REGIONALISM(S) & THE VERNACULAR
HOME ON THE RANGE

This class explores the history of the built environment from the perspective of cultural and evolutionary change, looking closely at rural vernacular cultural landscapes throughout the state and American West, while attempting to understand their place in the regional, national and global contexts.

COURSE
ARCH 6231-001 and HIPR 6110-001, Semester Hours: 3

DAYS/TIMES
Seminar will meet on Wednesday from 9:30am - 12:15pm.

SEMINAR
Room TBD, UCD Bldg

INSTRUCTOR
Ekaterini Vlahos, Professor

OFFICE HOURS
Wednesday 8:30am - 9:30am or by appointment, Office Dean’s Suite - 300

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COURSE INTRODUCTION
Rural cultural landscapes are powerful icons of America’s western heritage. They represent places where struggle and adaptation are etched into the ground, weaving together people, land, buildings, and traditions to form a distinct cultural landscape. Regional and traditional approaches to construction convey early efforts to build in response to the environment, and to shape the land for a specific use in areas that were often considered remote and uninhabitable.

Colorado is exceptional in that its rural lands are located across a full range of western topographies: vast grasslands, plateaus and tablelands, forested tracts, mountain slopes and riparian valleys, and high altitude deserts, among others. The diverse topography and climate that characterize Colorado’s lands, the development of building typologies, and the variety of historic events that have given rise to the rural lands have required distinct strategies to remain economically viable for survival and success.
Understanding the evolution of the region’s cultural landscapes is rooted in learning from those who experienced, adapted, and responded to specific environments. They are the people who spent time observing and understanding the available resources, materials, building methods, ecology, economics, natural landforms, native vegetation, and the history and traditions of the inhabitants that came before them. They understood how actions over time give shape, structure, and meaning to the built environment, and how passing of information from one generation to the next sustains a way of life.

Today rural cultural landscapes are changing as historic cattle trails become paved roads, open fields are filled with housing and commercial developments, technology changes the need and use for agriculture buildings and structures, and the working landscape is coveted for recreational use rather than productivity. Colorado’s agricultural lands and historic settlements tell a complex tale of discovery, settlement, innovation, growth, expansion, and – in some cases – decline. Understanding the history of these vernacular cultural landscapes, and current pressures, is critical to guiding informed design decisions for the region’s future.

In this seminar addresses the following questions:
1) What can we learn from rural vernacular “working landscapes” and how is that knowledge applied to current architecture, planning, and landscape architecture challenges?
2) What can we learn from the vernacular—everyday, ordinary cultural landscapes —to better understand viable approaches to building sustainably in the region?
3) How can preservation be used as a dynamic process of sustaining changing rural lands while embracing culture, traditions, land, and the built environment as an integrated whole?
4) What are the key characteristics and features of the region’s rural vernacular cultural landscapes?

Goals
1. Consider ways that an appreciation for and knowledge of Colorado’s rural heritage can be broadened and explored.
2. Raise awareness of preservation issues related to rural cultural landscapes and propose viable approaches.
3. Develop an understanding of vernacular architecture and landscapes through analysis of existing historic sites.