Steamboat Gothic took quite a bit of Carpenter Gothic into consideration. There was the fancy scroll saw work. There was little regard for where a spire might be placed. The entire point of Steamboat Gothic was to do one thing—imitate the great steamboats traversing southern rivers. However, the differential between Carpenter and Steamboat Gothic is the manner in which the scroll saw is used. The fancy wooden trim on a house loaned itself to conjure up another name for this type of house—the "Gingerbread House."

Steamboat Gothic got its name from the riverboats such as the "Delta Queen," "Natchez," and other great boats in their class. Terribly posh, these steamboats carried everything from passengers to chickens to cotton. The passenger cabins were very elegant for their time, with soft rugs on the floors and brass handrails. Paddlewheels churned through the water behind the boat, and the servants catered to every whim of every passenger.

Soldiers could travel for free, regardless of whether they were on or off duty. The quarters were spacious. And, in the charter for the Opelousas Steam Boat Company, the ships "shall be...supplied with good provisions and liquors for their (passenger) use."

The idea spread. Captains of steamboats began patterning their houses after their vessels. Steamboat Gothic spread through the Midwest and South United States rapidly. People living in steamboat landing towns were equally impressed with the large craft. They decided that if the boats themselves were actually as comfortable as claimed, the homes in the surrounding area could be, as well.

Steamboat Gothic homes actually looked like the outsides of a steamboat. Railings were placed on porches, in imitation of the decks of the ship. The captain's tower was placed on top of the ship—likewise, a box was placed on the top of a hipped roof in imitation. The steam escapes, tail chimney-like structures, were placed on the outsides of the house, and in many cases, were used as chimneys for the house. The wide, winding twin staircases on the steamboats were also used on Steamboat Gothic houses. The staircases on a Steamboat Gothic house usually led from the ground level to a raised deck. Large verandas on the outside of the house were meant to imitate the double decks on a steamboat.

The inside of a Steamboat Gothic home was usually as drastic in imitation as was the outside. The inside contained the plush carpeting, typically large area rugs, and brass handrails were placed in the hallways. Stairways were winding and wide, with elaborate bannisters decorating them. The interior of the house was as comfortable as a vacation on a steamboat.

With the emergence of railroads and the decline of steamboats, as well as the introduction of Victorian architecture, the use of Steamboat Gothic all but disappeared. The impracticality of Steamboat Gothic as an architectural design also was partially responsible for its own demise.

However, numerous homes in the Washington area are built on Steamboat Gothic designs, and "San Francisco," a home in the Reserve, La. area, are the last of the Steamboat Gothic homes in the immediate area.

No matter how impractical or bizarre the idea of Steamboat Gothic may have been at the time of its inception, the remaining houses designed in this vein give us a lasting impression of the bygone Steamboat Era.