Article Title: Selections From the Dictionnaire Raisonne- “STYLE”

Author: Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc

Source Title: The Foundations of Architecture

Vol.: Issue: Date: 1854 Pages: 231-263

Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions
The copyright law of the United States (Title 17. United States Code) governs the reproduction and distribution of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to reproduce materials. One of these conditions is that the reproduction not be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." Any person who copies or re-distributes this material in any way inconsistent with Title 17 and its "fair use" provisions may be liable for copyright infringement.
STYLE, s.m. There is style; then there are the styles. Styles enable us to distinguish different schools and epochs from one another. The styles of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic architecture differ from each other in ways that make it easy to classify the monuments produced by these various types of art. It would have been truer to speak of form: the Greek form, the Romanesque form, or the Gothic form, and not use the word style to distinguish the particular characteristics of these types of art. However, usage has rendered its judgment, and thus we do in fact speak of the Greek style, the Roman style, and so on.*

This is not primarily what we are concerned with here, however. In several entries of the Dictionary, we have brought out the differences of style that enable us to classify the architectural works of the Middle Ages both by schools and by epochs.

We will speak here of style only as it belongs to art understood as a conception of the human mind. Just as there is only Art in this sense, so there is only one Style. What, then, is style in this

*We have translated the entire entry “Style” from vol. 8, 477–501. [Editor’s note]
sense? It is, in a work of art, the manifestation of an ideal based on a principle.

Style can also be understood as mode; that is, to make the form of an art appropriate to its objective. In art, then, there is absolute style; there is also relative style. The first dominates the entire artistic conception of an object; the second can be modified depending upon the purpose of the object. The style appropriate for a church would not be appropriate for a private dwelling; this is relative style. Yet a house can reveal the imprint of an artistic expression (just as can a temple or a barracks) that is independent of the object itself, an imprint belonging to the artist or, more precisely, to the principle that he took as a starting point: this is style.

In the arts—in particular, in architecture—vague definitions have engendered many errors, allowed many prejudices to develop, and caused many false ideas to become entrenched. Someone proposes a particular word, and everybody then attaches a different meaning to it. Reasonings that never should have been brought together in the first place all get laid down on the same shaky foundations; they fail to advance the questions; they simply burden indecisive spirits and nourish slothful ones.*

*As an example of what I mean, I cite one of those words so beloved of art amateurs but one on whose meaning they have never been able to agree, and this for the very good reason that it is devoid of sense. There is no art critic who, in speaking of painting, fails to invoke the word chiaroscuro. What is chiaroscuro? If it refers to the distribution of lights and shades within a painting, why not simply speak of modeling, a word that covers the transitions between lights and shades perfectly? If it refers rather to the particular tone of the painting, as some critics appear to admit—that is to say, to the particular harmony adopted by the painter, if not with respect to color, at least with respect to the distribution of light—why not just say “harmony of light” or “harmony of color,” phrases understandable by everybody? Instead a vague—indeed, a strictly meaningless—word is preferred. This passes for great technique, but nobody ever bothers to explain it. None of this would be so terribly unfortunate, of course, except that this kind of nonsense word can create great uncertainty in young artists. We have actually known painters who work to achieve chiaroscuro, which is something indefinable, something beyond evaluation, something indeed we know not quite what—such painters are both wasting their time and allowing their judgment to be debased. [Author’s note]
caricature, and the pedantry and platitude that result from treating
the same object in accordance with the rules of a supposed
classicism behind which refuge is sought. The impression that any
object produces on various artists itself varies as a result of the
faculties of each artist; any artistic expression of it will accordingly
also vary. But only artists who possess style will succeed in making
the spectator feel what the object made them feel. The poet, the
painter, or the sculptor may experience feelings that are sudden,
vivid, and clear; these feelings, aroused by externals, are merely
a kind of imprint. Before this particular imprint can assume the
form of art it must undergo a sort of gestation in the brain of the
artist; the artist must assimilate it little by little, and re-create it as
a work of art that he brings into being with the help, precisely,
of style. If this faculty of assimilation is lacking in the poet, painter,
or sculptor, his works will arise out of a sensation or feeling that
is blunted, and hence he will fail to produce any effect.

For the architect, as for the musician, however, the psychology
is different. These two types of artist do not take from an object
or phenomenon of nature a feeling or sensation of their own that
is then transformed by them into a work of art. Rather, the work
of art must issue from out of their own intelligence; the work of
art must arise in embryonic state in keeping with their possession
of the faculty of reasoning. It is then their task to develop it by
nourishing it with observations that they have borrowed from
nature, science, or earlier artistic creations. If the architect is an
artist he will naturally assimilate the wherewithal for such nour-
ishment, which he will seek wherever he can find it, the better to
develop his conceptions. If he is not an artist, his work will be
nothing but an accumulation of borrowings whose origin will not
be difficult to recognize. His work, in other words, will lack style.

Style is for a work of art what blood is for the human body:
it develops the work, nourishes it, gives it strength, health, and
duration; it gives it, as the saying goes, the real blood that is
common to all humans. Although each individual has very dif-
ferent physical and moral qualities, we must nevertheless speak
of style when it is a question of the artist's power to give body and
life to works of art, even when each work of art still has its own
proper character.

It is not necessary for us here to attempt to appreciate the
degree in which painting, sculpture, and poetry are imitative arts
directly inspired by objects outside ourselves of which we are the
witnesses. It is only necessary to say here—what no one is likely
dispute, it seems to us—that architecture is not an imitative art
in the sense in which we are discussing it. Exterior objects can
only have a secondary influence on the development of archi-
tecture. Architecture as an art is a human creation. Such is our
inferiority that, in order to achieve this type of creation, we are
obliged to proceed as nature proceeds in the things she creates.
We are obliged to employ the same elements and the same logical
method as nature; we are obliged to observe the same submission
to certain natural laws and to observe the same transitions. When
the first man traced in the sand with a stick a circle pivoting upon
its axis, he in no way invented the circle; he merely discovered
a figure already existing. All discoveries in geometry have resulted
from observations, not creations. The angles opposite the vertex
of a triangle did not have to wait to be discovered by somebody
in order to be equal to each other.

Architecture, this most human of creations, is but an applica-
tion of principles that are born outside of us—principles that
we appropriate by observation. Gravitational force existed before
we did; we merely deduced the statics of it. Geometry, too, was
already existent in the universal order; we merely took note of its
laws, and applied them. The same thing is true of all aspects of
the architectural art; proportions—indeed, even decoration—
must arise out of the great natural order whose principles we must
appropriate in the measure that human intelligence permits us to
do so. It was not without reason that Vitruvius said that the
architect had to be in possession of most of the knowledge of his
time, and for his part he put philosophy at the head of all knowl-
dge. Among the ancients, of course, philosophy included all of
the sciences of “observation,” whether in the moral order or in the
physical order.

