

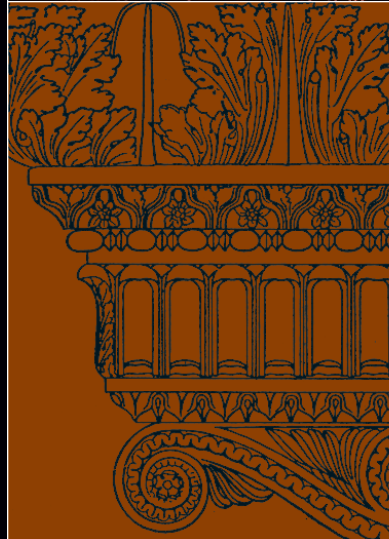
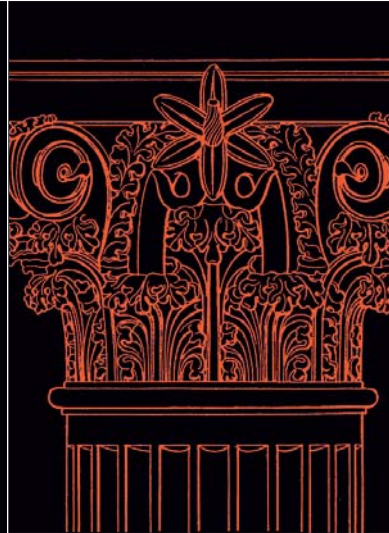


**SECOND IN A SERIES OF 5**

# *The Detailed Beauty of Texas Courthouses*

**W**HEN THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE authorized counties to issue bonds for courthouse construction in the late 1800s, citizens throughout the state supported construction of grand monuments to county government on their town squares. Accordingly, the period between 1870 and 1900 is considered the “golden era” of county courthouse construction in Texas, in which four “Victorian” styles were frequently built. In our last issue, our series on courthouse architecture highlighted elements common to Renaissance Revival and Italianate approaches. In this issue, photojournalist Amber Novak shows off French Second Empire (Caldwell County) and Romanesque Revival courthouses (Hays County).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER NOVAK



# Second Empire

## Caldwell County

The Second Empire style was born in France and refers to the reign of Napoleon III, who directed an architectural transformation of Paris in the mid 1800s. The hallmark feature of Second Empire is the mansard roof, named after architect François Mansart (1598-1666). Other common elements include decorative dormers, high brick chimneys, projecting pavilions, cresting, and bracketed cornices. The Caldwell County courthouse in Lockhart, designed by Alfred Guiles and built in 1894, offers a beautiful example of French Second Empire design.



The overall effect of the Second Empire style is monumental and ornate. Projecting and receding surfaces, often in the form of central and end pavilions, reflect the trend of the time towards the picturesque and irregularity of design.



Second Empire typically has a projecting, ornamental molding, or cornice, supported by decorative brackets at the base of the roof. In the case of the Caldwell courthouse, the brackets are paired.

Second Empire edifices rely on different colors and textures of stone to accent the building, both on the walls and roof. Horizontal banding was often used on the exterior to visually separate the floors of the building. The Caldwell County courthouse is banded with Pecos red sandstone, contrasting with the overall use of Muldoon blue limestone.



Botanical as well as geometric designs are repeated in the interior and exterior detail of the Caldwell courthouse. The newel posts of the wood staircase are elaborately hand-carved with leaves and a zig-zag pattern.

The nearly vertical, steep lower slope of the double-pitched mansard roof is a main feature of Second Empire architecture. The mansard roof increased headroom in the attic and allowed for another usable floor. Protruding and decorative dormer windows provided light to the resulting top floors. Other details that are exemplified by the Caldwell courthouse and indicative of French Second Empire are the high chimney, the ironwork cresting bordering the ridge of the roof, and the ornamental stone arches over windows.





Medallions, ornamental plaques that represent an object in relief, are often found in the interior of Second Empire buildings. This circular medallion graces the courtroom ceiling of the Caldwell courthouse.



# *Romanesque Revival*

## Ellis County

Romanesque Revival is fortress-like in its appearance. The walls are built of thick stone, Roman arches abound, and towers decorate the roof. A late 19th century variation on the Romanesque Revival style was developed by Bostonian Henry Hobson Richardson. By utilizing color, texture and patterning, Richardson is credited to be the only American architect to achieve a personal monumental style in the 1800's. J. Riely Gordon designed several superb Richardsonian Romanesque buildings in Texas, one of which was the Ellis County courthouse in Waxahatchie, completed in 1897.

Romanesque Revival columns are squat with carved, heavy capitals. The Ellis County courthouse is decorated with 21 hand-carved stone faces, ranging from the beautiful to the grotesque.



Thick round arches and squat columns lend to the heavy, even massive, feel of Romanesque architecture.





The Romanesque Revival style is castle-like in appearance with hallmark Roman arches, thick walls of rusticated stone and thin turrets with conical roofs.

Architect J. Riely Gordon required stone from various quarries to be used in the construction of the Ellis County courthouse. Gray granite, rose pink granite, Burnett County limestone and Pecos red sandstone provide contrasting colors and textures throughout the building. Pattern and elaborate detail within the masonry were also a hallmark of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.



Narrow windows accentuate the imposing appearance of Romanesque architecture.

The unique heaviness of the Richardsonian Romanesque style is emphasized by short, robust columns, cavernous loggias (open areas behind colonnades), and deep door openings.★

