

Historic Preservation Manual

City of Houston Planning & Development Department

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Avondale East & West

History and Culture

Avondale East was designated as an historic district in November 1999. The designation was based on its value as a visible reminder of Houston's development, from 1907–1928. Avondale West was designated as an historic district in September 2007 based on its development period from 1912–1928. The neighborhood's significance is associated with the developers, architects, builders, many notable residents; and its architecture. Architects and builders who built homes in Avondale included Fred Maret, E. L. Crain, and the Russell Brown Company of Dallas and Houston. Charles Oliver designed homes for the Russell Brown Company before becoming the staff architect for the River Oaks Corporation.

Avondale East contains the neighborhood's unique red sidewalks and curbs. The concrete was tinted red to complement green lawns and trees. The red sidewalks were also supposed to reduce glare. They were only placed in the 100 through 300 blocks of Avondale and Stratford Streets, between Baldwin and Taft. Some of the red sidewalks remain in that area.

The Russell Brown Company built custom homes for Houston's upper and middle class. The company was founded by Russell Brown in 1908. It designed and built more than a dozen homes in Avondale between 1908 and 1925. These included seven houses on prestigious Avondale Avenue, at 104, 216, 218, 410, 501, 503, and 610 Avondale. The company went on to build many homes in River Oaks and other affluent Houston neighborhoods, including Courtlandt Place, Broadacres, Montrose, River Oaks, and Westmoreland.

Houston homebuilder Edward Lillo Crain also built houses in Avondale. Today, Crain is best known for his "Crain Ready Cut House" kits. The kits contained plans, instructions, and all of the materials necessary to construct a house, in the correct quantity and already cut to size. Most Crain Ready Cut House kits were for small houses. Crain also built high-end custom homes, including several in Avondale.

Notable Homes and Residents

Avondale East

The August C. Bering House (now demolished) was located at **101 Avondale**. August C. Bering, Sr., ran Houston's very first lumber company, which his father and uncle had founded around 1850. His son August C. Bering, Jr., founded Bering Lumber Company in 1940. In 1952, August Bering III moved the company to the corner of Westheimer and Potomac, where one of its stores is still located today. The Bering home was built in the Neoclassical style. It was torn down to make way for apartments. The Corinthian columns from the house were used on the apartment building.

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The house at **104 Avondale** was built in 1917 for William and Helen Turnbow. William Turnbow was the president of Gulf Coast Oil. This Prairie-style brick house was built by the Russell Brown Company. Angie Frank Smith later lived at 104 Avondale. Smith was the bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from 1934 until he retired in 1960. The Turnbow-Smith House was designated as a City of Houston Protected Landmark in 2008. J. T. Figg and his brother Howard came to Houston from Indiana. The J. T. Figg Realty Company handled mostly agricultural land sales. J. T. Figg's Craftsman-style home at 106 Avondale (now demolished) was built in 1911.



C. M. Malone's house at **109 Avondale** (now demolished) was one of the first homes built in Avondale. Malone was an influential Houston businessman. He was involved in railroads and banking. He also was the secretary of the Banker's Trust Company, founded in 1909 by Jesse Jones to bring foreign investments into Houston.

The John and Florida Bishop House, **110 Avondale**, was one of the first houses built in the neighborhood. It is a grand home built in the Colonial Revival style.

The house at **206 Avondale** was built by the Russell Brown Company for attorney William Hill.

William L. Connelly House, **218 Avondale**, was built by the Russell Brown Company. Connelly was the regional supervisor for the Sinclair Oil Company and company president Harry Sinclair's right-hand man. This house became a City of Houston Protected Landmark in 2006. It is outside the boundaries of Avondale East Historic District.



Neal Pickett was the mayor of Houston during World War II. He lived at **217 Avondale**, which is also outside the boundaries of Avondale East.

The Edmundson House-Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at **108 Stratford** was designated as a Protected City Landmark in 2006. The house is in the American Four Square style with Prairie details and was built in 1912.

