Style of architecture that flourished in Europe from the mid-12th century to the end of the 15th century. It is characterized by the vertical lines of tall pillars and spires, greater height in interior spaces, the pointed arch, rib vaulting, and the flying buttress.

Gothic architecture originated in Normandy and Burgundy in the 12th century. It was essentially the style of the Catholic countries of Europe, including Hungary and Poland, and attained its highest excellence in France and England. It developed forms on a regional basis, often of great complexity and beauty, and was used for non-religious buildings as well as for cathedrals, churches, and monasteries. The style was common in Western Europe until the 16th century when classic architecture was revived.

France Gothic architecture in France may be divided into four periods: Early Gothic, lancet Gothic, Rayonnant Gothic, and Late, or Flamboyant, Gothic.

Early Gothic (1130–90) saw the introduction of ogival (pointed) vaults, for example Notre Dame, Paris (begun 1160). In lancet Gothic (1190–1240) pointed arches were tall and narrow, as in Chartres Cathedral (begun 1194), and Bourges Cathedral (begun 1209). Rayonnant Gothic (1240–1350) takes its name from the series of chapels that branch out from the cathedral apse, as in Sainte Chapelle, Paris (1226–30). Late Gothic or the Flamboyant style (1350–1520) is exemplified in St Gervais, Paris.

Italy The Gothic architecture of Italy had a classical basis, characterized by vast spans with simple arches on a basilican plan. A notable example of Italian Gothic is Milan Cathedral.

Germany In Germany, the Gothic style until the end of the 13th century was at first heavily influenced by that of France; for example Cologne Cathedral, the largest in northern Europe, was built after the model of Amiens. Many churches were built of brick, not of stone.

England Gothic architecture in England is divided into three styles: Early English (1200–75), for example Salisbury Cathedral; Decorated (1300–75), for example York Minster; and Perpendicular (1400–1575), for example Winchester Cathedral.

The pointed arch and window designs The real basis of Gothic architecture, and that which differentiates it from the heavier Romanesque style, is its elaborate and highly scientific system of vaulting and buttressing, made possible by the presence of the pointed arch. One result of the improved system was an increase of window area in the walls between buttresses – the walls no longer had to carry the main weight of the roof and could therefore be thinner and pierced freely. Lancet windows (windows topped by pointed arches) were grouped in twos or threes under an enclosing arch, the remaining contained space being pierced with small circular openings. Later the stonework between the various windows and openings ('lights') was reduced to slender stone bars ('mullions'), and the whole enclosed group of 'lights' became a single window. The upper portion of the window within the arch was filled with tracery, consisting at first of geometrical patterns, then later of...
flowing patterns, and finally of quasi-rectangular openings in the form of a grid (an effect achieved largely by the introduction of horizontal transoms in the larger windows).

These phases of window design, rather than any vital principle of construction, led to the formal division of English Gothic architecture into its three main stages.

The term Gothic was at first used as insulting criticism of medieval art by Renaissance architects. This may have derived from the work of the 16th-century critic Vasari, who attributed medieval artistic styles to the barbarian Goths, who invaded the Roman Empire between the 3rd and 5th centuries and destroyed ‘classicism’.

weblinks
Gothic Dreams
images
Chartres Cathedral
Gothic architecture
Gothic architecture – buttress
Gothic architecture – lattice-work
Notre Dame, west door
Venetian Gothic architecture
Vienna

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