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Thomas C. Hubka. *Houses Without Names: Architectural Nomenclature and the Classification of America's Common Houses*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013, 112 pp., numerous black-and-white photographs, floor plans, and illustrations, paperback, \$29.95, ISBN: 9781572339477.

To give something a name, to classify it in relation to other things, is a first step toward understanding. So-called common houses make up about 80 percent of the housing stock in the United States. Yet despite their predominance, speculatively built, anonymously designed homes often escape the attention of observers, in part because we don't know what to call them. Existing stylistic terms, alternately vague or reductive, can limit rather than broaden interpretation. Thomas Hubka's book, *Houses Without Names: Architectural Nomenclature and the Classification of America's Common Houses*, proposes an inclusive method of characterizing domestic architecture that combines exterior style and form with interior plan and function. A teacher and scholar, Hubka has written widely on vernacular architecture, including his 1985 study of New England agricultural buildings, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn*.

Drawing attention to common dwellings and integrating them fully into American architectural history is a primary objective of *Houses Without Names*. Such an achievement would grant common houses an enhanced place alongside elite, architect-designed homes. It would also enable practitioners to develop preservation strategies that acknowledge the true range of American housing. Hubka sets the stage with an overview of how dwellings have been classified historically and the limitations of defining them by style alone. He then outlines a survey process that seeks similar and repeated types within a given area, attributing these dominant forms to a dialogue between local and national trends. Significance is ascribed to the collective unity of houses rather than to unique or distinctive examples. A series of tables in the subsequent chapter illustrate with plans and elevations two hundred

years of common house prototypes. Emphasis is on the interchangeable relationship of exterior and interior forms. A guide to identifying floor plans from the exterior follows, providing an introduction to the techniques of common-home fieldwork. The book concludes with a sample application of Hubka's approach as undertaken by his historic preservation students in Springfield, Oregon. The book is abundantly illustrated throughout with images gathered during the author's fieldwork from Massachusetts to Oregon, as well as informative drawings of plan types and elevations.

Throughout *Houses Without Names* Hubka makes a persuasive case for the crucial role speculative building played in shaping America's residential landscape. He also argues that similarities in that landscape emerged through consensus among local builders about the house forms best suited to their community. Additional historical context about speculative construction and the people who undertook it would buttress these assertions. One is curious, for example, about the number of homes constructed by the typical builder. Were they career builders, or were they lured from other trades and professions during periods of opportunity? What networks helped shape the local unity that Hubka describes? What magazines did the builders read? Hubka states that they are "anonymous" but his extensive research surely revealed information that could give the reader a composite image of the typical professional responsible for these houses. Perhaps such insights will be forthcoming in a book Hubka is writing on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century middle-class housing culture.

Houses Without Names is one of the first books to take on the millions of common homes in the United States

and to see significance in that “common-ness.” Drawing on decades of research and keen-eyed observation, Professor Hubka establishes a model for applying fieldwork and an openness to the ordinary (long the strengths of the vernacular architecture historian) to a built landscape created through industrial production and mass markets. By focusing on regional building practices, local forces balance national ones; by presenting floor plans as partner to exterior forms, use becomes an important marker of meaning. As the Latin expression “*Nomen est numen*” (to name is to know) suggests, those things that we cannot identify risk being overlooked, ignored, or dismissed as insignificant and unworthy of study. In developing a system for classifying everyday dwellings, Hubka takes an important step toward making them visible to scholars and practitioners. When these homes can be named and discussed in relation to each other, new understandings will inevitably emerge along with a greater appreciation of their place in American culture.

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