Avondale West

Abe and Esther Levy, who owned the Levy Dry Goods stores, resided at **309 Avondale**. That house, built in 1912, is a modified American Four Square with Prairie details.

James House lived at **404 Avondale**. He was the son of prominent Houston banker T. W. House. James' brother, Edward Mandell House, was a confidant of President Woodrow Wilson. This home is one of many in the neighborhood featuring elements of the Prairie style of architecture.

Fred Hutchinson was one of the many independent oil producers in the region. He lived at **410 Avondale**.

Lawrence P. Scarborough, an investment banker, lived at **412 Avondale**. That house is now a City Protected Landmark. Scarborough later sold the house to J. K. Warren, president of the Warren-Cleveland Lumber Company.

Samuel Bashara invented a patented process that helped oil field workers clean bore holes during oil drilling. He lived in the Colonial Revival house at **414 Avondale**.

Ross Sterling founded Humble Oil Company and served as the Governor of Texas from 1931-1932. He lived at **600 Avondale**.

Judge William Love, the first mayor of Houston Heights, lived at **603 Avondale** with his family. A later resident of that Prairie-style home was J. Robert Neal was the vice president of the Cheek Neal Coffee Company, which later became Maxwell House Coffee.

Albert Bath managed the cotton exporting firm of Felix P. Bath & Company. His daughter, Harriet, founded and was a lifelong supporter of the Houston Ballet. The Bath home at **609 Avondale** was built by Edward Crain. Harriet Bath lived in the house until her death in 2006.

George Meyer and Joe Meyer Jr., sons of Avondale developer Joseph F. Meyer Sr., lived in the neighborhood. George Meyer went on to develop the Meyerland subdivision in southwest Houston in the 1950s.

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About

Avondale is a subdivision in the Montrose area of Houston, just a few miles west of downtown. It was designed to compete with other upscale neighborhoods, such as Courtland Place, Montrose, and Westmoreland. Today, the original Avondale neighborhood includes two historic districts: Avondale East and Avondale West, which were developed in the early twentieth century. Avondale homes were built in the Tudor Revival, Prairie, American Four Square, and Craftsman styles. Some of the neighborhood's red concrete sidewalks and curbs, carriage houses, and hitching posts are still present today.

In 1906, Joseph F. Meyer, Jr., was a Houston businessman who owned a 31-acre pasture in the country outside Houston. Meyer sold the land to the Greater Houston Improvement Company in 1907 for \$105,000. Mr. Meyer's timing was terrific. Before 1900, most business and professional people lived south of downtown, along Main Street. By 1908, upscale neighborhoods were beginning to expand beyond the Main Street corridor. The South End line of the Houston Electric Street Railway was extended so people could travel to work by streetcar. Avondale would become one of these upscale "Streetcar Subdivisions."

The company platted the land into 129 lots along three main streets. The streets were paved with oyster shells and the curbs and sidewalks were concrete. The company hired Teas Nursery to plant 500 trees. Every lot had gas, water, and sewer connections. Alleys were cut through the middle of each block, at the back of the lots and all of the utility poles were in the alleys. Deliveries and trash collection also used the alleys. All of this was in an effort to keep the neighborhood more attractive.

When it came time to name the subdivision, the company held a contest. It offered a \$25 prize to whoever submitted the winning name. Nine contestants suggested "Avondale", based on William Shakespeare's hometown in England: Stratford-upon-Avon. The prize money was increased to \$27 so it could be divided evenly, with each winner receiving \$3. The three main streets were named in keeping with the Shakespeare theme: Avondale, Stratford, and Hathaway (now Westheimer). (Shakespeare's wife was Anne Hathaway.) Cross streets included Baldwin, Helena, Mason, and Taft.

From the beginning, the neighborhood was designed to be upscale and exclusive. Deed restrictions ensured that it would develop as planned. No apartments, hotels, lodging houses, duplexes, or businesses of any sort were allowed. Some deed restrictions were specific to each street, allowing the company to market the neighborhood to three different income levels. The most affordable street was Hathaway. Lots on Hathaway Street were 5000–6000 square feet in size and houses had to be set back at least 25 feet from the street and cost at least \$3,000. Avondale, the most expensive street, had 10,000

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square foot lots, with a minimum 35-foot setback. Houses on Avondale Street were required to cost at least \$5,000. On Stratford Street, houses had to cost at least \$3,750. Some wealthy homeowners bought multiple lots and built large mansions.