If, therefore, we succeed in acquiring some little knowledge
of the great principles of the universal natural order, we will
quickly recognize that all creation is developed in a very logical
way and, very probably, is subject to laws anterior to any creative
idea. So much is this the case that we might well claim: “In the
beginning, numbers and geometry existed!” Certainly the Egyp-
tians and, after them, the Greeks understood things that way; for
them, numbers and geometric figures were sacred. We believe
that the style the Egyptians and Greeks achieved—for style is never
lacking in their artistic productions—was due to the religious re-
having had some recourse to his reason. Even if we go no further, we must still say that only human reason allows us to achieve a pale human imitation of the relentless march of logic that was followed in the creation of the world. No doubt our world is itself a minuscule grain of dust with respect to all creation. Nevertheless, it is the world we live in; it is the world we perceive and observe. However insignificant an object it may be in the total immensity of creation, we can nevertheless recognize that, in forming it, nature did not reason things out too badly. May we be pardoned for this digression—which is only apparently a digression—since what we are going to say is intimately connected with our architectural art, and particularly with our art as it was practiced during the Middle Ages. The basic problem nature had to resolve was this: “Given a spherical mass more or less in a state of molten liquefaction, how can it be solidified on its surface by cooling, that is, by contraction, by condensation, a little bit at a time, in a way that will result in the formation of a homogeneous and sufficiently resistant crust around the spheroid, which will otherwise remain in fusion?”

It is a fact that before this problem was ever posed, geometry already had to exist, for the problem’s solution turned out to be entirely in accordance with the laws of geometry. Let us note in passing, by the way, that nature never discovers the undiscoverable or the absurd; nature never attempts to square the circle. However, nature does dispose of means that we, too, have succeeded in appropriating for our own use by dint of careful observation of nature’s laws. For nature as for us, a circle remains a circle; and if the problem is to cover a spheroid with a resistant crust, that is, with a kind of solid pavement, then nature will proceed as we, too, would have had to proceed—namely, by juxtaposing bodies suitable for the purpose. The question, then, was to find, with no opportunity for trial and error, what unique kind of body was suitable for this particular purpose. On what kind of model could be found the absolute properties of resistance that were necessary? When nature is at work, successive deductions follow in accordance with an inflexible logical order: nature traces a circle and inscribes in it the only geometric figure whose shape cannot be modified, a figure of which both the sides and the angles are equal to each other—namely, an equilateral triangle. Given a sphere rather than a circle, however, what turns out to be required, by induction, is a pyramid; for the four faces of a pyramid

spect they had for the principles to which universal creation itself was the first to be subject, that universal creation which itself is style par excellence.

In questions of this order, however, we need to bring forward some simple and obvious demonstration. We are not here concerned with philosophy; we are concerned with bringing some great and fundamental principles within our grasp—simple principles, in fact. Style is able to enter into architectural work only when it operates in accordance with these fundamental principles.

There are those who appear to be persuaded that artists are simply born with the faculty to produce works with style and that all they have to do is to open themselves to a sort of inspiration of which they are not the masters. This idea would appear to be too broadly general in its sweep; it is, nevertheless, favored by the fuzzy-minded. It is not an idea, however, that ever seems to have been favored or, indeed, even admitted in those epochs that knew best how to produce the works of art that have been most noted for their style. On the contrary, in those times it was believed that the most perfect kind of artistic creation was the consequence of a profound observation of the principles on which art can and must be based. (It was, of course, also granted that artists did possess artistic faculties.)

We will leave it to poets and painters to decide whether what we call inspiration can or cannot get along without a long and profound observation of nature. As far as architecture is concerned, however, this particular pursuit is compelled on its scientific side to observe the imperatives that rule it; it is obliged from the very first to seek the elements and the principles on which it will be based, and then to deduce from them with an utterly rigorous logic all the consequences that follow. It happens to be the truth that we cannot pretend to proceed with a power greater than that possessed by universal creation itself, for we act at all only by virtue of our observation of the laws of that creation. Once we have recognized that nature (however we suppose nature herself to have been inspired) has never so much as joined two single atoms together without being subject to a completely logical rule; once we have recognized that nature always proceeds with mathematical exactitude from the simple to the complex, without ever abandoning its first principles—once we have recognized these things, we will surely have to be allowed to smile broadly if we then find an architect waiting for an inspiration without first
are all equilateral triangles. Now we have a solid whose shape cannot be modified and whose properties are the same no matter which one of its four sides are in question. Here, then, is the solid, now conveniently discovered: equal sides, equal angles, equal resistance. On this model nature will form the solid crust of the incandescent sphere; for this particular solid is in fact quite adaptable to this function.

Two equilateral triangles possessing a common base form a rhombus (as can be seen in A, figure 1): equal sides, obtuse angles \( a \) (120°), acute angles \( b \) (60°). With the help of six such rhombuses (as shown in B), the rhombohedron \( C' C \) is obtained. This is a body composed of two pyramids \( e \), of which the four faces are equilateral triangles, of which, in turn, the middle part \( g \) possesses a common base \( f \), on which two opposed pyramids arise and of which the faces are again equilateral triangles.

We can see here how, with the use of a single figure, the equilateral triangle, a body is obtained with properties capable of
prodigious extension. Let us take first of all the body $C$: does it not present the eye with the junction of six equal parts capable of being attached to three networks that cut into or penetrate each other, thus lending itself to the covering of curved surfaces? Now four such rhombohedrons penetrating each other constitute two pyramids composed of equilateral triangles also penetrating into each other—that is to say, they constitute a solid in the form of an eight-pointed star; each of the like points of this star is itself a pyramid composed of equilateral triangles (see figure 2). This solid, of which the middle part $a$ is that of the rhombohedron, inscribes the projection of the six points of the bases of the two pyramids penetrating each other in the hexagon $b$; it inscribes the points of the star in a sphere and in a cube (see figure 3). It is not necessary for us to insist on all these various elements. But the resulting body, composed out of a single basic figure, the equilateral triangle, has extensive properties.

If, now, we take the trouble of examining the first crystallized geologic layer, namely, granite, we will discover that it is entirely composed of juxtaposed rhombohedrons (see $a$, figure 4). Wherever we find basaltic eruptions that have become contracted in solidifying, we will find that they yield prisms with hexagonal sections $b$, and these, of course, are derivative of the rhombohedral form.

