

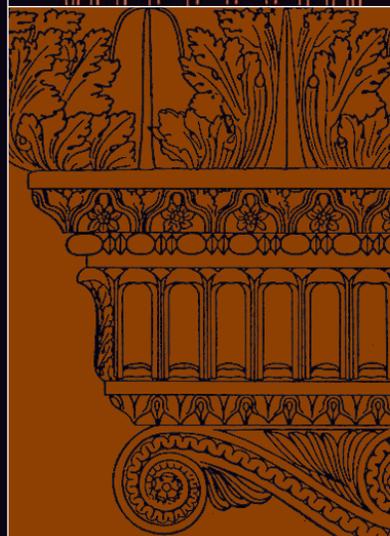
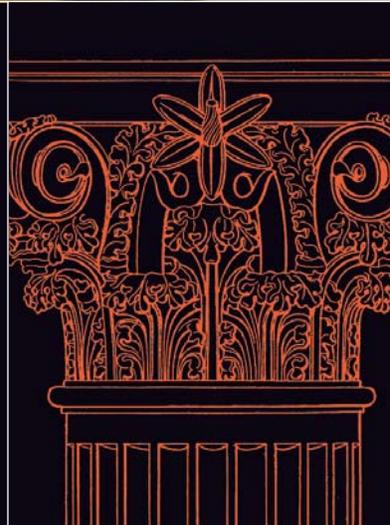
FIRST IN A SERIES OF 5

# *The Detailed Beauty of Texas Courthouses*

ONE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A COUNTY OFFICIAL to appreciate the joy of a beautiful county courthouse. Several coffee-table books and numerous Internet sites offer photos that identify the courthouses as well as the unique architectural styles in which they were built. But what does it mean to say that a building is "Second Empire" or "Beaux Arts" or "Art Deco?"

To find out, *County* asked photojournalist Amber Novak to consult with architects who specialize in courthouse styles and then head out to counties around the state to capture the unique elements that earn particular courthouses their architectural labels. In each of the next five issues of *County*, the magazine will highlight two styles from the same periods of history. First, we start with related styles from the turn of the 20th Century (1900): Renaissance Revival and Italianate.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER NOVAK



# Italianate

## Grimes County

Italianate form, inspired by the architecture of Renaissance Italy, was immensely popular in America during the second half of the 19th century. For Texans, it was a style that fulfilled a desire for the sophisticated look of east coast cities. Boxy in form, with decorative elements such as quoining and arched window heads, the Grimes County Courthouse in Anderson offers a good visual description of Italianate design, and contains remarkable interior detail. It was designed by F.S. Glover and Company of Houston and completed in 1893.



Italianate style is boxy, with a low roof that may be either hipped or gabled. In the case of the Grimes County Courthouse, the roof is hipped, with four uniformly pitched sides.



Arched window heads, which in this example are constructed out of hand-molded bricks and painted white in an attempt to match the native stone used as trim elsewhere on the building, are indicative of the Italianate style, and the windows themselves are often paired.

