

Window Types & Configurations

Architectural Elements

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In the last installment of Elements, way back in 2020, we discussed window anatomy and defined the terms used to describe the basic components of a window. This issue, we are identifying the different types of windows. Thanks to our friends at the Vieux Carré Commission Foundation (VCCF) in New Orleans, this article includes drawings to create a visual dictionary that will allow you to identify different window types and configurations in your own neighborhood. Window types also give clues as to the overall architectural style of a building. Please note that the associated styles listed below are not exhaustive, but instead give a general idea of what we find in our unique region. For more information, I recommend consulting the references listed for this article.

Window Types

Sash – If you recall the last article, a sash is the framework into which panes and muntins are set. Sash windows consist of two or more sashes, with at least one sash moving on a vertical plane. Sash windows are divided into four categories based on their operation: single-hung, double-hung, triple-hung, and slip-head.

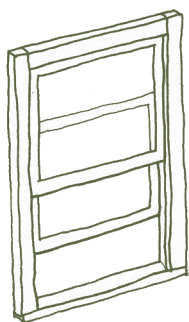
Single-hung windows (a) exhibit a fixed upper sash and an

operable lower sash that moves on a vertical plane. This is the most typical category of sash windows found in Reno. Associated styles: Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, Tudor, Ranch, and Minimal Traditional.

Double-hung windows (b) consist of two sashes, both of which are operable, moving up and down separately within the frame. The term “double-hung window” has become, mistakenly, a catchall term for sash windows. Keep in mind that all double-hung windows are sash windows, whereas not all sash windows are double-hung. Associated styles: Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, and Tudor.

Triple-hung windows (c), as the name implies, consist of three sashes, all of which are individually operable and move vertically. These windows typically extend to the floor, allowing passage through the window opening. This type of sash window is typical to early 18th century buildings and is therefore rarely seen in Northern Nevada.

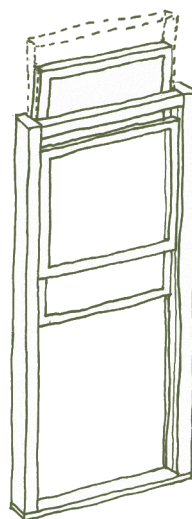
Slip-head windows (e) are comprised of two sashes, both of which are separately operable. The lower sash is taller and can “slip” into a pocket at the top of the window, allowing passage through the window opening. These are also very rare in our region.



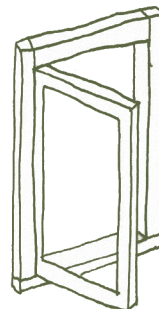
a. Single-hung



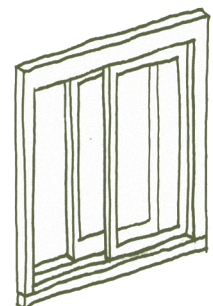
b. Double-hung



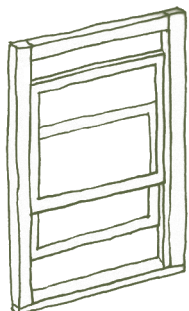
c. Triple-hung



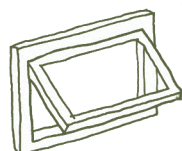
d. Casement



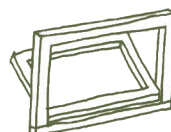
e. Sliding



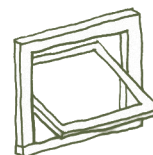
f. Awning



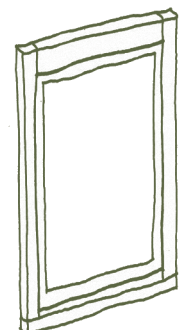
g. Hopper



h. Horizontal pivot



i. Vertical pivot



j. Fixed



One-over-one

Six-over-one

Six-over-six

Casement windows (g) are hinged on one side, operating by swinging in or out. This is the second most typical window we see in Reno's historic houses. They include single configurations and can also be paired to form a double-casement window. Associated styles: Prairie, Tudor, Spanish Revival, Mission Revival, Ranch, and Contemporary/Mid-Century Modern.



716 Arlington, this period revival cottage displays a trio of six-over-six, single hung sash windows. Courtesy David Lowndes.

Sliding windows (j) are comprised of a horizontally-sliding sash with a fixed panel, or two horizontally-sliding sashes. Sliding windows gained prominence in the 1950s and is the most common window used in modern buildings. Associated styles: Ranch.

Fixed windows (k) are non-operable, consisting of glazing within a frame. These are typically seen in storefront display windows, or as smaller, decorative windows in residential buildings.

Awning windows (d) are hinged at the top and open, or "flip up," at an angle.

Hopper windows (f) are the opposite of awning windows, being hinged at the bottom and opening by "flipping down" at an angle.

Pivot windows are exactly what they sound like: they operate by pivoting. They can pivot on a horizontal axis (h) or a vertical axis (i).

Window Configurations

In general, the older the window is, the smaller its panes of glass are. The earliest windows, dating to the seventeenth century, feature a lot of tiny panes of glass, either square or diamond-shaped, which are attached to wooden or metal frames with strips of soft lead. As technology improved



619 Sinclair has cottage-type windows with diamond-patterned upper sashes and single-light lower sashes. Courtesy Steve Ellison.

and became less expensive, window panes increased in size throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By the mid-1800s, it became possible to glaze a sash using one or two panes of glass. Of course, smaller panes continued to be used in windows, but this was driven by aesthetic tastes and historical precedents, not by the limitations of technology. Different glazing configurations, in combination with different window types, indicate architectural periods and styles.

Glazing configurations are named by counting the panes, or lights, of glass in each sash. If you're looking at a single- or double-hung sash window with six lights in the top and bottom sashes, it is called a six-over-six window. If it has six lights of glass in the top sash and one light of glass in the bottom sash, it is a six-over-one window, and so on. There are also windows with patterned upper sashes or transoms, including cottage windows, which do not subscribe to this descriptive pattern. They may be described based on the pattern (e.g., diamond pane), or simply called "patterned pane" or "patterned light" windows. These are typical to the Queen Anne, Neoclassical, and Craftsman styles. 

Information for this article include Gottfried and Jennings' American Vernacular: Buildings and Interiors, 1870-1960 (2009), McAlester's A Field Guide to American Houses (2013), and Phillips' The Old House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture, 1600 to 1940 (1992). Illustrations are from the Vieux Carré Commission Design Guidelines (2015). The Vieux Carré Commission Foundation generously granted HRPS permission to use these illustrations.

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