

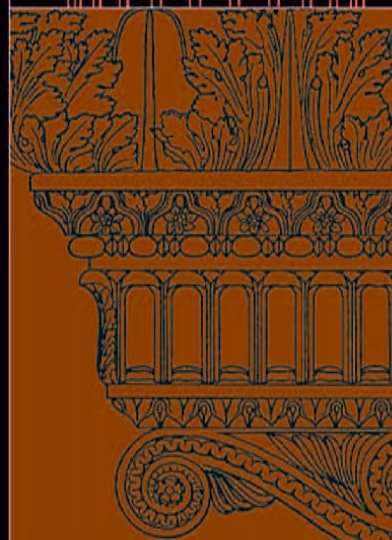
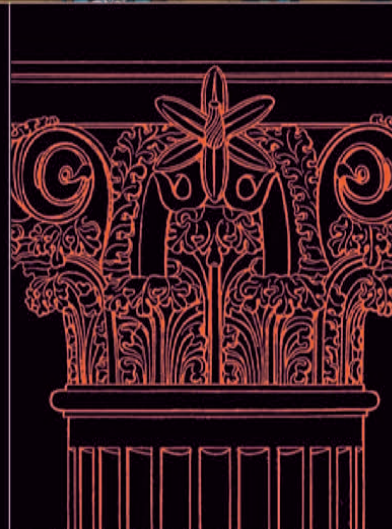
**THIRD IN A SERIES OF 5**

# *The Detailed Beauty of Texas Courthouses*

**C**ourthouses constructed early in the twentieth century followed national trends of design that were heavily influenced by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and the teachings of the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. In Texas, it was a time of optimism and rapid change – autos and paved roads, street cars powered by electricity, and new wealth from cotton, cattle, timber and oil.

Two architectural styles were predominant: Neoclassical Revival style or Beaux-Arts Classicism. “In planning they still largely followed earlier practices with symmetrical compositions of forms and spaces, although they often had rotundas providing impressive interior centers of circulation,” reports the Handbook of Texas. “On the exteriors, columns, pediments, and domes are characteristic features.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER NOVAK



# Beaux-Arts

## McLennan County

Beaux-Arts (pronounced boh ZAR) is one of the more easy to identify styles among Texas county courthouses, even though like others, it draws from the study of Greek and Roman structures. Influenced by the horror vacui, an abhorrence of undecorated surface area, the more elaborate Beaux-Arts structures are often compared to wedding cakes. In 1901, one of the more spectacular Beaux-Arts courthouses was completed in the McLennan County seat of Waco. It was designed by the Dallas firm of J. Reily Gordon and W. C. Dodson, and is rumored to have been inspired by St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

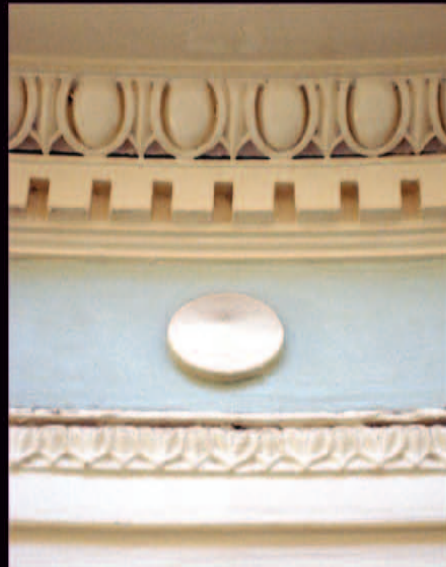


A grand entrance atop a daunting number of stairs is typical Beaux-Arts. The portico is uniquely detailed, from the base of the columns to the carved relief work and circular window in the pediment above.



The base of the McLennan County courthouse dome is home to a series of twelve perched eagles.

The interior of a Beaux-Arts courthouse is often as ornate as the exterior. This wall features several layers of carved moldings, including the classical egg-and-dart pattern at the top most row of the cornice.



Courthouses all over the country are commonly crowned with a statue of the mythological Goddess of Justice. The McLennan County courthouse, however, boasts three female figures: Themis, the Greek goddess of Justice, Justitia, the Roman goddess of Justice, and Liberty, the torchbearer.

As well as displaying numerous symbolic statues, the courthouse dome is lavishly decorated with floral designs, hood moldings, rounded panels (cartouches) alternating between eagles, and multiple columns and pilasters framing the windows.





The McLennan County courthouse dome prominently displays the Texas star in its stained glass.



# *Classical Revival*

## Brooks County

A later, more subdued version of the Beaux-Arts vernacular influenced the American architectural revival of Greek and Roman traditions. Classical Revival, as it is called, was popular for the first half of the 20th century and shares many similarities with Renaissance Revival – such as pillars, porticos and an overall box-like form. The Brooks County courthouse in Falfurrias is a brick edifice designed by Alfred Guiles in the Classical Revival style. Built in 1914, the courthouse will soon undergo a massive restoration effort to preserve its original integrity.

Two-story columns support a classical portico at the entrance of the Brooks County courthouse. A balustrade, or railing, lines the roof above.





Brooks County boasts one of the best examples of a Corinthian column across all Texas county courthouses. The third and most ornate order of Greek columns (the first two being Doric and Ionic), the Corinthian shaft is slender with shallow vertical grooves, called fluting. The column head, or capital, features volutes (spiral scrolls), and acanthus leaves.



The wooden façade inside the Brooks County courtroom (directly behind the judge's bench) is a reference to the Neo-Classical architecture of the entire building. It is a small-scale model of a portico supported by columns and capped with a triangular pediment, with decorative panels of stained glass inserted where the exterior windows would normally be.

Pilasters, or rectangular columns that project only slightly from the wall, are common in Classical Revival architecture and are used to frame windows and doors. With their fluted shafts, volutes, and acanthus leaves, these pilasters conform to the Corinthian order. Also noteworthy is the detailed crown molding, or cornices just below the simple roof of Classical Revival.



Classical Revival courthouses sometimes incorporate the Roman idea of a keystone above the arched windows.

The imposing bases of these fluted columns establish a sense of authority and permanence to those who enter the courthouse.★

