



Image from: [The enduring monuments of Romanesque architecture... in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

### Summary Article: **French architecture**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

The architecture of France.

For architecture in France before the Christian era, see Roman Architecture: France.

**Early Christian** The influence of France's rich collection of Roman buildings (ranging from amphitheatres to temples and aqueducts) can be seen in early Christian church building, which began even before the Romans retreated. The baptistery of St Jean at Poitiers and the crypt of Jouarre near Meaux, both 5th century, use Roman architectural effects to their own ends.

**Romanesque** Such early Roman-influenced buildings gave way to the first distinctive Romanesque architecture, which reached its zenith in the abbey at Cluny (begun 1088). The style developed and took on regional characteristics, such as tunnel and other types of vaulting, for example, St Philibert at Tournus (11th century). See also Early Christian and Romanesque Architecture: France

**Gothic** The abbey church of St Denis, near Paris, 1132–44, marks the beginning of the Gothic style, characterized by the use of pointed arches and rib vaulting. The cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, begun 1160, is an example of **early Gothic** (1130–90). The cathedrals at Chartres, begun 1194, Reims, begun 1211, and Bourges, begun 1209, are examples of **lancet Gothic** (1190–1240). French **Late Gothic**, or the **Flamboyant style** as it was known in France (1350–1520), characterized by flowing tracery, is best represented at Caudebec-en-Caux in Normandy, about 1426, and Moulins in Burgundy. See also Gothic architecture: France.

**Renaissance** Arriving in France from Italy late in the 15th century, at first it replaced Gothic very gradually, as in England. Francis I introduced a number of Italian architects at Fontainebleau, Amboise, Blois, and other places. French architects soon acquired the new Italian fashions in design, and during the 16th century built the first part of the New Louvre in Paris (1546), the chateau of St Germain, and many of the picturesque châteaux in the Loire valley, where the Renaissance made its greatest impact, for example Azay-le-Rideau, Chenonceaux, and Chambord 1519–47. See also Renaissance architecture.

**Baroque** After a long period of religious warfare, architecture was again given priority. Henry IV's interest in town planning manifested itself in such works as the Place des Vosges, Paris (begun 1605), the Pont Neuf, and the Place Dauphine. The Baroque style found expression in Le Vau's work on the chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte 1657–61, the gardens of which were designed by Le Notre; the two later worked extensively at Versailles. Jacques Lemercier designed the older part of the palace at Versailles; the Palais Royal (1633), and the churches of the Sorbonne (begun 1626) and St Roch; and laid out the town and chateau of Richelieu for the cardinal of that name (begun 1631). Francois Mansart enlarged Lescot's Hôtel Carnavalet and built the church of Val-de-Grace, both in Paris; the beautiful chateau at Maisons-Lafitte, near Paris, 1642–51; and the Orléans wing at Blois. Under Louis XIV, Hardouin-Mansart enlarged Versailles in 1678, designed the cathedral there, and Les Invalides in Paris, 1680–91; and planned the Place des Victoires and the Place Vendôme both in Paris. See also Baroque.

**Neo-Classicism** In the 18th century there was a definite move towards Classicism, culminating in the severe works of Boullée and Ledoux. The classical influence continued in the 19th century, perpetuated to some extent by the revolution of 1789, with works such as the Madeleine, Paris, 1804–49, by P A Vignon (1762–1828). By the middle of the century, the grandiose Beaux Arts style was established, most spectacularly in the Opéra, Paris, 1861–74, by Charles Garnier (1825–1898). It was challenged by both the rationalist approach of Labrouste who was responsible for the Library of Sainte Geneviève, Paris, 1843–50, and by the Gothic Revival as detailed in the writings of Viollet-le-Duc. See also Neo-Classicism.

**Art nouveau** Art nouveau developed towards the end of the 19th century, with centres in Nancy and Paris. Hector Guimard's Paris Metro station entrances, with their flamboyant metal arches, are famous examples of the style. Garnier experimented with pure form, paralleled by the later work of Auguste Perret. See also art nouveau.

**The Modern Movement** In the 1920s the Swiss-born Le Corbusier emerged as the leading exponent of the Modern Movement in France. His masterpieces range from the cubist Villa Savoye at Poissy (1929–31) to the vast, grid-like Unité d'Habitation at Marseille (1947–52). Since the 1950s technological preoccupations have been evident in much modern architecture in France, beginning with the work of Jean Prouvé, for instance his Refreshment Room at Evian (1957), and continuing in more recent projects, such as the Pompidou Centre, Paris, by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers (1971–77), and the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1981–87, by Jean Nouvel. In the 1980s, Paris became the site for a number of *Grands Projets* initiated by President Mitterrand, including the cultural complex at Parc de la Villette by Bernard Tschumi (partially opened 1985), the conversion by Gui Aulenti of the Gare d'Orsay into the Musée d'Orsay in 1986, I M Pei's glass pyramid for the Louvre in 1989, and the Grande Arche at La Défense by Johan Otto von Spreckelsen in 1989. See also Modern Movement.

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