Now, the reticulated faces of the rhombohedron lend themselves to providing a covering for a spheroid better than cubes ever would. The meeting planes of these rhombohedrons are not perpendicular to the curve of the earth, as the meeting planes of cubes would have been; cubes would have formed a juxtaposition of truncated pyramids with square bases. The rhombohedral planes, however, since they are not perpendicular to the curve of the earth, provide better resistance to pressure, whether from within or without. It should be clear that bodies disposed in the manner of those shown in $C$ will not be able to hold in a molten core $X$, with a tendency to escape, as well the bodies disposed as shown in $D$. This latter disposition, of course, is precisely that of granitic rhombohedrons. We need not linger any longer on these geologic formations. It has, however, been necessary to help make better understood how the very first creative datum of the globe that we inhabit—and, quite certainly, the other similar globes spread across space, for an equilateral triangle on Saturn cannot be any different from the one we have here—proceeds in ac-
cordance with the rigorous application of a principle, the only principle, indeed, that could apply. If we were to follow through and examine all the phases of creation in our own world, both organic and inorganic, we would quickly find it to be the case that, in all of nature's various works, however different they may be in appearance, the same logical order proceeding from a fundamental principle is followed; this is an *a priori* law, and nature never deviates from it. And it is to this natural method that is owing the "style" with which all of nature's works are imbued. From the largest mountain down to the finest crystal, from the lichen to the oaks of our forests, from the polyp to human beings, everything in terrestrial creation does indeed possess style—that is to say, a perfect harmony between the results obtained and the means employed to achieve them.

This is the example that nature has provided for us, the example we must follow when, with the help of our intelligence, we presume to create anything ourselves.

What we call imagination is in reality only one aspect of our human mind. It is the part of the mind that is alive even while the body is asleep; it is through that same part of the mind that, in dreams, we see spread out before us bizarre scenes consisting of impossible facts and events that have no connection one with the other. This part of ourselves that is imagination still does not sleep when we are awake; but we generally regulate it by means of our reason. We are not the masters of our imagination; it distracts us unceasingly and turns us away from whatever is occupying us, although it seems to escape entirely and float freely only during sleep. However, we are the masters of our reason. Our reason truly belongs to us; we nourish it and develop it. With constant exercise, we are able to make out of it an attentive "operator" for ourselves, able to regulate our actions and ensure that our accomplishments are both lively and lasting.

Thus, even while we recognize that a work of art may exist in an embryonic state in the imagination, we must also recognize that it will not develop into a true and viable work of art without the intervention of reason. It is reason that will provide the embryonic work with the necessary organs to survive, with the proper relationships between its various parts, and also with what in architecture we call its proper proportions. Style is the visible sign of the unity and harmony of all the parts that make up the whole
work of art. Style originates, therefore, in an intervention of reason.

The architecture of the Egyptians, like that of the Greeks, possessed style because both architectures were derived by means of an inflexible logical progression from the principle of stability on which both were based. One cannot say the same of all the constructions of the Romans during the Roman Empire. As for the architecture of the Middle Ages, it, too, possessed style once it had abandoned the debased traditions of antiquity—that is, in the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. It possessed style because it proceeded according to the same kind of logical order that we have observed at work in nature. Thus, just as in viewing a single leaf it is possible to reconstruct the entire plant, and in viewing an animal bone, the animal itself, it is also possible to deduce the members of an architecture from the view of an architectural profile. (See the entry "Trait.") Similarly, the nature of the finished construction can be derived from an architectural member.

If, when at work, the creative force of nature could obtain an integrated result only by combining parts; if, without speaking of higher organisms, the crust of the earth had to be formed by a juxtaposition of crystallized bodies formed according to a unique pattern; and if the results obtained were based strictly upon the proper combination of all the parts—then it is all the more incumbent upon us in fashioning our own creations to employ our raw materials in accordance with their form and their qualities. For we humans must inescapably make use of already existing raw materials, fashioning them for our purposes. We can, of course, force our raw materials, for example, metals—up to a certain point. We can force them into assuming certain arbitrary forms. Nevertheless, we are finally obliged to accept wood and stone for what they are and as nature has fashioned them already; certain laws dictated the formation of these natural materials. We are therefore obliged to conceive of a structure for them that accords with their qualities. Style is possible only under certain conditions. This is the case because the nature of the materials is already fixed: they will take on the form of art only as a consequence of the harmonious adaptation of their particular properties with the artistic end in view; moreover, every use of materials must be proportional to the object. Proportions are relative, not absolute. This does not mean they are relative as to number. Rather, they are relative with respect to the materials employed, to the object, and to what is to be made out of it. In architecture it is not possible to establish a fixed formula such as that 2 is to 4 as 200 is to 400. Although you can place a lintel 4 meters long on posts 2 meters high, you cannot do so with one 400 meters long on pillars 200 meters in height. When the scale changes, the architect must also change his mode of operating. Style consists precisely in choosing the mode that best accords with the scale of the work, taking the word scale in its broadest sense. The Greeks, of course, did not accept what we call scale. (See the entry "Échelle.") They did accept the relationship of numbers. But then they built only relatively small buildings.

If the masters of the Middle Ages accepted a single module related to the human dimension, they nevertheless modified the proportionate scale of their work in harmony with its dimensions, its structure, or contexture; what followed from this were diverse appearances, which nevertheless had style because they were based on the application of a true principle.

A comparison will help us appreciate the profound difference between the architecture of the Middle Ages and that of Greek antiquity at its prime. The Greek column, which served as the basis for vertical support, had no other function except to support the horizontal beam members or entablatures; it was a part of the classical Greek order, and was always found in an identical proportional relationship with the members it supported. If the beam, lintel, or entablature was greater in volume, it stood to reason that the column supporting the particular member would be strengthened in the same proportion, except that there was, of course, a limit to the dimensions a member might assume. Once the arch was admitted, though, and following it, the vault, a column could no longer simply be part of an order; its function had to be dictated by the nature of the structure being constructed. Since the use of horizontal members did not permit intercolumniation of more than a certain width—for horizontal members longer than ten meters cannot be supported—it was logical to utilize columns of a thickness proportionate to their intercolumniation and thus also to their height. The capacity of an arch being almost unlimited meant that it would be illogical to fix the thickness of columns in accordance either with their height or with their intercolumniation. It is for this reason that, in the architecture of the Middle Ages, it was the weight and function of what they supported that
determined the relative proportions of the columns; if these proportions were correct, the column then had style.

