

Southern Hospitality

A Brief History of the Porch

Hunter Doyle



Clementine Hunter, *Harvesting Gourds near the African House and Wash Day near Ghana House*, 1959. New Orleans Museum of Art.

Vibrantly painted, Clementine Hunter's painting presents an image of the home as a nucleus. An atom around which activities unfold. Against a field of brilliant pink pigment, a collection of scenes are depicted as isolated moments framing the structure. Communal traditions, daily rituals and personal memories are seen as vignettes around the home's periphery. Flowing from the doorway and encircling the building we find a break in the otherwise ubiquitous pink field—a light brown, almost sienna, swatch. The threshold immediately defining the home's periphery is neither of the field nor the home. Instead, it appears like a halo, an aura floating between worlds. A shaded space where the household's extended community may congregate, meet and work together. The home is seen buffered by an ambiguous space of reception.

The porch has a complex history in the United States. As a product of migration and spatial hybridization, the porch is fundamentally a space of exchange and social resiliency. This article attempts to chronicle some incidents in the genealogy of the porch related to social and

environmental values. The essay suggests the sixteenth century Caribbean islands as the birthplace of the American porch and tracks its spread and early development on the continent related to the Haitian revolution. The southern porch can be understood as a process of spatial, social and cultural grafting. The consequences of which are highlighted by three case studies in the Mississippi Delta, New Orleans and Charleston.

Although much separates people in the southern part of the US, they do share at least one value—hospitality. The extent of which is evidenced through the clichés and stereotypes often used to define the social characteristics of the region. Countless examples from films and music, to cookbooks, magazines and literature illustrate the importance of this trait across economic, cultural and ideological lines—*southern* hospitality,⁰¹ is, in fact, genre defining. As a concept hospitality is an act of kindly welcoming others into one's home.⁰² Valuing hospitality means placing importance on the care of those outside one's biological family. Welcoming them in. Implicitly spatial, in the context of domesticity, southern hospitality is manifested through its architectural counterpart: the porch.

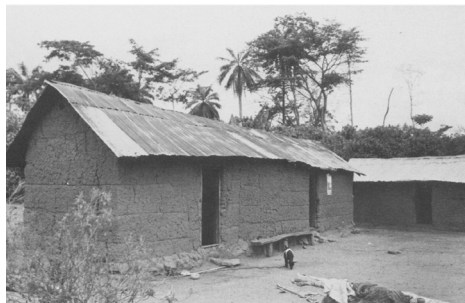
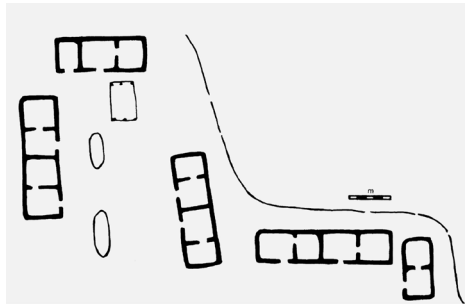
THE ORIGINS OF THE PORCH

The Caribbean islands underwent a dramatic change during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, especially Hispaniola. At that time, much of European colonialism pivoted around this tropical island. Hispaniola's strategic position and ideal climate for sugar cane put the Caribbean Island at the center of Europe's emerging global trade. Driven by one of the worst humanitarian injustices in history—the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade—people from Western Africa, southeast Asia and the Americas were brought against their will to work in the Caribbean.⁰³ This is the context in which the porch emerges. On Hispaniola, the porch relates to two distinct housing types, the *Cailles Long* and Colonial villa. Built by slave labor, the architecture of both was greatly influenced by their cultural values, traditions and environmental knowledge. Products of architectural transference from diverse backgrounds these houses became hybrids. They did, however, all share the porch as a central element. Understanding the significance of this requires an in-depth study of the housing types which influenced these groups. While a complete analysis is outside the scope of the work, the essay will consider two important examples: the Yoruba *togun*⁰⁴ from West Africa and Taino *bohio* from the Caribbean.

The Yoruba *togun* significantly influenced the architecture and culture of colonial Hispaniola, impacting both the individual dwelling and the manner in which multiple households related to one another.⁰⁵ Internally, Yoruba homes were traditionally composed of square, equal sized, consecutive rooms. Linearly arranged, the footprint of the walls formed an elongated rectangle, topped with a gabled roof. Built of thick mud the structures used thermal mass and shade to keep themselves cool. Homes were not always freestanding, often multiple households shared a single roof while maintaining independent entrances and separations inside. These entrances were, without exception, located on the long side