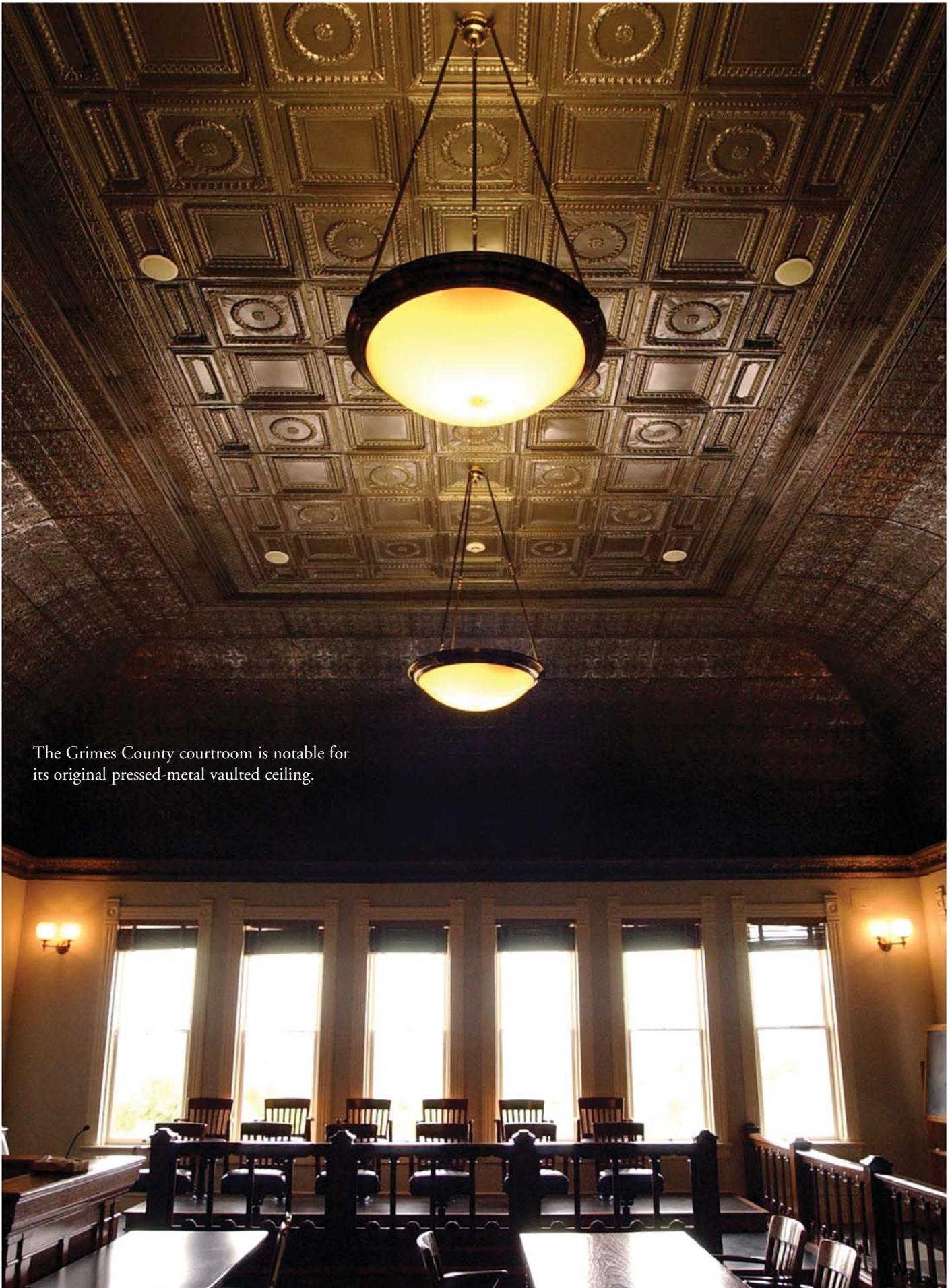
Quoins, pronounced “coins,” are the dressed stones at the corners of a building that provide decorative contrast with the adjoining wall. The Grimes County courthouse uses native stone accent against the hand-molded bricks of the building. Quoining is commonly used with the Italianate style.



A square cupola, or tower, is commonly placed on top of the Italianate roof.



Using a single remaining carved brass door hinge from 1894 as a guide, all door hardware of the Grimes County courthouse was replicated during recent renovations to honor the original Native American pattern.



The Grimes County courtroom is notable for its original pressed-metal vaulted ceiling.