Nothing is more satisfying or more nearly perfect than the Doric order of the Parthenon. Artists who could achieve such true proportional relationships among the various parts of the structure must surely have benefited from many long efforts devoted to the end in view. Nevertheless, the structure is limited both in its scope and in its use. In order to transcend the limitations of this type of structure, what was required was another type of structure. This other type of structure would become possible by utilizing the arch and the vault. The use of these elements, in turn, would create a new relationship between blank spaces and functional spaces, and, therefore, it would create an entirely new system with different harmonics. To believe that the beautiful is irrevocably linked to the artistic form, that beauty is, as it were, married to that form, and that all other artistic forms must therefore stand in a false relationship with the beautiful as well as with artistic style—this is a pedantic, schoolmasterish idea, one that may very well seem plausible within the four walls of a classroom but cannot hold up when exposed to the fresh air. Nature never becomes either suspended or stopped, and the limits that certain kinds of mentalities pretend to be able to place upon what is to be considered beautiful—to possess style!—must inevitably remind us, if we may be pardoned the comparison, of the point on the dial of a barometer reading "set fair," although the needle does not stop there any more often than it does on any of the other barometer points. A tempestuous sky or a wind in the woods or on the sea, clouds broken up by a storm, a heavy fog—all these phenomena have their own kind of beauty, every bit as much as does the deep blue of the sky on a hot summer day. At the point where we find ourselves, then—and looking only at questions of art—style as well as the beautiful, we must insist, resides not merely in forms, but in the harmony of a form with reference to an end in view, to a result to be achieved. If a form clearly delineates an object and makes understandable the purpose for which that object was produced, then it is a beautiful form. It is for this reason that the creations of nature are always beautiful in the eyes of the observer. The correct application of a form to its object and to its use or function, and the harmony that necessarily always accompanies such a correct application, can only evoke our admiration, whether we observe it in a stately oak tree or in the smallest of insects. We will discover style in the mechanisms of the wings of a bird of prey, just as we will discover style in the curves of the body of a fish; in these cases style clearly results from mechanisms or curves so aptly designed that flight results in the one case and swimming in the other. It hardly concerns us if someone points out that a bird has wings in order to be able to fly or that this bird is able to fly only because of its wings; the fact is that the wings are a perfect machine, which produces flight. This machine represents a precise expression of the function that it fulfills. We other artists need go no further than this.

If, therefore, we happen to come upon architectural works in which the same condition of harmony obtains between the form, the means, and the object, we naturally declare: "These works have style." We are wholly entitled to speak in this fashion. What, indeed, could style possibly be if it did not arise out of these very qualities? Can style really reside merely in a given form, regardless of the object, the methods employed, or the end in view? Would style somehow be the "soul" of this particular form, inseparable from it? Can such things be? Let us take a highly organized being, a living animal; if we change its habits and surroundings, it can lose the natural harmonic quality of its style. A bird of prey imprisoned inside a cage becomes an awkward, sad, and deformed kind of creature, even though it still has the same instincts, appetites, and qualities. The same is true of a column on a monument; by itself it is nothing but raw form. Is it likely that, if you removed it and put it somewhere else, separated from the causes that brought it into being in the particular proportions it has, it would retain the style and claim that characterize it as part of the ensemble for which it was built? This charm, this style, arises out of the proper context of a particular object—both the ensemble of which it is a harmonious part and its total surroundings. Suppose we rebuilt the Parthenon on the hill of Montmartre—the Parthenon, with its proportions, its silhouette, its proud grace, but without the Acropolis, the sky, the horizon, the sea off Attica, indeed, without the people of Athens! It would still be the Parthenon, no doubt. It would be like the lion in the zoological garden. Now suppose we simply extracted from the Parthenon its Doric order and reproduced it somewhere else along a wall with windows. What name could we give to such a barbarous fantasy? What would happen to the style of the Greek monument under these circumstances? Could not what we are saying here about
the Parthenon be true of all such kinds of more or less random borrowings? Does the style of an edifice crumble along with its various members? Does each member possess independently a part of the style of the whole? No: when we build with bits and pieces picked up here and there—in Greece, in Italy—belonging to styles of art remote from our times and our civilization, we are really engaged in collecting body parts and members of cadavers. When we remove these members from the bodies to which they belonged, we cut them off from the source that gave them life. Out of such we cannot fashion work that lives.

In the created order that surrounds us, and is there at our disposition, so to speak, everything that we touch or arrange or change loses its style—unless we reintroduce into the work a style of our own arising out of our own minds, the stamp of which we then place upon the disorder we would otherwise be producing. When we make a garden of the type called “English,” we take away the true aspect of nature, which always possesses its own inner logic, and substitute for it our own fancy; style disappears as a consequence. If, however, we lay out a garden according to a plan reflecting human genius, making use of natural products as our materials; if we invent an order that did not exist in nature, rectilinear avenues, for example, or quincunxes, or symmetrical cascades intermingled with archeitectonic forms—in these cases we may have destroyed nature’s own style; but we will have substituted for it a style arising out of our own genius, on the basis of principles that we have laid down in advance. Should we make use of human creations rather than those of nature, adopting mere parts of them as we would stones from a quarry or trees from the forest, we will again, a fortiori, be removing the original style from those human creations. In order for style to reappear, it is necessary that a new principle animate the materials with its own breath of life.

This is the way the masters of the Middle Ages understood things to be. They had at their disposal a type of Romanesque art that had descended from the architecture of the Roman Empire, even though it had been purified by a Greco-Byzantine contribution. This type of art did not lack grandeur nor, indeed, even originality. Occidental peoples had succeeded in fashioning a practically indigenous product out of it. After the great impetus that had been given to this style of art in the wake of the first Crusades, however, it had reached a certain relative perfection and had come to lack further inspiration. It operated within the confines of a fairly narrow circle; this was because it was based on no new, whole, or absolute principle. This type of art had limited itself to studying forms without occupying itself with their content. It is true that improvements in construction were realized; there were even innovations in the methods of construction. But the basic structural principles of this architecture remained unchanged. Ornamentation might achieve greater elegance; architectural profiles might be more delicately traced. But this improved ornamentation rested upon no new observations; and the profiles did not clearly indicate their function. Romanesque architects purified their taste; they constantly sought to perfect and refine their forms; but they failed to achieve style, because style results only from an idea linked to a generating principle aiming at a particular end in view. This generating principle was the utilization of materials by taking into consideration their particular qualities, while always allowing the function of the parts to appear—just as, in the case of the human body, we distinguish the skeletal framework, the points where the muscles are attached, and the seat of the various organs . . . the form is solely the result of this use. The consequence is that the ensemble of the entire monument, along with each of its parts, perfectly serves the end in view; nothing is lost.

The art of the French school that arose toward the end of the twelfth century in the middle of a medieval civilization whose principal outlines were beginning to be clear, although confusion still persisted between old ideas and new aspirations, sounded with the clarity of a piercing trumpet fanfare amid the vague humming and buzzing of a crowd. People quickly gave their support to the nucleus of artists and artisans who were prepared to affirm the natural genius of a nation that had been suppressed up to then. The nobility, the clergy, and the bourgeoisie were all prepared to pour their treasure into programs of building new churches, palaces, castles, town mansions, public buildings, and houses, according to the newly adopted principle, meanwhile hastening to demolish earlier structures already in place. No one thought for a moment of hindering the new artists in the carrying out of their principles. Indeed, only artists without principles are hindered.

A principle is an article of faith; when, in addition, this principle is based on human reason, it can no longer be opposed with
the same weapons that might be employed against an unreasoning faith. Just try to shake a geometrician’s faith in geometry!

The general phenomenon that produced our architecture of the Middle Ages, so endowed as it was with style, was all the more remarkable when we consider that, generally speaking, style finds its most vigorous expression in primitive art, becoming progressively more attenuated as the execution is perfected. It would seem, however, that our lay architecture of the twelfth century in no way possessed the character of primitive art, since its point of departure came from an art in decline, namely, Romanesque art. But we must be careful not to confuse the form of an art with its basic principle. If there were transitions in form between the Romanesque and the Gothic, there were none in structural principle.