- 01 Such as Ludacris, "Southern Hospitality," December 29, 2000, track 14 on Back for the First Time, Disturbing Tha Peace, Def Jam South, 2000; Southern Hospitality, 2022-23, Season 1-2. Directed by Lamar Bonaparte. Aired since November 28, 2022 on Bravo; and Winifried Cheney, *The Southern Hospitality Cookbook* (Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 1976).
- 02 See Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (San Francisco: Stanford University Press,) 200; Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2 (2012): 501-517; Matei Candea & Giovanni da Col, "The Return to Hospitality: Strangers, Guests and Ambiguous Encounters," in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 18 (2012): S1-S19.
- 03 See Peter Mark, *Portuguese Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Anthony D. King, *Space of Global Culture: Architecture Urbanism Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004); James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).
- 04 As noted by John Vlach, the Yoruba word for dwelling, "togun," is synonymous with "assembly."
- 05 John M. Vlach, "Affecting Architecture of the Yoruba," in *African Arts*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (October 1976): 48-53; and Peter Mark, *Portuguese Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

of the structure. Architecturally, Yoruba homes lacks any recognizable form of porch. The use of the area just outside the entrance, however, does imply a cultural significance later found in the porch. Every settlement included two or three independent dwellings laid out to form an 'L' or 'U' shape. This outdoor zone between the structures provided a kind of collective square.⁰⁶ The dwelling's long rectangular wall faced the square, providing shade in the afternoon and used as an open room. Proliferated with personal belongings, ceramics and furniture, this space around the threshold and along the wall became a visible extension of life within.



Above: Plan of Yoruba settlement. Drawn by John Vlach, 1977; below: Yoruba Togun dwelling. Photographs by John Vlach, 1977.

Similar to the Yoruba, Taino dwellings were built around an open communal space. Here, however, the community lived under one ellipsoidal roof without interior divisions. Instead of mud, which was less common on the sandy islands, the Taino relied on light branches lashed together to form monocoque shells faced with palms. Over time these ellipsoidal forms adapted to be more orthogonal and became known as the bohio.⁰⁷ Distinct from the Yoruba, the bohio was entered frontally along the short side, aligning the opening with the length of the dwelling, possibly to take advantage of prevailing winds. The transition from ellipse to rectangle resulted in a structural change from a shell to a frame, separating wall from roof. The separation of these elements provided a new opportunity: the roof could now continue beyond the wall. Adding simple posts to balance the cantilever, the roof was extended over the home's entrance, creating a

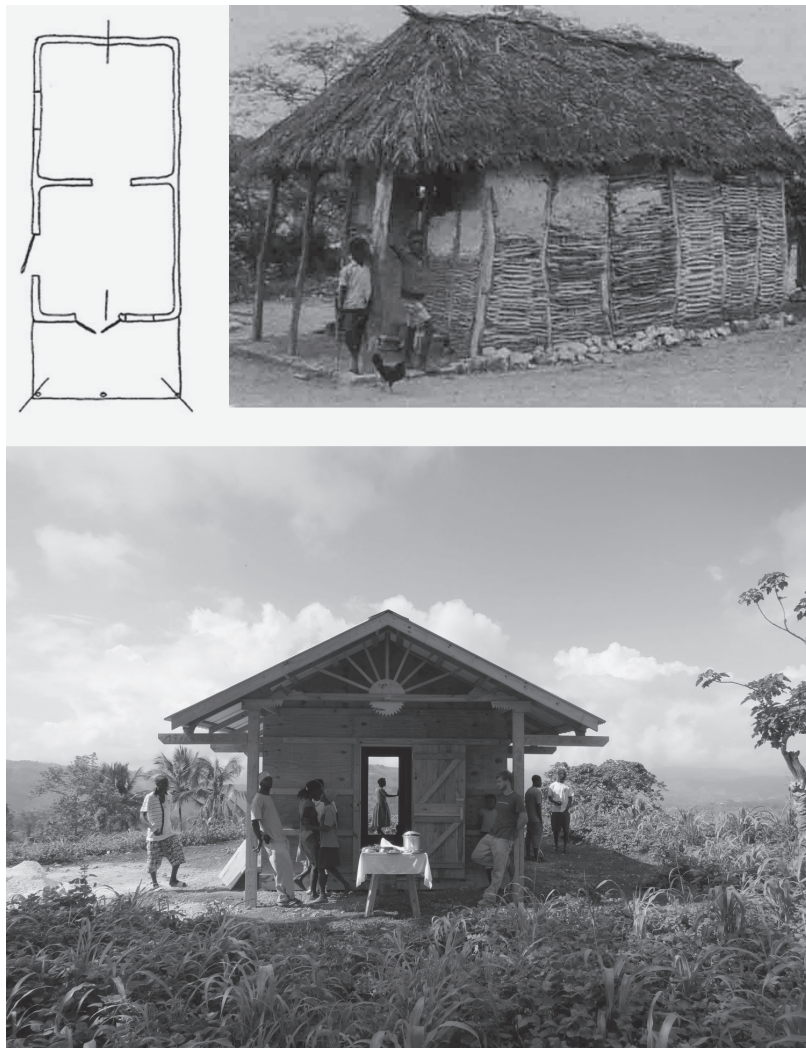
⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁰⁷ Shaku Ramcharan, *Caribbean Prehistoric Domestic Architecture: A Study of Spatio-Temporal Dynamics and Acculturation* (Florida: Florida State University Press, 2004).

