

Moorish Revival Style in Minnesota

The term “Moorish revival,” or “Neo-Moorish” originated in the nineteenth century to describe a style of European and American architecture featuring onion-like domes, glittering mosaics, and pointed arches. Moorish revival style was inspired by the art and architecture of the medieval Muslim culture of north-west Africa and southern Spain. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Western world was fascinated by the exotic aesthetic of faraway places, a sentiment that was part of the Romantic Movement.¹ Archaeological discoveries of the 1920s led to a resurgence of exotic revival styles, especially for movie theaters, or “picture palaces.”² Moorish revival style was used between about 1830 and 1930,³ appearing on various types of buildings from apartment buildings to mansions, commercial buildings to synagogues.

Origins

Moorish revival architecture draws its inspiration from the art and culture of Andalusia, the region that extended from North Africa to parts of Spain and Portugal which was under Muslim rule from A.D. 711 to 1492. Two of the most famous examples of Moorish architecture style are the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Alhambra palace in Granada, Spain. The Alhambra is the best preserved medieval Islamic palace, known for its colonnades, stucco decoration, mosaic tilework, fountains, and courtyards. Its symmetrical courtyard, called the Court of Lions, was constructed in A.D. 1377 and is divided by four water channels around a central fountain, representing the Islamic Paradise. The Great Mosque of Cordoba was originally constructed in A.D. 784-6, with additions throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. The mosque is known for its striking rows of white and red, horseshoe arches, polylobed arches, glass mosaics, carved marble panels, and decorative stucco.⁴ The characteristics of these buildings are representative of the Moorish architectural style.



Caption: The Court of Lions in the Alhambra Palace in Granada Spain

Source: Javier Carro, “Arcos en patio de los leones, la Alhambra,” *Wikimedia Commons*, 2 October 2005, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AArcos_en_patio_de_los_leones%2C_la_Alhambra.JPG (accessed October 30, 2017).

¹ “Moorish Revival Architecture,” *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, http://www.worldheritage.org/articles/eng/Moorish_Revival_architecture (accessed October 30, 2017).

² David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987), 25.

³ Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. “Exotic Revival Style 1830 - 1850, 1920 - 1930.” *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide*, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/exotic-revival.html> (accessed October 30, 2017).

⁴ Nasser D. Khalili, *Islamic Art and Culture: Timeline and History* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 161.

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Caption: Red and White horseshoe arches in the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Cordoba, Spain.

Source: Berthold Werner, "Spain, Cordoba, Mosque-Cathedral," *Wikimedia Commons*, 27 October 2015, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASpain_Andalusia_Cordoba_BW_2015-10-27_13-54-14.jpg (Accessed October 30, 2017).

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Attributes of Moorish revival architecture

In the nineteenth century, Western cultures drew inspiration from the exotic "Moorish" style, borrowing decorative elements from the architecture of the East. Moorish revival style is characterized by architectural elements including the following attributes:

1. Pointed arches, called "ogees"
2. Horseshoe arches
3. Intricately detailed tile mosaic and patterned brickwork
4. Onion domes⁵
5. Lobed arches and window tracery⁶

Some buildings include small tower-like protrusions imitating "minarets" the slender towers typically found on mosques.

⁵ Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. "Exotic Revival Style 1830–1850, 1920–1930."

⁶ Cyril M Harris, *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1998), 220.



Photo Captions:

1. A minaret and patterned brickwork decorate former Despatch Coin Laundry building in Whittier, Minneapolis (Source: the author, Alyssa Gregory)
2. The Moorish Mansion apartments feature a copper onion dome over a bay window (Source: the author, Alyssa Gregory)
3. Windows framed by pointed arches on the Frederick C. Wilhelm House in South Minneapolis (Source: the author, Alyssa Gregory)

Typically, Moorish revival buildings do not serve the same functions of the medieval Islamic buildings of Spain and North Africa, with their lush gardens and open-air courtyards. Like many of the revival styles, Moorish revival style imitates Islamic design elements and incorporates them into a Western framework.