With the introduction of a new structural principle, style will arise out of adherence to a law that is unimpeded by exceptions. In proceeding thus, art acts in the same fashion as nature does, style in nature being the corollary of principle.* All this is very simple in the case of primitive civilizations, where everything human has its own style: religion, customs, manners and morals, arts, and dress are all imbued with a distinct flavor deriving from direct and unsophisticated observations. The mythology of the Vedas, like that of the ancient Egyptians, arose out of this kind of direct observation; and these mythologies are accordingly penetrated with a style par excellence. Those arts that were an expression of these mythologies similarly possess style. Something quite out of the ordinary, however, is the case of a complex civilization made up of a confused mixture of the debris of an earlier civilization which then turns out to be able to bring to new birth types of artistic expression possessing a style that had been extinguished for centuries. For such a phenomenon to be realized a powerful effort was obviously required, indeed, a great movement of minds along with a fundamental change of outlook. Moreover, to us it seems evident that this great movement of minds was confined to a single class in society. It was neither found in nor appreciated by the other classes, and it is this fact that explains why, even today, the lay inspiration of this art is unknown to most people.

The art that was due to this new school of laymen involved a sort of initiation into a number of truths whose existence was barely suspected; it involved a return to a more primitive state, as it were. It took place amid the disorder and collapse of confused traditions; it involved the planting of new seeds in soil that was already teeming with other crops, but they were tangled and broken ones, some of them rotting on top of the others. At first the young plant could barely be seen. Cultivated as it was with great persistence, though, it soon grew to overshadow all the others. It had its own aspect and bearing, just as it produced its own fruit and flowers. For a long time it provided a cover over all the sad debris of the other plants, which at that point were lying in its shadow.

The opinion we are expressing here regarding the formation of an art within a certain class of society without the other classes of society being directly involved may perhaps seem strange to some, almost as if the art in question had been practiced as a kind of Freemasonry. The obstacles to such a development would appear to be very great; it is not clear how the vigor of the principles of such an art could be maintained at one and the same time against the monastic establishments, which had maintained a monopoly on teaching up to that point; against a secular clergy, which tended to reach toward omnipotence; against a nobility that tended to be jealous; and against a lower class that was simply ignorant and vulgar or rude.

But it was precisely in the face of such antagonisms that men of principle were obliged to affirm their principles. At the end of the twelfth century, the feudal system in France was in a situation for which there was no parallel anywhere in Europe. In other countries the balance between power in society and the various social classes was less equal. Social antagonisms did not give rise to countervailing powers in a society engaged in a permanent struggle. In one place, old municipal traditions had been preserved; in another, pure feudalism still reigned, or else a kind of theocracy, or else a monarchy tempered with some civil-type liberties. In these diverse kinds of systems, art spoke a language that was more clearly understood than was the case in France. In the case of the almost republican institutions of the Italian municipalities, art was as much a public thing as it had been in ancient Greek city-states. If you were an artist or an artisan, you fulfilled a public function. Art was understood by everyone; it was hon-

*We have sufficiently brought out elsewhere the novelty of the new structural principle established by the lay French school of the twelfth century, and hence it is not necessary to dwell upon this here. In any case, this new structural principle can be expressed in a single word: equilibrium. [Author’s note]
ored, envied, sermonized about, or even persecuted, as the case might be. Under an absolute feudal regime, the artist was nothing else but a bondman liable to forced labor, a villein, or a serf obliged to carry out the orders or even the whims of the master who stood over him. In a theocracy tied to a hieratic order no artist could either develop or change; what had been the practice yesterday remained the practice today. In a country that enjoyed more liberal institutions, such as, for example, England, there existed among the various classes of society some frequent common interests, which made possible some mutual comprehension between the various classes. In France, however, there was, on the one hand, a feudal nobility that maintained its class prejudices, founding them on the right of conquest; on the other hand, there was another but contested power, which sought support sometimes from the nobility, sometimes from the communes, and sometimes from the higher clergy: this was the monarchy. There was also a population at large that had not completely forgotten its old tradition of municipal liberties; it was a class that was always ready to rise up; it was intrepid, industrious, pugnacious. Alongside this class, there was a secular clergy, which was jealous of the predominance of both the monastic establishments and the feudal nobility. The secular clergy saw itself as a kind of clerical oligarchy and dreamed of an alliance with the rising power of the towns; all this was to take place under a monarch without real power, even if he was surrounded with great prestige; he was to be a king who would be a sort of Venetian doge, ruling alongside a senate of bishops. But in such a society as this, who would be involved in the practice of the arts? Would it be the monastic establishments? It was not the least important area where they might possibly act. In the communes the old Gallic spirit was being revived. These communes were almost constantly in turmoil, constantly struggling with the feudal nobility. Though they were both industrious and rich, the bourgeois were divided into different bodies in accordance with the art or craft that they practiced. They also often had to meet and make their plans in secret because their meeting halls were always being dismantled or they were forbidden to hold their meetings in the public square. These groups became foyers of municipal liberties, and schools of lay artists were formed within them. When the day came that they were able to work independently, without reference to the monastic establishments, the bishops recognized in them a potential for helping the bishops carry out their projects in the face of the power of the abbeys and of the lay nobility; the bishops thus turned to these schools of lay artists in order to secure their help in building a worthy and proper monument to the city itself, namely, the cathedral. (See the entry "Cathédrale.") Who in that era would ever have been able to appreciate the extent of the sheer intellectual work that went into the development of art by means of the meetings of these bourgeois artists and artisans? They had been obliged to learn their arts and crafts literally in the shadows; when they suddenly were able to bring out their construction activities into the full light of day, their monuments seemed to be highly mysterious to everybody except themselves. And just as in an individual work of art style emerges only if the artist lives apart from the workaday world, so the expressions of the general style that prevailed among these artists were like a perfume arising out of the collective state of mind that was produced by a concentration of ideas and of tendencies belonging to a class of citizens who had been able to fashion for themselves their own world separate from the world around them.* The new school of lay art adopted absolutely and from the beginning its set purpose: its art would be established on the laws of equilibrium. These laws of equilibrium, of course, had not been observed in architecture up to that time. The other foundations of this art were geometry and the observation of natural phenomena. Everything was to proceed by way of a crystallization, so to speak; nothing was to deviate in its development from the strict path of logic. Anyone who wishes to substitute principles for traditions is obliged to study the plants of the field with minute care in order to derive from nature a type of ornamentation that is suitable for his needs. Any school that has studied natural flora minutely, and natural fauna as well, and that has succeeded by the application of logical method in