shaded outdoor space. An early precursor of the porch, this overhang was used as a place where people of different households could comfortably sit.

THE CARIBBEAN PORCH

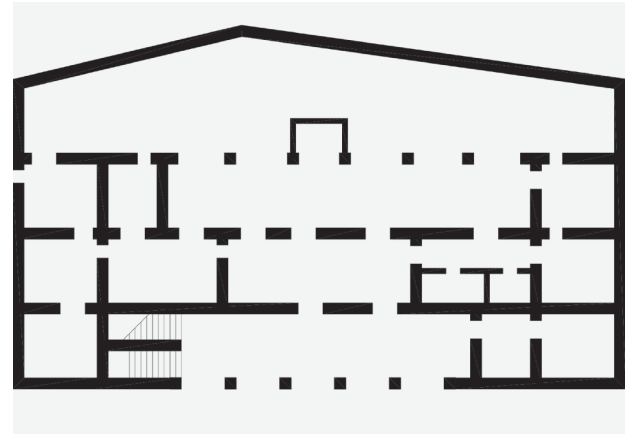
European colonies in the Caribbean focused on profit rather than territorial or social control. Enslaved workers were therefore left to build their own houses, so long as they were organized within the given allotments.⁰⁸ For more than 200 years, a large and culturally diverse population was forced to build and maintain their own houses on the island.⁰⁹ Materially, these houses were built using timber, mud, thatch and palms.¹⁰ A combination which allowed the different communities to exchange their architectural, construction and environmental knowledge. However, the imposition of the land allotment disrupted the traditional settlement patterns, prompting a need to rethink how individual homes related to a larger organization.



Clockwise from above left: Plan of *cailles longe*. Drawn by John Vlach, 1977; Image of *cailles longe*. Photographer unknown; and *Ti-Kay* House. Photograph from The Building Goodness Foundation, Haiti, 2015.

- 08 Jay Edwards, "Creole Architecture: A Comparative Analysis of Upper and Lower Louisiana and Saint Domingue," in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (September 2006), 20-52.
- 09 Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).
- 10 Jay Edwards, "Creole Architecture: A Comparative Analysis of Upper and Lower Louisiana and Saint Domingue," in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (September 2006).

Known as the *cailles longe*, what emerged architecturally came to define the spatial and social features of the porch. These houses were built as single-story rectangular dwellings with gabled roofs. Entered from the gabled side, they were comprised of two or three equally sized square rooms. Aligned, the thresholds create a singular passage through the home, allowing for ventilation and cooling. The reorientation of the entrance and interior subdivisions are clear hybridizations of the previous forms. The extension of the roof becomes much more pronounced, creating a shaded space similar to those later found on porches throughout the Caribbean, Mississippi delta and tidal south. Environmentally this overhang created comfort inside the home while providing an outdoor room during both the wet and dry seasons. Architecturally, the porch compensated for a collective quality otherwise lost from the earlier traditional settlements.



Above: Casa del Almirante in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Photograph by Jahel Tamayo, 2013.
Below: Plan of Casa del Almirante (c. 1512). Drawn by author, 2024, after Antonio Abarca Barba, *Plate No. 370*, 1770. Archivo de Indias, Seville.