As Avondale developed, automobiles were starting to become popular. Many Avondale residents could afford automobiles, even as commercial deliveries still relied on wagons drawn by horses or mules. Most properties in Avondale had hitching posts at the curb and a carriage house behind the main house. The carriage houses were usually two stories tall and were designed in the same style as the main house. They had space for two cars on the ground floor with a small apartment (servants' quarters) above that. The carriage houses were usually designed in the same style as the main house.

The neighborhood developed quickly. In 1912, Avondale was expanded westward past Taft Street for four blocks. The new north-south cross streets were named Whitney, Hopkins, Stanford, and Crocker. The lots on Avondale Avenue were large, as in the original neighborhood, with a rear alley. The lots on the cross streets were the standard city residential-lot size of 5000 square feet. No alleys were built in those blocks.

The expiration of the neighborhood's deed restrictions in 1930 had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, non-white people were no longer prohibited from owning property in the neighborhood. On the other hand, businesses started opening in some of the houses.

Avondale continued to change after World War II. Many of the old families moved away from Avondale. Many U.S. cities did not have enough housing for returning servicemen and their families. As old families moved away from Avondale, many of their large houses were torn down to make way for apartment buildings, which helped solve the housing crisis. Businesses took over Hathaway Street, which had been renamed Westheimer Road.

As the neighborhood enters the twenty-first century, the renewed interest of living close to downtown has helped Avondale once again become an upscale residential community.

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Defining Features

This Historic District Profile was developed to help property owners. It explains the typical features of buildings found in Avondale East. This can be helpful when you are planning a project that would change your home's exterior.

Many houses in Avondale East were designed by architects and custom-built for their original owners. That makes each house unique. It also means that each part of the house is important to the overall design.

Historic District designations are used to maintain the character of a neighborhood. Once an Historic District is created, certain rules apply to the entire neighborhood. These rules require that changes to properties in the District must be appropriate. In other words, the historic character of the property must stay the same.

Exterior changes must be approved in advance. The Planning Department can help with this process. If the project is approved, the property owner receives a Certificate of Appropriateness. In many Houston neighborhoods, deed restrictions require that the neighborhood civic association also approve changes to a property. The civic association's regulations and standards may differ from those of the City. The information shown here refers only to City requirements. Property owners should check with their neighborhood association before beginning any project.

When planning a building project within the Avondale East Historic District, please refer to this chart. It shows which building elements are compatible and which are not. Definitions of common architectural terms can be found in the [glossary](#).

	Compatible	Incompatible
Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Raised pier and beam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Slab on grade
Front Porch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Front porch▪ At least 50% of building width (usually full-width)▪ At least 5 feet deep▪ May wrap around house▪ Fluted classical columns▪ Ionic or Corinthian capitals▪ Squared/tapered porch supports (Craftsman)▪ Brick porch support bases (Craftsman)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ No porch or small porch▪ Turned porch supports (Queen Anne)
Roof	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gable, hip, or hybrid roof shapes▪ Medium or low pitch▪ Gable ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Shed, flat, gambrel or mansard roof shapes▪ Steep pitch

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- Wide boxed eave overhang or open eave overhang with exposed rafter tails
- Dormers
- Composition shingles
- Dentils or classical eave moldings
- Cupolas or towers
- Slate or tile roof

Exterior Wall Cladding

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Horizontal lapped, bevel, or drop wood siding ▪ Standard patterned brick masonry ▪ Patterned or plain rectilinear wood shingles ▪ Stucco | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vertical siding ▪ Corrugated metal ▪ flat modular panels ▪ half-timbering or patterned stick work |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Front Door