*There does not exist any example of an artist who has achieved in his work what is called style and who at the same time has simply lived the life of the world at large in the complicated and diffuse social situation of our modern societies. There is in true style something sharp and harsh, which is quickly diluted and attenuated as a result of contact with the world, such as the world has become over time. Thus it is that the quality most lacking in works of our time, even works often remarkable in other ways, is, precisely, style. What replaces it is manner, and all too often, manner is taken to be style, even among artists. [Author's note]
creating out of stone an organism with its own laws similar to those of a living organism—this school does not have to be preoccupied with style; these methods, then as always, constituted the very essence of style. The day when artists go out looking for style, that is when art no longer has style. It is better to begin with an art that, in itself, is impregnated with style. Whenever an architecture is, by its very constitution, logical, true, and subject to a principle from which it does not for a moment deviate; whenever it is the absolute and exacting result of this principle—then any example of the work will always have style, even if the individual artist happens to be mediocre. Such an architecture will continue in future ages to be a subject of admiration for some, and of tiresome comparisons for others. Is it not precisely this latter sentiment to which we must attribute the disapproval that has so often been heaped upon the architecture of the Middle Ages? All its characteristics—its unity of style, its logical aims, its disdain for the traditions of antiquity, its freedom, the mystery of the interrelationship of all its parts—all these things have counted as so many reproaches against it in the minds of those for whom architecture is a kind of game played with forms borrowed from imperial Rome or Renaissance Italy, without any understanding of those forms. Many have found it easier to affect disdain for the architectural art of the Middle Ages than to attempt to study its principles and thus to understand how their application just might have constituted something wholly new in art. Instead, the sharpness of this style of architecture has been considered barbarous, and the science of its various combinations has been held to be nothing but the reign of confusion. The truth is, though, that the nature of these very reproaches is actually an indication of the very qualities that distinguish this kind of art. Nevertheless, it would probably be impossible ever to expect artists who think architecture is some kind of an exterior shell or cover, devoid of any ideas, meaning, or logical cohesion, and having no necessary relationship to its object, to understand and appreciate the work of medieval masters who never laid down a stone or a piece of wood or traced out a profile without being able to give a reason for what they were doing.

This is what our school of lay architects of the end of the twelfth century actually accomplished: they devised a structural system that was free, extensive, and applicable to every kind of plan, one that allowed the utilization of every kind of material, as it did every kind of combination, from the most complex to the simplest; they endowed that structural system with a form that was nothing less than a wholly organic expression of the system itself; they applied a type of decoration to the form that never clashed with it but rather always accentuated it, meanwhile explaining this type of decoration by means of combinations of profiles traced out according to a geometric method, a method that was nothing else but a corollary of the method employed by this architecture as a whole; they gave to this architecture (that is to say, to this new structural system endowed with an appropriate artistic form) proportions that were based on the simplest principles of stability, those principles, indeed, that are immediately grasped by the eye; then they enriched the whole with a type of ornamentation methodically derived from nature and based upon exact and delicate observations of plants and animals; they provided, finally, this organic, unitary architecture that they had thus created with a type of statuary that always went well with it without conflict or clash and, indeed, was always an integral part of it. This is only a summary of what this architectural school accomplished. Now, style is inherent in an architectural art when that art is practiced in accordance with a logical and harmonious order, whether in its details or as a whole, whether in its principles or in its form; nothing in such an architectural art is ever left to chance or fantasy. It is, however, nothing but fantasy that guides an artist if, for example, he provides a wall that has no need of it with an architectural order; or if he provides with a buttress a column already erected with a view toward carrying a load. It is fantasy that includes in the same building concave bays along with square bays terminating with horizontal beam members; or that inserts projecting cornices or ledges between the floors of a building where there are no roof drains; or that raises up pediments over bays opening on a wall; or that cuts into an upper story in order to make a door opening for the people or vehicles that must pass through the door; and so on. If it is not fantasy that leads to the construction of such things, so contrary to reason, then it must be what is commonly called taste. But is it a proof of good taste in architecture not to proceed in accordance with reason? Architecture, after all, is an art that is destined to satisfy, before everything else, material needs that are perfectly well defined; and architecture is obliged to make use of materials whose qualities result from laws to which we must necessarily submit.
It is an illusion to imagine that there can be style in architectural works whose features are unexplained and unexplainable; or that there can be style where the form is nothing but the product of memory crammed with a number of different motifs taken from here or from there. It would be equally valid to say that there could be style in a literary work of which the chapters or, indeed, even the sentences were nothing but a loose collection of words borrowed from ten different authors, all writing on different subjects.

Leaving aside these sad and costly examples of abuses, if we compare our architecture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with another type of architecture possessing style in the true sense, a style arising out of its own genius, namely, the architecture of imperial Rome, we will find that the living essence of style is more marked in the works of the Middle Ages: they possess a more perfect harmony; the link between their structure and their form is more organic, as it is between their form and its decoration.

Let us take an example. In Figure 5, A, we have the springing of a Roman groin vault on the capital of a column over a fixed vertical point. In the case of this architectural member, what is the reason for the entablature B? What purpose does it serve? It is all a matter of taste, it might be replied. For my part, though, my reason and consequently my taste are shocked to find between [this vault A and] the member that actually carries the load—the capital of the column, C, which is already sufficiently crowned and widened to carry the load—an entire arrangement of architrave, frieze, and cornice. I do not understand the purpose of such an arrangement; it is quite superfluous. What is the point of the projecting ledge a on the cornice? Could the impost of the vault, b, not be carried just as easily on the capital? If, on the other hand, these projections were supposed to carry the scaffolding needed to secure the masonry of the vault, then this indicates an undue emphasis on accessories that should never have been anything but provisional in the first place; headers placed in the vault at d, which could have been cut off after the construction was complete, could readily have served this function.

Besides, why expend so many apparent efforts to which the decoration seems to assign such great value merely in order to carry imposts on which the pressure is not vertical but oblique? This pressure penetrates into the mass of the masonry in such a way that the vault, by the very effect of its curves, does not appear to the eye to be supported by these projecting members anyway. If, though, we then examine the springing of the vault according to the system adopted at the end of the twelfth century (as shown by G), do we not find that the load rests quite clearly on the fascicular column and on the common capital? Is there a single useless member here, a member whose function and reason for being are not immediately apparent? The problem to be solved is the same in both cases. Was it the Roman architect or the French master who solved the problem in the most satisfactory manner? If style results from the perfect accord between purpose and form, in which of these two examples can style be said to reside?

The particular Roman arrangement that we have reproduced here is, in fact, the one that lacks style. Whenever a Roman artist succeeded in producing work with style, it was always when he was not consciously seeking it: in the great Roman public works, for example, such as in a huge amphitheater where everything was sacrificed to a well-conceived plan; in the simplest of the baths
(leaving aside the borrowed ornamentation); or in the broad porticoes built to shelter large crowds. Whenever the Roman attempted to play the artist in the Greek manner, however, appropriating an architectural order without understanding its original significance and then applying it uncritically to the springing of a vault, or employing it as a buttress along a wall, then the art of the Roman lacked the first characteristic of style, which is clarity. By clarity we mean the proper application of form to its object. Ruins that are truly Roman ruins, based on Roman ideas, possess style. If you were to restore most of these ruins, putting the orders back in place within their accustomed frameworks, supplying them with the ornamentation, the stringcourses, and the like that were removed by the barbarians or by the passage of time, you would find the style proper to these grandiose constructions being eclipsed in precisely the measure that you supplied them with features borrowed from another art, another order of ideas, or other structural principles.

