

Spanish Colonial Revival Architecture

The Spanish Colonial Revival officially started in 1915 when the style was showcased at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego.

However, the architectural style was also made popular by the immensely successful 1884 historical novel "Ramona," featuring a romanticized and picturesque vision of Mexican Colonial life in Southern California.



The novel was republished 300 times and made into four films by 1936. This led droves of tourists to visit locations in the novel and then mail tens of thousands of postcards across the country featuring the iconic Spanish-style architecture. A coordinated public relations campaign promoted this sunny, robust American way of life. Both the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railways adopted the style for rail-corridor buildings to provide a consistent Southwest theme for eastern travelers.

The two most influential architects of Spanish Colonial Revival were Bertram Goodhue and George Washington Smith. In the 1920s and 1930s, their architectural plans were made widely available in books produced by contractors and builders. The revival quickly spread to other regions, including Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Florida.

Spanish Colonial Revival draws inspiration largely from Moorish, Renaissance, Byzantine and New World Mission-style architecture. Characteristics include low-pitched, multi-level red-tiled roofs; rectangle or L-shaped floor plans; balconies and porches; courtyards and patios; arched entryways and windows; stucco walls; ornamental iron work; unpainted, heavy wooden doors often carved in detail; ceramic flooring; exposed wooden beams; and colorful interior tiles.