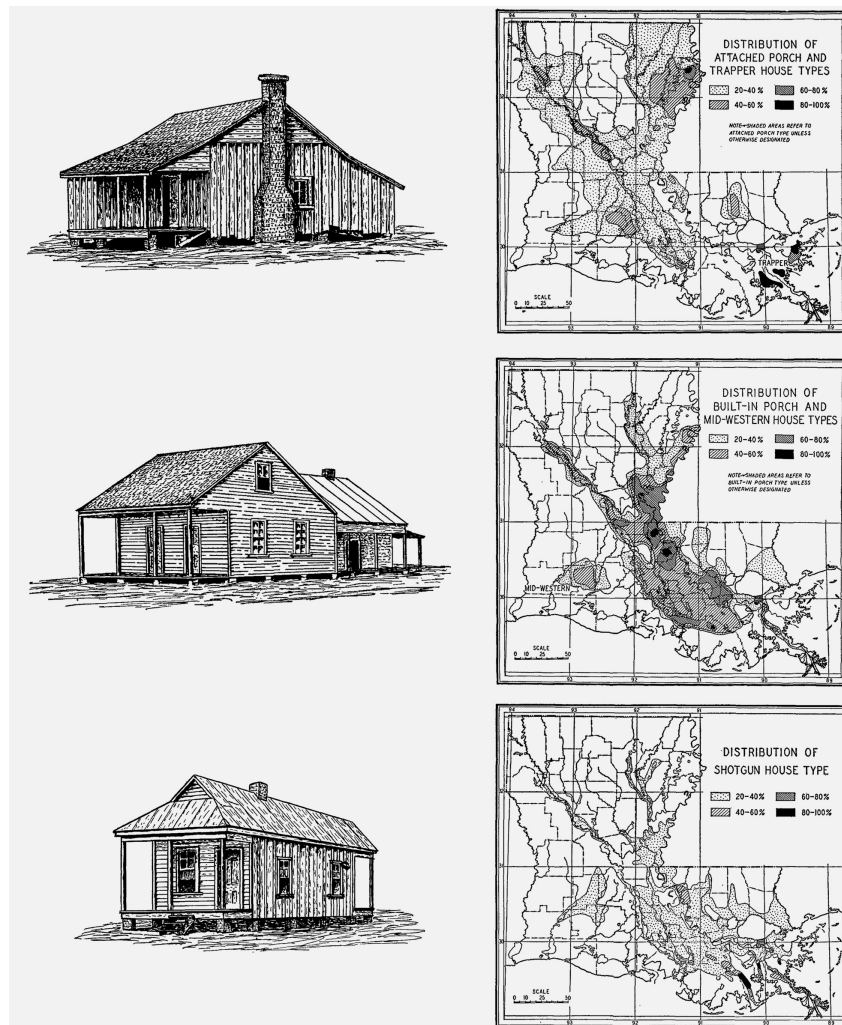
While the *cailles longe* suggests a lineage of the porch based on collectivity, the Caribbean villa presents a counter narrative. Commissioned by wealthy European plantation owners from the early sixteenth century onward, the villa followed contemporary Italian renaissance fashions, especially considering the façade. On one hand this may seem far-fetched, no Italian colonies existed in the Caribbean. However, one young wealthy European colonial explorer makes the link, Diego Colon, the son of Christopher Columbus.¹¹ As a member of the aristocracy, Colon was familiar with early renaissance architecture in cities such as Florence. Citing architects such as Brunelleschi, Colon commissioned his villa, Casa del Almirante in Santo Domingo, to be built with an open loggia running along the front, facing the city's main square. The home was centered around an internal piazza, where the ground floor was used for municipal offices and first floor kept for the family's private living quarters.¹² Similar to a porch, one still entered Casa del Almirante through a public space, however the hierarchy implied was substantially different. Completed in 1512 Colon's house was exactly contemporary to Italian villas, such as Baldassarre Perruzzi's Villa Chigi in Rome (later known as Villa Farnesina) and embodied much of the same attitude. If Villa Chigi's loggia faces the garden, Casa del Almirante uses same archetype to monumentalize its entrance.¹³ As a space the loggia is something one moves through rather than a chamber in which one spends time or hosts guests. The loggia, elevated above the square, defines a vantage point or vista. In this case the

11 James Edwards, *Unheralded Contributions Across the Atlantic World* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

loggia of Casa del Almirante is a space which one either looks to or from—both directions asserting a form of social dominance. Unlike the shared social space of the porch, the colonial loggia was used to symbolize ownership—projecting an image of dominance and power rather than inclusion.



Distribution maps and illustrations of house types in Louisiana. Drawings by Fred Kniffen, 1936.

Contrary to the porch, the loggia presents a different and generally speaking anti-social, attitude towards hospitality and community. This differentiation plays out further in the more detailed architectural languages that differentiate loggia from porch. Structurally, the loggia uses a column to support itself—a formal architectural device which, since antiquity, is used as a means of institutionalizing public space. On the other hand, the porch uses a simple and humble means of support, the post. A simple device for balancing a cantilever which carries little, if any, institutional baggage and is instead an acknowledgement of inclusion. Colon's early villa was undoubtedly influential. Likely it was the first to introduce the loggia to the region. Despite this significance, it is not solely responsible for the evolution of colonial villas built in the region after 1530. After Casa del Almirante several interesting developments occur which are relevant to the development of the porch. The central courtyard is replaced by a working yard in the rear, hosting all of the

home's services. Following this, the loggia shifts to the rear as a private outdoor area overlooking the backyard. Caribbean villas begin to more explicitly follow the interior tripartite organization laid out in cases like the Villa Chigi or Villa Rotunda. Although distinct, these influences do not amount to a complete picture. Specifically, they miss a frontal gallery. Introduced later, the addition of this gallery spanned the façade and closely resembled the front porch of the *cailles longe*.