History and Significance

Islamic design was appropriated into European and American architecture as part of the Romantic Movement, a movement that developed in the first half of the nineteenth century in reaction to the rapidly industrializing Western nations. The Romantic Movement embraced the idea of the “picturesque,” which drew upon imagery of ruins and foreign, faraway places. During this fascination with the exotic, “orientalism” – the romantic, Western construct of Eastern cultures – found its way into the art, literature, and architectural styles of Europe and America.⁷

Orientalism in architecture was, in part, inspired by architectural drawings of Islamic buildings brought back by travelers in the middle of the nineteenth century. Between 1836 and 1845, architects Owen Jones and Jules Goussier created detailed studies and drawings of the Alhambra palace in Spain, illustrating the Islamic aesthetic for the Western World.⁸ In his famous book of drawings, *The Grammar of Ornament*, Jones described the Alhambra palace as, “the very summit of perfection of Moorish art, as is the Parthenon of Greek art.”⁹

Grand international expositions, such as the World Fairs, allowed Victorians to transport themselves into a fantastical vision of the East, one of Turkish baths, harems, and lavish palaces. Elements of Middle Eastern architecture were incorporated into the eclectic period of the nineteenth century as architecture embraced an array of creative styles.¹⁰ As archaeologists made discoveries in faraway lands, the Moorish

⁷ Sibel Bozdogan, “Orientalism and Architectural Culture,” *Social Scientist* 14 (July 1986), 53–4.

⁸ Sibel Bozdogan, “Orientalism and Architectural Culture,” 54.

⁹ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Herbert Press, 2001), 185.

¹⁰ Bozdogan, “Orientalism and Architectural Culture,” 54.

revival style became popular for dramatic structures in the 1920s such as movie theaters, or “picture palaces.”¹¹

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Synagogues

Onion domes, tower-like minarets, and pointed arches might seem out of place on a Jewish-American synagogue. However, the use of Moorish or “Byzantine” revival style became a common motif for Jewish Orthodox synagogues. The style was first used by Jewish communities living in Germany.¹² In the early 1800s, Jewish people in Europe had gained more political agency, but were still categorized in terms of otherness, called “the Orientals of Europe.”¹³ These congregations embraced their Eastern origins and established a distinct identity, drawing upon Turkish, Persian, Syrian, Indian, and Moorish motifs for their religious buildings.¹⁴



Caption: Temple Israel, 501-503 10th Street South, Minneapolis, 1890.

Source: University of Minnesota Libraries, Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives. <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/756847>

Temple Israel, 501-503 10th Street South, Minneapolis

Designed by the nationally renowned architect, Leroy Buffington, the building included elements of Moorish and “Byzantine revival” style, complete with a large onion dome, slender towers, or “minarets,” and lobed and pointed arches.¹⁵

Temple Israel (originally named Shaarai Tov) is the Twin Cities oldest synagogue, founded in 1878. Originally, the congregation was meant to serve both Reform and Orthodox Jewish traditions, however, the plan was unsuccessful and it became a Reform congregation. Their first religious building was constructed in 1880, located on Fifth Street between what is now Marquette and Second Avenue South. In 1888, the congregation moved the building to Tenth Street and Fifth Avenue South.¹⁶

¹¹ Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 25.

¹² Steven H. Moffson, “Identity and Assimilation in Synagogue Architecture in Georgia, 1870–1920,” in *Constructing Image, Identity, and Place: Perspective in Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Alison K. Hoagland and Kenneth A. Breisch (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 156.

¹³ Gwen Underwood, “Why Moorish? Synagogues and the Moorish Revival,” *Museum at Eldridge Street*, <https://www.eldridgestreet.org/art-architecture/moorish-revival-synagogues/> (accessed October 30, 2017).

¹⁴ Moffson, “Identity and Assimilation in Synagogue Architecture,” 156.

¹⁵ Laura Weber, “Temple Israel, Minneapolis.” <http://www.mnopedia.org/group/temple-israel-minneapolis> (accessed October 03, 2017).