Style is the consequence of a principle pursued methodically; it is a kind of emanation from the form of the work that is not consciously sought after. Style that is sought after is really nothing else but manner. Manner becomes dated; style never does.

When an entire population of artists and artisans is strongly imbued with logical principles in accordance with which form is the consequence of the object as well as its purpose, then style will be present in the works that issue from their hands, from the most ordinary vase to the most monumental building, from the simplest household utensil to the costliest piece of furniture. We admire this unity in the best of Greek antiquity, and we find the same kind of thing again in the best of what the Middle Ages produced, though the two types of art are different because the two civilizations that produced them were different. We cannot appropriate to ourselves the style of the Greeks, because we are not Athenians. Nor can we re-create the style of our predecessors in the Middle Ages, for the simple reason that time has moved on. We can only affect the manner of the Greeks or of the artists of the Middle Ages; that is to say, we can only produce pastiches. If we cannot accomplish what they did, we can at least proceed as they did by allowing ourselves to become penetrated with principles that are true and natural principles—just as they were imbued with true and natural principles. If we succeed in doing this, our works will possess style without our having to seek after it.

The thing that particularly distinguishes the architecture of the Middle Ages from those architectures of antiquity worthy of being considered types of art is the freedom of medieval architecture in its utilization of form. The principles that were accepted, although different from those of the Greeks and even of the Romans, may have been followed with a bit too much rigor; but form was nevertheless allowed a freedom and elasticity that had been unknown up to that time. To put the whole thing more exactly, form was moved onto a more extended field of operations, whether we are talking about structural methods, systems of proportion, or the use of details borrowed from geometry or from natural flora and fauna. Architecture in its organic aspect saw a more ample development; it was based upon a greater number of actual observations; it was more scientific and sophisticated, more complicated, and hence also more delicate. It constituted an organic whole already on the road to modernity, and thus it is rather strange that it should have once suffered rejection as something antiquated; it is equally strange that it should have been replaced by types of architecture that are actually considerably more remote from the modern spirit. In architecture, however, everything today is a contradiction. If we look at things as they really are, we will find that what is generally wanted is the easy way out, a path to be followed that allows us simply to slip right past principles based on reason without ever coming up against them.

For many people style in architecture is nothing but a kind of outer decorative shell or envelope. Even among artists we find many who sincerely believe they have achieved a work of style when they have superimposed upon a construction entirely modern in conception some ornaments or profiles borrowed from Etruscan, Greek, or even Gothic models—or ornaments or profiles borrowed from the Italian Renaissance. Certainly the traditions of an era anterior to our own are worth knowing, studying, and even imitating; but it is not in any of this that style manifests itself. Style resides much more in the principal lines of a construction, in the harmonious ensemble of its proportions, than in the garments with which architectonic works are clothed. The same is true of the work of a painter, where style manifests itself in the choice of lines, in the ensemble of the composition, and in the truth of the gestures represented; these are the important things, rather than a search for antiquated materials or an attempt to
achieve exactitude in reproducing clothing and accessories. It is remarkable that this truth, recognized where painting and sculpture are concerned, is only grasped with difficulty where architecture is concerned. This example alone should prove to us how it is that the most elementary principles of architecture continue to remain generally unknown, and how the most natural of these principles have been distorted.

The Middle Ages represented distinct progress over the era of antiquity in certain important respects, and it is in these respects that we should follow the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages put the idea above every tradition or doctrine; the idea was pursued fanatically, often blindly, in fact. But to follow out an idea, even a foolish one, even one impossible of realization, is not to turn one's back on progress as such. Alchemists seeking the philosopher's stone opened the road to the development of the science of chemistry. The nobles and free peasants who blindly rushed to the Orient following Peter the Hermit moved civilization a giant step forward thereby, especially in the arts. Even chivalry, so easy to mock, planted seeds that produced some of the best fruits of our own society. St. Francis of Assisi was a passionate lover of nature and of the created world; he spent hours contemplating a flower or a bird; he considered himself part of a created whole, and he did not separate the human from the rest of the universe. Antiquity produced nothing like this: neither among the Egyptians, nor among the Greeks, nor even less among the Romans were there ever any alchemists searching for the philosopher's stone; nor were there ever any warriors rushing into battle in the name of an idea; nor, certainly, was there ever anyone like St. Francis of Assisi! What is chiefly reflected in the art of ancient Egypt or of ancient Greece is the narrow egotism of ancient man. The art is perfect, complete, exact, clear, and finished. But this art has no beyond to it. If it moves us, it is because our imagination as moderns associates it with the things and events to which its surviving monuments bear witness. It is necessary to be educated in order to appreciate properly an ancient monument—that is, in order to experience an emotion in viewing it that has no reference to anything beyond what the object itself exhibits. The most modest construction of the Middle Ages, however, can set even the ignorant to dreaming. Let us be very clear about what we are saying here: we are not trying to make comparisons favorable either to one or to the other of these kinds of art; we are not engaged in any special pleading for one or the other. We are merely trying to bring out the qualities that truly do distinguish the two kinds of art and to identify those elements that truly bring out the particular style with which they are imbued. We may be sure that posterity will agree with us about style on the day when it is finally realized by all that style is nothing else but the natural savor or aroma of a principle, of an idea followed in conformity with the logical order of things in the world; style is not something sought after. Style develops as does a growing plant, in accordance with certain laws of nature; it is not some sort of spice that one takes out of a bag and sprinkles upon works that, by themselves, have no savor, that is to say, no style. From everything that has been said up to now, it should be clear that we have not been trying to lay down a set of rules by which the artists of the Middle Ages somehow injected style into their works. The style was there because the form they gave to architecture was the logical consequence of the structural principles they were following. All of this dictated (1) the materials to be used; (2) the way of putting these materials to work; (3) the aims to be achieved; and (4) the way of deducing the details of the work logically from the plan of the whole, a way similar to the natural order found in the case of created things, where the part is complete and self-contained like the whole and is constituted like it. Most of the articles in this Dictionary bring out both the logical spirit and the unity of principles that guided the masters of the Middle Ages. It is not their fault, though, if we have since identified unity with uniformity, and if our architects still persist in seeing nothing but disorder and confusion in an architectural organism whose features and logical connections they have in fact never studied. We say "organism," for it is difficult to assign any other name to this architecture of the Middle Ages, which developed and made progress in the same formative way that nature herself works—namely, by departing from a simple principle, which then becomes modified, perfected, and made more complex without ever damaging or destroying its original essence. All this was true up to and including the law of equilibrium of forces, which was brought into play in this architecture for the first time, and which almost transformed its constructions into living things. The law of equilibrium of forces opposes structural actions with inverse actions, pressures with counterpressures, overhangs with counterweights; it diffuses weight by spreading it out away from where it would tend to
concentrate vertically; it provides each profile with a purpose related to the place that it occupies, and each stone with a function such that no stone could be removed without compromising the entire structure. Is this not, indeed, to give a work life insofar as it is given to us to give life to something with the work of our hands? No, it is nothing but science, ingenuity, some will object; it is not art at all. They are no doubt entitled to their opinion. But what is the art of architecture then? Is it nothing but a traditional form? A completely arbitrary one? If it is simply a traditional form, why one tradition rather than another then? If it is simply an arbitrary form, then it has neither principles nor laws, and this means that it is not even an art, but instead is merely the costliest and least justified of all possible fantasies.