At first Spanish [Caribbean] houses were built with open loggias, but without full galleries. These appear to have been added beginning around the end of the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they became increasingly popular.¹⁴

Built by those working on the plantations, Caribbean villas began to incorporate ground level porches in their design, replacing their traditional loggias. This inclusion suggests an architectural transference from enslaved populations to the wealthy elite. While villas such as Casa del Almirante were effective at enforcing social hierarchies and European customs they were, at the same time, poorly equipped for the Caribbean environment. Occurring only after the porch's emergence on worker's housing, the timing of the gallery's introduction to the villa is revealing. Environmentally the porch was much more effective at cooling than the loggia—spatially aligning its domestic use with the wind and shade.

The birth of the porch in the Caribbean represents two parallel but conflicting trajectories.¹⁵ On the one hand, the porch is a reclamation of community by people violently displaced from their place of origin. On the other it is a symbol of power within a colonial structure designed to enforce authority. Herein lies the tension. While the porch enacts a value around hospitality and social resiliency, it also provides a distinct form and image which can be abused under the guise of benevolence.

RURAL HOUSING IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

The Haitian revolution and its following diaspora profoundly impacted colonial American history and architecture. The mass migration of people from Hispaniola to the Mississippi Delta and Tidal South marked a turning point for the porch. Freed from slavery, a large percentage of the island's population left the Caribbean for the mainland, settling in the French territory of Louisiana and the British colony Charles Towne. Put into context, this amounted to roughly a 12% population increase in cities like New Orleans.¹⁶ Impacts of this have been studied regarding its culinary, art and ceramic influence¹⁷ but the impacts upon architecture have been largely overlooked. However, this migration of people substantially influenced the area's architecture and way of life in the Mississippi delta and caused the introduction of the porch as a domestic archetype. Following the revolution, the porch proliferated as a community-oriented space throughout rural and urban Louisiana. In the years following the Haitian revolution, rural homes in the Mississippi delta underwent a number of changes.¹⁸ Surveys from the time reveal a pattern of change in housing along transportation arteries—roads, railroads, waterways—around New Orleans. During this time, the majority of new homes built along these arteries included porches while existing homes were modified, attaching self-supporting porches to their fronts. Isolated, these areas were mostly low density, self-sustaining agrarian communities.

14 Ibid.

15 National Parks Service Report, US Census Bureau, 1953.

16 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

17 See Fred Kniffen, "Louisiana House Types," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (December 1936): 179-193.

18 See Belinda Tate, "Old House, New Future: The Quiet Revival of the Shotgun House," Master's Thesis, (Wake Forest University, 2010); Charlette Caldwell, "The Lowliest Type?: The Historiography of the Shotgun House," in *Avery Review* No. 37 (February 2019); Samuel Wilson, "New Orleans Prefab," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March 1963): 38-39.



Linda Anderson, *The Apple Cut*, 1985. Private Collection.

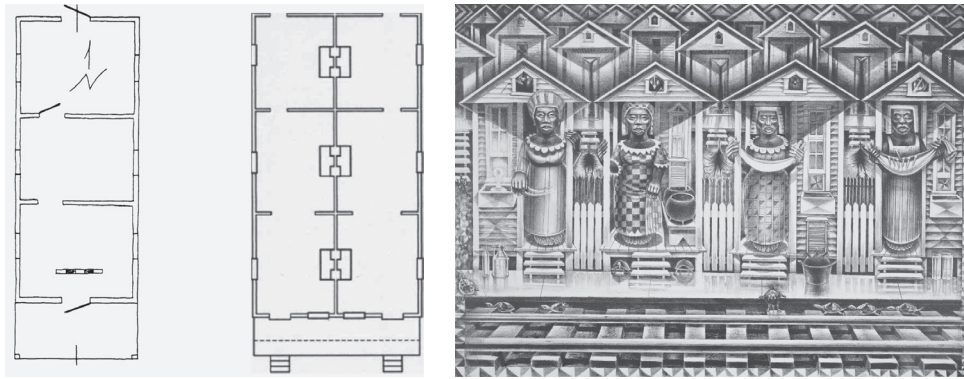
Living independently these people lacked social and communal spaces. In the absence of towns, porches became de facto urban spaces. The notion of ‘public space’ was not something separate from the home but the opposite. Made possible by the porch, public life was an integral part of domestic life. Much like in the *cailles longe*, communal congregation, social activity and shared labor were architecturally linked to the home’s entrance. The depth, scale and windward orientation of the porch reinforced it as a place to spend time rather than as a symbol of private ownership or control as in the *loggia*. In a rural setting the oversized porch provided a space for multiple households to come together, tell stories, play music, make art, perform annual farming rituals, develop crafts and otherwise spend time together. Community was a shared value, integrated in the architecture of the home itself. This relationship was further established by the porch’s integration into the homes overall structure. The roof is cantilevered, balanced at its furthest extremity by two small posts. In this case the porch is no longer an extruded gable but now structurally integral to the building as a whole. Visually defined by its lack of solidification, the porch is a void, cut out of the skinny home. Much deeper than in the Haitian examples, it now occupied a third of the house as platform to receive guests and perform necessary tasks together.