¹⁶ Weber, “Temple Israel, Minneapolis.”



Caption: Mikro Kodesh Synagogue, 1000 Oliver Avenue North, Minneapolis

Source: Placeography http://www.placeography.org/index.php/Image:JulieTarshish--Mikro_kodesh.jpeg_%281%29.jpg

[Mikro Kodesh Synagogue, 1000 Oliver Avenue North, Minneapolis](#)

Built by architect Septimus J Bowler, the synagogue is an example of Moorish or “Byzantine Revival style.” The Moorish elements include the patterned brickwork and a line of three arched entry doors flanked by two domed towers.¹⁷

Mikro Kodesh Synagogue was constructed in 1926 as the place of worship for Russian-American Jewish community in North Minneapolis.¹⁸ By the 1960s, many of the Jewish residents of North Minneapolis were moving to the suburbs and the congregation rapidly decreased. Today, the building is owned by the African American Disciples Ministry Church.¹⁹

Victorian House Styles

Moorish revival, also defined under the term “Exotic Eclectic” style, is one of several Victorian House styles along with Gothic Revival, Swiss Cottage, the Italianate, Second Empire, the Stick style, and the Queen Anne style.²⁰ The love of ruins and the picturesque in the nineteenth century resulted in eclectic designs in house styles, inspired by Moorish bazaars, Indian palaces, and Turkish mosques.²¹ Moorish revival houses are characterized by domes, pointed and horseshoe arches, recessed porches, and minarets. Some houses exhibit more than one style, such as the Bardwell-Ferrant House in Minneapolis and Huff-Lamberton House in Winona where Moorish revival additions blend with homes in other styles.

¹⁷ Larry Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 294.

¹⁸ Weber, “Temple Israel, Minneapolis.”

¹⁹ Laura Weber, “Mikro Kodesh Synagogue, Minneapolis.” *MNopedia*, <http://www.mnopedia.org/structure/mikro-kodesh-synagogue-minneapolis> (accessed October 30, 2017).

²⁰ John Milnes Baker, *American House Styles: A Concise Guide* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1994), 73.

²¹ Baker, *American House Styles: A Concise Guide*, 82.



Caption: Huff-Lamberton House, Winona, Minnesota

Source: Jonathunder, "Historic Lambertson House on Huff Street in Winona, Minnesota", *Wikimedia Commons*, 1 January 2009, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LambertonHouse.JPG> (accessed October 30, 2017).

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Huff-Lamberton House, 207 Huff Street, Winona, Minnesota

The Huff-Lamberton house was built in 1857 for Henry D. Huff, a land speculator who became rich as Winona expanded, building a flour mill, promoting a transit railroad, and constructing the Italian Villa mansion as a hotel. In 1873, he sold the house to a railroad land agent named Henry W. Lambertson. Lambertson's wife, said to be an opera singer from St. Louis, added the later addition of the Moorish gazebo and porch lined with intricate ogee arches.²²

The Huff Lambertson House is one of the oldest and best preserved Italian Villa style homes in Minnesota. The addition of the Moorish gazebo and porch is significant because it indicates the interest in the exotic which had become popular at the time due to the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 where large-scale Moorish architecture was featured.²³

The building was added to the National Register of Historic places in 1976. It has been used as an orphanage and a senior care home. Today, the building has been renovated into apartments by Bluff City Properties.²⁴

²² Roger G. Kennedy, *Historic Homes of Minnesota* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006) 109-110.

²³ Charles W. Nelson, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Huff-Lamberton House, Winona, Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976).

²⁴ Adam Voge, "After 5 Years on the Market, Huff-Lamberton House Gets New Owners." *Winona Daily News*, September 1, 2011. http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/after-years-on-the-market-huff-lamberton-house-gets-new/article_b1649d0e-d450-11e0-93c0-001cc4c03286.html.



