

## I'll Take The Tudor

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Tudor buildings are scattered all over Westchester, like sprinkles on doughnut. In downtown Bronxville, 65 Pondfield Road there is a sweet two-story series of storefronts with a pointed tower at the corner. Along Garth Road in Scarsdale, Tudor elements frost six story tall buildings – a height incomprehensible to the Tudors. You can find many more Westchester homes and village shops that tout this romantic style of architecture.

The name Tudor is strange as the style predates the 15<sup>th</sup> century English dynasty. Some call it “French half-timbered construction” which is too wordy for real estate advertisements. Despite its popularity, most people do not know the origins of this capricious mixing of stone, brick, wood timbers and stucco. I place the start of this delightful, gentle and romantic architectural motif with raging hoards of barbarian vandals.



In the Roman Empire, many dignified buildings (imitating solid stone Greek buildings) were made of brick and faced with stone. The Romans had a massive brick industry so bricks were cheap. Romans were ashamed of brick the way we are ashamed of foam insulation. Buildings would not be “finished” if any bricks were showing.

Picture yourself a 5<sup>th</sup> century Roman citizen in the city of Angers in Gaul (France.) You have a fine home. It has a stone foundation but the upper floors are brick covered with marble facing. (A brick foundation would crush under its own weight.) Life is good. You have a lovely wife and strong children. You trade grain in the market in the morning and go to the baths in the afternoon. Occasionally the gladiators come to town or there are chariot races.

But the Roman Army is not what it used to be and raiding gangs of Visigoths burn and pillage the town. The Empire falls. Your house is in ruins. The stone foundation is there but the marble has been stripped off exposing that ugly red-brown brick. The top floor is toppled. But you cannot go to the local Rome Depot to buy more bricks or marble facing to fix it up. The only plentiful materials are wood and mud.

1300 years later, German Romantic philosophers, like Hegel and a pair of Schlegels, idealize the middle ages and the half-timbered revival is born. Ignoring its Dark Age origins (amongst starvation and plagues), the style is copied throughout America. So much so, that a Tudor style building, with its stone foundation, brick walls, exposed wood structure and stucco infill looks like an appropriate place to get a latte in downtown Tuckahoe.