New Orleans city block (c. 1700). Drawn by Jay Edwards, 2008; and New Orleans city block (c. 1870). From Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1876.

THE NEW ORLEANS SHOTGUN HOUSE

Early housing records of New Orleans are limited. By the time the first in-depth survey takes place in 1876 however, a version of the Haitian porch and *cailles longe* was already common in the city. The popularity of the type benefitted from two factors: French tax laws and the industrialization of building materials. Adrien de Pauger's 1721 plan for New Orleans defined an even grid of equally sized square blocks. The scale of each block in turn determined by the saleable plot size of urban villas. As a French colony, New Orleans properties were subject to French inheritance laws, requiring wealthy estates to be equally divided amongst eligible heirs.¹⁹ Frequent disputes amongst inheritors and a lack of internal alleys, required each parcel be directly accessed from the street. These regulations amounted to a progressive slimming of Pauger's plan. Beginning as squares, the blocks slowly became long, thin, strips with equal frontage. One room wide and several deep, the *cailles longe*, or *shotgun house* as it was known in New Orleans, fit perfectly—replacing the balconies and loggias of the demolished mansions with rows of tightly packed porches.

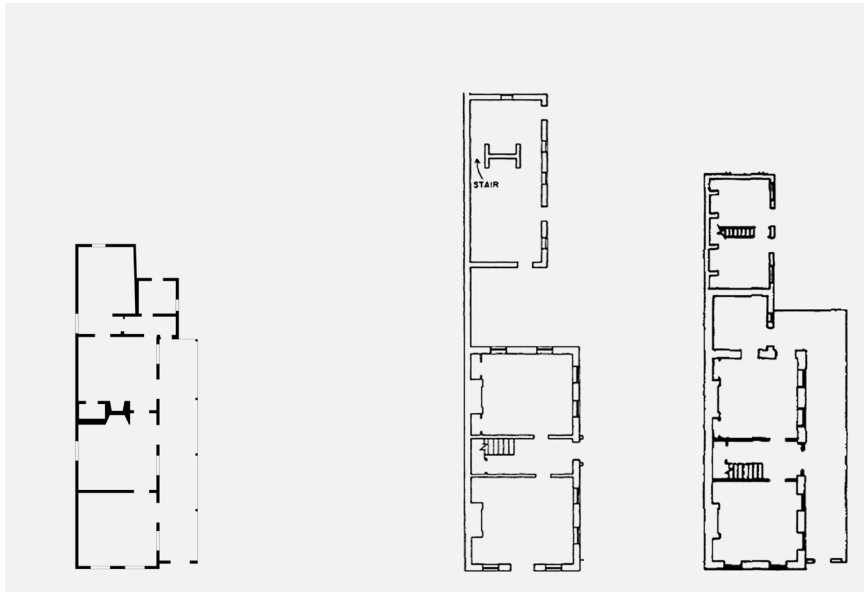


Clockwise from above left: Plan of shotgun house. Drawn by John Vlach, 1977; Plan of double shotgun house. Drawn by Jay Edwards, 2008; and John Biggers, *Four Seasons*, 1990. Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Beyond property lines, the proliferation of the shotgun house also owed itself to modernized construction methods. The availability of milled timber and iron nails helped propel a new building type, the balloon frame.²⁰ Relying on a unified structural system of elements—floor, wall, roof—the balloon frame simplified timber construction, replacing the need for complex joints and specialized labor. Given its simple architecture, timber construction and known plot sizes, the shotgun house could be standardized. Cheap, fast and easy to build, the type and its porch quickly became a favorite model amongst developers, well suited for the city's growing population. As demand for housing grew units were squeezed together, separated internally by a party wall to maximize real estate. Front porches, however, were undivided and shared, connecting the multiple households. Pushed to the front of the plot this communal porch was almost on the street. Pedestrians became intimate visitors. Guests of one household also became guests of another. Shoulder-to-shoulder, the ubiquity of the porches gradually defined the collective character of the city. By virtue of existence the porch successfully instilled a communal quality throughout New Orleans housing. Architecturally embedding the same social values for which it was established in

19 Sigfried Gideon, *Space Time and Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

20 Bernhard Alexander Uhlendorf, *The Siege of Charleston, With an Account of the Province of South Carolina: Diaries and Letters of Hessian Officers*, from *The von Jungkenn Papers*, in the William L. Clements Library.