Caption: Bardwell-Ferrant House
Source: Alyssa Gregory (the author)

[Bardwell-Ferrant House, 2500 Park Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota](#)

The house was originally constructed at 1800 Park Avenue in 1883 for Charles Bardwell. In 1898, it was relocated to 2500 Park Avenue South to avoid the construction of a new apartment building. The Bardwell-Ferrant House was added to the National Register of Historic places in 1984, despite its deteriorating conditions. The house was renovated in the 1980s and sold 2001, although after a few years the bank foreclosed on it. A new owner purchased the house in 2011, making efforts to restore it.²⁵

Originally, the house was constructed in the Queen Anne style, visible in the south-facing, rectangular bay beneath the open balcony. In 1890, the home's new owner, Emil Ferrant hired the prominent Minneapolis architect, Carl F. Struck to create the exotic Moorish additions including lobed windows, ogee arches, and the onion-dome towers on the north facade of the house.²⁶

²⁵ Shiffer, James. "The Leaning Tower of Portland Avenue." *Star Tribune*, November 27, 2012. <http://www.startribune.com/the-leaning-tower-of-portland-avenue-129-years-wear-on-mpls-landmark/181021501/>.

²⁶ Camille Kudzia, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Bardwell-Ferrant House, Minneapolis, Minnesota* (Minneapolis, MN: City of Minneapolis Heritage Convention, 1981).



Photo, William Sauntry Recreation Hall, 2017

Source: Interior image from Star Tribune article: Kim Palmer, “Stillwater’s ‘Alhambra’ — the Backstory,” *Star Tribune*, September 8, 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/stillwater-s-alhambra-the-backstory/4432938><http://www.startribune.com/exotic-stillwater-home-inspired-by-famed-spanish-palace-hits-market-for-1-6m/442770793/#>

Exterior: Alyssa Gregory

William Sauntry Recreation Hall, 625 5th Street North, Stillwater, Minnesota

The recreation hall was built in Stillwater by prominent lumberman, William Sauntry in 1902, tucked behind his large Queen Anne style mansion. At the time it was built, the hall housed a swimming pool, bowling alley, and an elaborate ballroom.²⁷

The building's exterior references Moorish revival style, with a horseshoe windows and door tracery and mosaic tile ornaments. However, the elaborate interior brings to life the spirit of the Alhambra palace. It has been speculated that Sauntry, an avid traveler, may have visited Granada, Spain to see the palace, and that he hired craftspeople to create molds of the palace so that it could be replicated in Minnesota.²⁸ Although the recreation hall had originally been converted into a triplex, the current owners have restored the mansion to its 1902 appearance.²⁹

Movie Theaters

Early movie theaters were simple, decorated spaces with only a few seats. However, by the 1920s, theaters began to take the form of “picture palaces.” Spurred on by the success of Hollywood studios, elaborate, large-scale movie theaters popped up throughout metropolitan areas and the Main Streets of small towns.³⁰ By the 1920s, movie theaters embraced a whimsical aesthetic, inspired by archaeological discoveries in Egypt such as the tomb of King Tutankhamen and the Great Hall of Karnack.³¹ The fanciful facades were designed to stand out from their surroundings and transport moviegoers into another world.

²⁷ Thomas Harvey, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Washington County Multiple Resource Area, Washington County, Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1980).

²⁸ Kim Palmer, “Stillwater’s ‘Alhambra’ — the Backstory,” *Star Tribune*, September 8, 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/stillwater-s-alhambra-the-backstory/443293863/>.

²⁹ Palmer, “Stillwater’s ‘Alhambra’ — the Backstory.”

³⁰ Naylor, David, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 15–17.

³¹ Naylor, David, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 25.