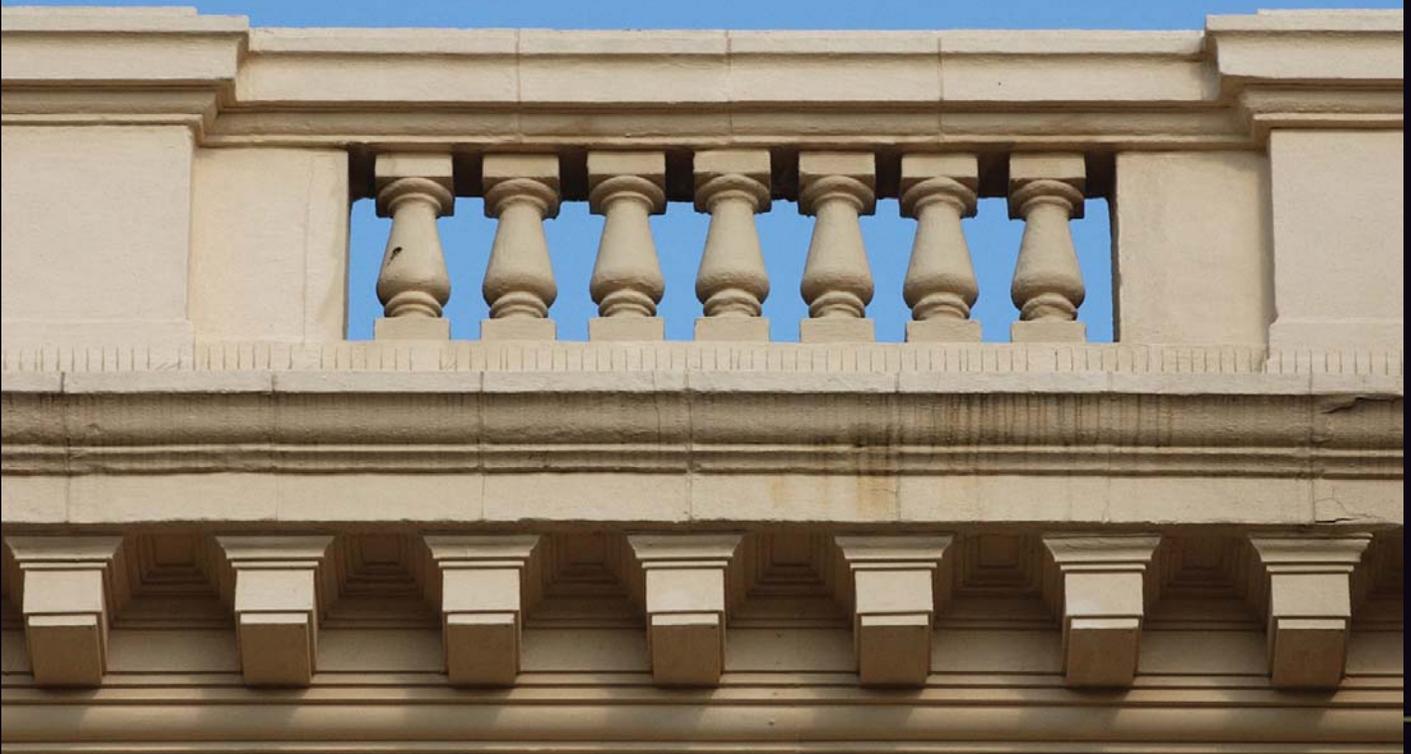


# *Renaissance Revival*

## Anderson County

Often associated closely with the Italianate style, Renaissance Revival draws from both French and Italian expressions, with obvious roots in ancient Greek and Roman architecture. The Renaissance Revival courthouse is usually three stories with progressively more intricate design on each exterior level. Like Italianate, the Renaissance Revival building is box-like, but may be capped with a dome on a raised drum. Anderson County's courthouse, in the city of Palestine, was designed by C.H. Page and Brothers and built in 1914, more than a decade after the peak of Renaissance Revival architecture in the United States. While many Renaissance Revival elements are the same as the subsequent Beaux-Arts style, the Anderson County courthouse is substantially less ornate than those courthouses typically categorized as Beaux-Arts.

Renaissance Revival architecture is characterized by balustrades (railings with supporting pillars) along the roofline and decorative moldings at the top of the building, called the cornice.





The elegant stone and metal work of this spiral staircase is indicative of the prosperity and permanence that late 19th century and early 20th century Texas courthouses were expected to convey.



A stained glass decorates the interior of the dome in Anderson County's courthouse and two mirrored spiral staircases connect the floors.

A few of the Renaissance Revival county courthouses in Texas have a portico and pediment in the style of the ancient Greeks and Romans. At Anderson County's courthouse, giant ionic columns support the pediment.



A statue of the Goddess of Justice sits atop the metal dome of Anderson County's courthouse.

The Renaissance Revival edifice becomes more elaborate as the floors progress, beginning with clean lines on the ground floor and more decoration and detail near the roofline. Windows are often repetitive and engaged columns are common. ★