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single door that faces street (door may face side on less than full-width front porches) ▪ Double doors ▪ Round fanlights ▪ Pediments ▪ Masonry arches ▪ Pilasters Recessed panels ▪ Glass lights ▪ Sidelights ▪ Rectilinear transom, often with a patterned pane | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single door that faces side property line |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Windows

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large, vertically proportioned ▪ Double-hung, single-hung, or casement ▪ Wood or wood clad ▪ May group (ribbon) two or three windows in a row ▪ Patterned upper panes ▪ Pediments above windows ▪ Masonry arches ▪ Fanlights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Horizontally proportioned ▪ Aluminum ▪ Large plate glass |
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Architectural Styles

The historic buildings in Avondale are mostly two-story houses. They were built in the popular architectural styles of the period. These included the Neoclassical, Prairie, Colonial Revival, American Four Square, and Craftsman styles. Neoclassical houses use details found in ancient Greek architecture. This style became fashionable after it was featured at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Many Neoclassical houses are two stories tall. They have two-story porches with classical columns. Sometimes the porch spans the entire front of the house. In other cases, the main entry porch is two stories tall, but the porches on either side are shorter.

Colonial Revival houses are meant to look like houses built around the time of the Revolutionary War. The most common Colonial Revival houses are two stories tall. They are rectangular, with a hipped or side-gabled roof. The front door is usually located in the center of the front façade. The door is often accentuated with a porch or decorative trim. Front windows are arranged symmetrically. Other shapes and configurations are also possible. Sometimes, Colonial Revival and Neoclassical houses look very similar, when they both have large porches with columns.

The Arts and Crafts Movement became popular in the early 1900s. It was a shift away from the intricate decoration that was fashionable in the late 1800s. Arts and Crafts emphasized order and restraint in the decorative arts. The Craftsman and Prairie building styles were developed during this period. Between 1900 and 1930, these were the most popular architectural styles in America.

The Craftsman style is often associated with a form of house called a bungalow. Both the Craftsman style and the bungalow were developed in California by Greene and Greene, a pair of architects who were brothers. Bungalows have low-pitched roofs with wide eaves. Decorations are prominent, but simplified. Craftsman houses are often identified by the brackets under the eaves of the roof.

Craftsman details are often found on bungalows. However, not all bungalows were built in the Craftsman style. Also, sometimes Craftsman details were applied to other types of houses, such as the American Four Square.

American Four Square houses are two rooms wide and two rooms deep. In other words, each floor has four rooms in a square shape. These houses may be one or two stories tall. In Houston, these are usually two-story houses with decorative

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Four-Square - Colonial Revival



American Four-Square - Craftsman

details from the Craftsman, Prairie, or Colonial Revival styles. The Prairie style was developed in Chicago by architect Frank Lloyd Wright. It was used on large houses and on commercial buildings. Buildings in the Prairie style were wide, with flat, horizontal features. They were supposed to recall the flat, treeless plains of the Midwestern United States. Prairie houses are very common in the Avondale neighborhood.



Colonial Revival



Neoclassical

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Setting

The setting of a house – how it is located on and sized to fit a lot – should also be compatible with the rest of the historic district. The homes in Avondale East are mostly two stories in height. Setback from the street is based on the original deed restrictions: 25 feet on Stratford and 35 feet on Avondale. Garages are located in two-story carriage houses accessed via rear alleys.

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When considering a building project within the Avondale East Historic District, please refer to this chart. It shows which setting-related elements are compatible and which are not. Definitions of common terms can be found in the glossary.

	Compatible	Incompatible
Driveways	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ No driveway visible from the front of the house▪ Driveway at the side of the house	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Parking pads in front of the building
Garages and Carports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Located in rear half of the lot; often fully or partially obscured visually by house in front	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Attached to the building▪ In front of the house
Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ One or two stories▪ Typical overall height less than 40 feet▪ Finished attic space with dormers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Three or more stories▪ Overall heights greater than 40 feet
Front setback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 25-foot or greater front setbacks on most blocks▪ 35-foot or greater front setbacks on Avondale Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Any setback inconsistent with the containing blockface