The interiors of the picture palaces were no less dramatic. John Ebersohn was a well-known architect famous for his “atmospheric” movie theater design. Seats were lined up beneath a blue plaster sky dotted with lights to create the effect of a starry night.³² The theaters were designed to create a sense of a night under the stars in a romantic setting like a Persian court or the grounds of an Egyptian temple.³³



Caption: El Lago Theater (detail)

Source: “El Lago Theater,” *Picture Palaces*, <https://mtpmcg.wordpress.com/picture-palaces/> (accessed October 11, 2007)

El Lago Theater, 3500-06 East Lake Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota

El Lago Theater stands on 3500 Lake Street East in the Longfellow neighborhood of Minneapolis. It was constructed in 1927 by Eckman Holm and Co. Since the 1970s, the building has been used as a church, housing Victory Christian Center.³⁴ The facade combines Moorish revival architecture with Baroque classicism.³⁵ Adorned with an array of bright patterns, the facade is reminiscent of the mosaic walls of the Alhambra in Spain.

Houses and Apartments in the 1920s

In the 1920s, there was a resurgence of Islamic-inspired design and architecture for apartment buildings. In *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, Twin Cities architectural historian Larry Millet suggests that this resurgence was influenced by Hollywood stars like Rudolph Valentino who often portrayed Middle Eastern characters, like sheiks.³⁶



³² Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 23.

³³ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 256.

³⁴ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 197.

³⁵ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 197.

³⁶ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 254.

Caption: Facade of Moorish Mansion apartments

Source: Alyssa Gregory (the author)

Moorish Mansion Apartments, 3028 James Avenue South, Minneapolis

The Moorish Mansion apartments were constructed in 1929, designed by architect, Carl J. Bard.³⁷ The apartments represent an array of Islamic revival traits pieced together on an asymmetrical facade. One of the most striking features is the copper onion domes on top of the large bay window. Pointed “ogee” arches surround the doorway and the dark stone facade is offset by brightly colored mosaic details. Today, the building is still in use for its original purpose as an apartment complex.



Caption: Granada Apartments, 1456 Lagoon Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Source: Alyssa Gregory

Granada Apartments, 1456 Lagoon Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Not far from the Moorish Mansion Apartments, Carl J. Bard constructed another apartment complex in 1929 in the Spanish-Moorish revival style. The building includes an arcaded courtyard lined with arches. Patterned brickwork decorates the arches and the facade.³⁸ Like his Moorish Mansion apartments, the Granada Apartments are still in use as an apartment complex.



Caption: Frederick C. Wilhelm House, 5140 Aldrich Avenue South (facade and arcaded side porch)

Source: Alyssa Gregory (the author)

³⁷ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 253.

³⁸ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 254.

Frederick C. Wilhelm House, 5140 Aldrich Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The dramatic, Moorish home was built in 1927 by architect, S. B. Appleton for its original owner, Frederick C. Wilhelm. The theatrical nature of the Moorish revival house reflects the sentiments of Period Revival architecture.³⁹ Tucked away in a residential South Minneapolis neighborhood, the home stands out from its surroundings, with an onion dome above the large bay window, an arcaded side porch, and lobbed windows. Elaborate Islamic decoration surrounds the doorway beneath a painted arch.

Commercial Buildings:



Caption: Despatch Laundry Building in Whittier neighborhood of Minneapolis

Source: Alyssa Gregory (Author)

Despatch Laundry Building, 2611 First Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota

This small, but elaborate building in Whittier, Minneapolis was built as the Despatch Laundry Co. building in 1929 by architect Louis B. Bershach, who was better known for his apartment buildings.⁴⁰ The storefront serves as form of advertising for the business.⁴¹ The building is eye-catching in the residential neighborhood of Whittier, Minneapolis, with its onion dome, pointed arches, patterned brickwork, mosaic tile, and narrow minarets. It was renovated in 1981⁴² and now houses an office space.

³⁹ Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 234.

⁴⁰ Marjorie Pearson, Penny Petersen, and Charlene Roise. *The Evolution of the Whittier Neighborhood* (Minneapolis, MN: Hess, Roise and Company, 2009), 35.

⁴¹ Marjorie Pearson, Penny Petersen, and Charlene Roise, *The Evolution of the Whittier Neighborhood*, 35.

⁴² Millet, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities*, 211.

Links:

http://www.minneapolismn.gov/hpc/landmarks/hpc_landmarks_exotic_revival

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