Left to right: Plan of Charleston worker's house (c. 1800s). Drawn by the author; Plan of Charleston merchant's house (c. 1780). "Survey Plat No. 515," from McCready Plat Collection; and Plan of Charleston merchant's house (c. 1840). Drawn by Gabrielle M. Lanier, 1997.

the Caribbean, expanding the notion family and solidifying community.
THE MERCHANT'S PORCH IN CHARLESTON

The city itself (including the burnt buildings) consists of 1,020 houses, which are built along broad unpaved streets intersecting one another at right angles, each house having a garden and standing twenty to one hundred paces from any other. The warm climate makes the open spaces necessary. They permit the cool breezes to play through the city.

Johann Hinrichs, 1780²¹

Charleston is hot. Set on the coast the area more closely resembles Southeast Asia than North America. The Vietnamese scenes in the Hollywood classic *Forest Gump* were filmed near Charleston. According to *The Weather Channel* the city's average daily heat index in July is ~46 degrees Celsius with an average relative humidity of 86%. As a result, Charleston's urban fabric was, from the start, designed according to a cohesive environmental engineering strategy related to wind. Early British colonial houses were designed as elongated, free standing, rectangles surrounded by gardens on either side. Linearly aligned, the buildings create uninterrupted wind channels between houses, blocks and city at large. Rotated 90 degrees, the private entrances face the adjacent plot rather than the street. While the city was planned with the heat in mind, the individual homes were not.

Charles Towne was an important port for the growing Trans-Atlantic trade. British speculators capitalized on the West African's environmental and agricultural knowledge, relying on their expertise to grow and sell rice to the Caribbean sugar plantations—such as those on Hispaniola. Lacking experience in such a climate, these merchants built their houses according to the norms with which they were accustomed. Internally, rooms were laid out according to the formal entertaining traditions of the British aristocracy. These social hierarchies resulted in environmentally isolated spaces, incapable of cross-ventilation. Externally, the buildings were constructed from brick and mor-

21 National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Atlanta: US National Parks Service Department, Southeast Regional Office, 2005).

tar with sash windows. Inflexible and impossible to fully open, these structures trapped heat and humidity, exacerbating the problem. However, like New Orleans, the colony's connection with Haiti and the Caribbean, likely influenced the adaptation of its domestic architecture.

Early examples of the Charleston porch resemble that of the *cailles longe*²² and can be found in a neighborhood demographically composed of freed people from nearby Charleston and Haiti.²³ As an environmental necessity the Charleston porch transcended class. Following the Haitian Revolution timber porches quickly spread to the wealthy merchant townhouses at the turn of the nineteenth century.²⁴ Grafted across the long side of the brick structures, the later addition of the porch took advantage of the city's urban strategies, integrating airflow into the house by means of a new timber piazza.

Structurally grounded on one side the Charleston porch comes as timber addition, leaning against the pre-existing masonry. Using operable wooden shutters and a wide depth, the porch both effectively cools and insulates the home. While open, wind is cooled by the shade and pulled along the length of the building. When closed in the wet season, a warm bubble of air is trapped against the façade. The slope of the flooring works both structurally and climatically. Allowing water to run off while revealing the porch as a dependent addition. These characteristics make the porch a passively self-regulating space. Providing an otherwise missing, thermally comfortable, outdoor living space in the city. This outdoor living space, in fact, resulted in many consequences regarding work, labor and housing. As a new addition the porch presented a seemingly casual space for hospitality within the otherwise rigid social hierarchy.

No other American city can compare with Charleston in the beauty of its house and the splendour and taste displayed therein. The rapid ascendancy of families which in less than ten years have risen from the lowest rank, have acquired upward of £100,000 and have moreover, gained this wealth in a simple and easy manner, probably contributed a good deal toward the grandiose display of splendor, debauchery, Luxury and extravagance in so short a time.

Johann Hinrichs, 1780²⁵

Of the city's many striking characteristics, one in particular stands out—it was purely a merchant's town. Arriving from Hispaniola the porch in Charleston, was much more distinctly related to a system of exchange. In practical terms the evolution of the porch responded to the city's etiquette around commerce. Providing an informal outdoor living space attached to the home. A vibrant port, Charleston began as a place where North American financial enterprise took hold in the south. Commodity contracts in the form of future sales agreements were bought, sold and negotiated inside each merchant's home. Setting out the terms and commitments of an eventual exchange.