That each stone of a building fills a useful and necessary function; that each profile have a precise purpose and that that purpose be clearly indicated in its line; that a building's proportions be derived from principles of geometric harmony; that ornamentation be based on natural flora, as observed truly and with imagination; that nothing be left to chance; that materials be employed in accordance with their qualities and that these qualities be indicated by the form they are given—does it follow from all of this that art is absent and science alone operative? We can admit, if you will, that the presence of all these material facts in no way constitutes an art. But is that the end of it? Would constructions fashioned along these lines be devoid also of ideas? And would these ideas be impenetrable and mysterious for all of us who are their children? The medieval lay masters were in fact the first to attempt to do what we do today, if not in architecture, so often forced as it is into an "academic" mold and hence so often backward, at any rate in industry, in naval construction, in major public works, and the like. The medieval lay masters wanted to master their materials, and to bend and fashion them in such a way that anything was possible. They vaulted huge spaces on slender points of support. They introduced light into their enormous covered spaces in such a way that this light itself constituted a kind of decoration, indeed painting. There were no longer walls but rather translucent tapestries. Forced by the conditions of their times to construct lordly manorial dwellings that could serve at the same time as fortresses, they were obliged to subordinate form to these two distinct necessities laid upon them. Yet they were still able to fashion a homogeneous art that was sufficiently flexible to fulfill both of these disparate requirements. The castles they built are both fortresses and habitations; this double function of theirs is clearly written on their front.

One of the marks of style is the adoption of a form that accords with each object. When an architectural work indicates clearly on its front the purpose for which it was constructed, then it comes very close to possessing style by that fact alone. When, in addition, it forms a harmonious whole with the structures that surround it, then it is pretty certain to possess style. Now, it is evident to those who have studied the varied constructions belonging to the period of the Middle Ages with which we are concerned here that, among the diverse expressions of the day, there did exist a harmony; there was agreement. The church did not resemble the town hall; nor did the latter resemble the hospice; nor did the hospice resemble the lord's castle; nor did the castle resemble the palace of the king—nor did any of these buildings resemble the dwellings of the bourgeoisie. The purpose of each of these various structures was plainly written upon it; yet at the same time there existed a link between all of them. They were all products of a social situation that was both the master of its own kind of artistic expression and, at the same time, never hesitated or faltered in its choice of a particular artistic language. Yet in that harmony what variety there was! Individual artists preserved their own personalities, even while they all spoke the same artistic language—and with what fecundity as each spoke it in turn! This was because the architectural laws they observed were not based upon accepted forms but rather upon accepted basic principles. For them a column was not an object that, by tradition, had to have a height that was a fixed number of times its diameter. Rather, it was a cylinder whose form had to be calculated in accordance with the weight it was expected to carry. For them a capital was not an ornament that crowned the shaft of a column but rather a projecting foundational feature placed on top of a column in order to carry the various members that the column was designed to support. For them a door was not a kind of bay with height equal to its width but rather an opening designed to admit the number of persons likely to be passing at the same time beneath its lintel. . . . But why go on insisting on the application of all these principles, which have so many times been spelled out in this Dictionary? All these principles amount to nothing else but sincerity in the use of form. Style enters into the execution of
works of art in the degree that these works avoid departures from expressions that are true, clear, and appropriate. Finding the appropriate expression and being clear—these are eminent French qualities, which we possess in the plastic arts every bit as much as we possess them in the written or spoken word. Indeed, even the French architecture of the Renaissance, provided it was executed by competent hands—and in spite of the spurious elements dictated by the court or by fashion—even French Renaissance architecture preserved these same qualities of clarity and appropriateness; they are natural to us. The work of Philibert de l'Orme (Delorme) is proof enough. Here was a master architect who, in his portico in the Tuileries, adopted an order from antiquity joined to arcades by way of buttresses. He did not, however, design engaged columns; he used either pilasters or entire columns, the latter, projecting over the arcing of the portico, carrying balconies, juttins of a terrace over the garden, which served as kinds of watchtowers. The architect thus provided a justification for the use of his columns; the columns actually served a purpose, and were thus more than just a banal decoration. His order, of course, was not supposed to carry the unfortunate new floor level that has since been imposed upon it; surely the least defect of this latter feature is to render incomprehensible the entire disposition of the ground floor. Accepting the utilization of the order in this case, though, let us examine what kind of art and skill our master architect exhibited in utilizing it and endowing it with style—a style that, once again, arose out of an appropriate application of true principles. Philibert either could not or did not judge it appropriate to put up monolithic Ionic columns; instead he constructed the columns by placing one column drum on top of another. Moreover, he frankly revealed the structure of his construction. He separated the drums quarried in upper layers of Saint-Leu stone from those quarried in lower layers of marble; the effect was a number of rings circling the shaft like rings on a finger. On the marble drums he sculpted delicate designs, which scarcely stand out at all, thus indicating the delicate nature of the material. On the Saint-Leu stone drums he put fluting, and, beneath the capital, in order to effect a transition between the coldness of the shafts and the richness of the crowning, he fashioned laurel branches running up out of the fluting.

We accept the utilization of an order of antiquity when it is applied with as much sagacity as this, being subordinated to a structural mode imposed by the material being used. Art is not at all impossible in such a situation as this; invention is a distinct possibility. No one will challenge the elegance of the architectural piece under discussion, especially if we imagine it at least in spirit as being free of all the barbarous superfluities later imposed on it that tend to snuff out its life. If, however, we were to repeat this charming motif today, without reference to the reasons it was fashioned in the first place, style would disappear from the resulting product; it would be a pastiche that betrayed incomprehension of the original; it would be a vague and confused translation of language that was simple, logical, and clear. In order to possess style the work of an architect cannot dispense with ideas in its conceptual stage, any more than it can dispense with the intervention of reason in the course of its development. However, not all the splendors of the sculpture, its richness as well as its profusion of details, can make up for an initial lack of ideas or a lack of reasoning thereafter.