

Dear Planning Commissioners,

Below are common arguments we hear from “modernists” regarding Carmel’s architecture. We have provided our responses to these comments below. We hope they help clarify our position for you.

Carmel Preservation Association
ISSUES/ARGUMENTS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Define “Carmel character.” What are you talking about...can you describe exactly what you mean by that?

This type of question is used commonly on **any** topic to disarm an opinion. Almost all issues/opinions lie on a continuum. Many Carmel houses are easily defined as having Carmel character or charm, with almost 100% agreement. Likewise many are clearly not of that ilk. Then there are those along the continuum, where opinions differ. That’s why we have committees, and hopefully clear guidelines, to discuss and determine whether an individual house plan qualifies as having Carmel character.

Carmel charm is best described in pictures, not words.

2. Architectural designs need to be represented from every decade.

Carmel is not an encyclopedia of architectural styles. They are well represented in other communities (less desirable ones, we might add).

Because Carmel has limited undeveloped land, newer designs actually eliminate the charming cottages. Taking this to the extreme, continued demolition of older homes to be replaced by new “modern” buildings will eventually eliminate what is Carmel’s charm.

TO USE AN ANALOGY, IF CARMEL WERE A MUSEUM OF IMPRESSIONIST ARTWORK OF ALL KINDS, AND THE MODERATOR DECIDED TO INTRODUCE MODERN ART, BECAUSE OF LIMITED SPACE EACH PIECE OF IMPRESSIONIST ART WOULD EVENTUALLY BE REPLACED WITH MODERN ART. THE MUSEUM IS NO LONGER WHAT IT WAS. CARMEL IS ALSO GOING THE WAY OF MOST OTHER BEACH DESTINATION COMMUNITIES, ACCORDING TO OUR VISITORS—RUINED.

3. Diversity. Diversity is good.

Maybe diversity is good among people---maybe not as much among houses. Yes, some diversity is desirable—we don’t want “cookie cutter” designs that all look alike. We do not have that. The diversity among the older Carmel traditional styles thrives.

Carmel has maintained an architectural integrity atypical of the vast majority of communities. We are special, in that the residential designs have, for the most part, *a warm, inviting, cozy feel, impervious to trends of the time.*

In any community worth visiting there is an atmosphere, expressed through its architecture, which speaks not only to diversity within a genre, but *homogeneity* as well. Carmel is world-renowned for a reason, much of it due to the “magical” designs of its homes.

4. “You can’t stop progress.”

Yes we can. What have we been doing for the last 100+ years in Carmel, when it comes to housing designs? That does not mean that we won’t embrace new and better ways to deal with issues generally. However, Carmel has maintained an architectural integrity atypical of the vast majority of communities. We hope this will continue to be, as it has been accomplished through hard work, over and over again by those before us. Carmel is in danger of becoming an “Anywhere USA” community. Many of the beach communities have already succumbed to “progress.” *At this point the village of Carmel is losing the battle to maintain its traditional character, maybe for the first time in its history.*

5. People should be able to do what they want with their house styles.

....Individual rights. If your neighbor wants to build a warehouse next to you, is that ok? How about a huge flat-top box home painted purple that blocks all the neighbors’ views? *Any community worth visiting has strict building guidelines.* European villages exemplify this well. People can build pretty much what they want in other, but less desirable areas.

6. New construction should not mimic the older styles of earlier decades.

As for “mimicry,” aren’t the contemporary homes mimicking others just as much as the traditional styles? Original nuances can appear on any style of home. Yes, it is important to monitor the quality of construction to assure that false facades and *poor* attempts at capturing the past are discouraged. However, there are many examples of charming newer buildings in the village that uphold the magic of Carmel.

Many of the Carmel cottages are beyond repair, but they can be remodeled, added to, or demolished if necessary while keeping in the character of what makes Carmel so unique and special.

Take the analogy of modern art. Are paintings of landscapes, or still lives mimicking others on the same topic? Is not modern art mimicking a style as well? Everything old is new again.

7. it doesn’t say in the design guidelines that we can’t do this.

Our present guidelines are just that, guidelines. They cannot be comprehensive in covering every possible issue presented. The “spirit” of the guidelines is ideally determined/upheld in committee discussion and decision making. This is not a perfect world, but we can strive toward that ideal. This is also why we need stronger language in the updated guidelines, allowing our Commissioners backup for holding the line.

8. There are other examples of modern styles in our neighborhood—why can’t we build a modern house too?

Unfortunately true, modern houses have been approved. Two (or more) wrongs do not make a right. Let’s start making better decisions regarding designs in Carmel!

9. We don’t want “Disneyland,” or cutsy cottages.

Well, Disneyland is not what we want either, but people flock there for a reason. We don’t want false fronts. We do want the real thing. There is nothing wrong with making an environment welcoming and comfortable, different from other places. There IS something wrong with making it sterile and bare, particularly in Carmel by the Sea. Comstock would not have been allowed to build his cottages today. Not just because of codes, but because they would not have been seen as “acceptable” by our Planning Commission (e.g., volumetric guidelines preclude high peaked roofs, and the Commission recommends “simple” lines/designs). The most common requests of visitors at the Visitors Center (other than asking where the bathrooms are) is “where are the fairytale cottages?”).

10. Isn’t it ok to have *some* modern houses?

Who do you say “yes” to and who do you say “no” to? This is the approach we presently have, and has caused a proliferation of modern styles in Carmel. If we give them an inch, they’ll take a mile,” as we see presently. This speaks to updating our design guidelines to be more prescriptive, and adhere to them. People deserve to know what is expected architecturally *before* they draw up plans.

Kh 10.10.22