Prior to the introduction of the porch, early Charleston homes can be read as a manifestation of European norms and customs surrounding commerce. Evident in both the architectural layout as well as the décor. The seclusion of spaces such as kitchen, laundry, servants' quarters and the informal breakfast room reinforces a distaste for casual engagements and domestic labor. Regarded as improper, spaces associated with biological life are extracted and kept in separate buildings, as if to purify

22 John M. Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An Architectural Legacy. Part 1," in *Pioneer America*, Vol. 8, No.1 (January 1976): 47-56.

23 National Park Service, *Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (Atlanta: US Department of the Interior, Southeast Regional Office, 2005).

24 Bernhard Uhlendorf, *The Siege of Charleston*, 1780.

25 Bernard L. Herman, "Slave and Servant Housing in Charleston, 1770-1820," in *Historical Archaeology: Charleston in the Context of Trans-Atlantic Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1999): 88-101.

the home for formal entertaining.²⁶ Commerce and social status, however, are glorified in the rooms meant for entertaining. Known as the *Best Rooms*, these social spaces were lavishly decorated. Covered in a collection of exotic floral images and intricate patterns, the rooms created a visual scenography related to Trans-Atlantic trade, financial power and cultural sophistication.²⁷ Related to business the home worked as a choreographed progression. Potential partners were invited from the office to the formal dining room and, if lucky, to the parlor above.²⁸ Success in business required success in this orchestrated social progression.²⁹ The introduction of the porch, however, disrupted this formal hierarchy.



Left: “Southern Comfort,” in *Garden & Gun Magazine: Soul of the South* (The Allee Group, June-July 2020); right: Charleston house (c. 1851). Photograph by Katherine Saunders, 1996. Charleston Historic Preservation Society.

Up to this point the Single-House was a constellation of disconnected fragments. Running from the public sidewalk, down the length of the house and around the rear elevation, the porch tied all of these pieces together for the first time. By necessity the addition addressed all the home’s constituent parts, indiscriminately linking the hidden services, best rooms and private quarters. The porch cannot be said to belong to any one space in particular. Bridged all of the internal rooms, the porch subverted spaces previously meant to enforce social hierarchies, an anomaly to the otherwise rigid interior. The porch introduced a third class of space, one which was neither defined by formal entertaining

26 Robert Leath, “After the Chinese Taste: Chinese Export Porcelain and Chinoiserie Design in Eighteenth-Century Charleston,” in *Historical Archaeology: Charleston in the Context of Trans-Atlantic Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1999): 48-61.

27 Maurie D. McInnis, “An Idea of Grandeur: Furnishing the Classical Interior in Charleston, 1815-1840,” in *Historical Archaeology: Charleston in the Context of Trans-Atlantic Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1999): 32-47.

28 Bernard L. Herman, “The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780-1820,” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol 7, (1997): 41-57.

29 See Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association Publications, 1997).



President Jimmy Carter on the Truman Porch of the White House, 1977. Brumby Rocking Chair Company Archive.

norms nor utilitarian labor, but which consequentially overlapped both.

The merchant's porch in Charleston sat in direct opposition to the home's carefully scripted etiquette. As a space that neither explicitly belonged to the domain of service, family nor hospitality, the porch instead belonged to all three. This ambiguity of place allowed for a breakdown of otherwise long-standing traditions. The resilient climatic characteristics of this room, combined with its perceived ambivalence as part of the urban realm, gave way to a space for hosts and guests to converse in a more relaxed fashion. A stark contrast to the previous system of manners and controlled conduct which could quantifiably determine one's commercial ability. Destabilizing one's criteria for success in a competitive social field allows everyone to believe they have the advantage. Rather than being encircled with ornate molding, interactions on the Charleston porch were surrounded by an ambiance of blooming gardens and sea air. Similar to the interior rooms, behavior on the porch was also determined by its furnishings. While inside hierarchies were constructed around seating arrangements, card tables and tea ceremonies, interactions on the porch unfolded atop swinging benches and wicker rocker chairs. Designed to relax. Cornice details replaced by garden baskets. A new image of wealth and success. The porch was co-opted. A trojan horse for easing one's guest into a sense of comfort and safety. It is perhaps unsurprising that over a hundred years later the Federal Reserve would be founded on one such porch just south of Charleston. Sipping sweet tea, the US central bank was born between rocking chairs on an 'American' archetype: the southern porch.

AUTHOR

Hunter Doyle is an architect and researcher at 51N4E in Brussels. His background is in printmaking, painting and finance. Doyle holds a Master of Architecture from the Architectural Association.