Ranch.

Other Resources:

For more information about specific Ranch house styles and types, check out these resources developed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division:

<https://gadnr.org/sites/default/files/hpd/pdf/RanchHousesinGeorgia.pdf>

<https://gadnr.org/sites/default/files/hpd/pdf/RanchHousesinGeorgiaTwo.pdf>