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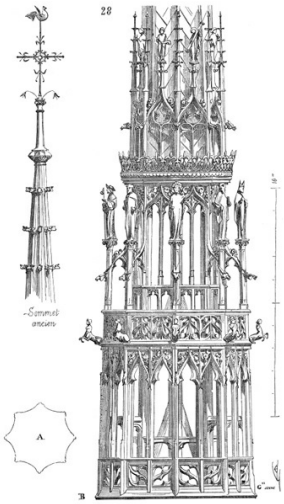
Front of Fonthill Abbey, England.

Neo-Gothic style living-room project, watercolour, c.1836. Neo-gothic style permeated everything from furniture, to mirrors, to the mantelpiece...

Neo-Gothic facade of Saint-Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, 1885-1888, James Renwick Jr.



The **neo-Gothic style** is an architectural style born in the middle of the 18th century in England. With the development of Romanticism, some enlightened amateurs such as **Horace Walpole** and **William Beckford** highly influenced the public's enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, Medieval arts and the new aesthetic quality known as the “picturesque”, as shown in the luxurious architectural follies of Fonhill Abbey or Strawberry Hill. In the 19th century, the neo-Gothic had its moment of glory with the works of **Pugin** and **Ruskin**; the London Parliament (1840-1860) is a famous example of the style.
In the 19th century this movement had a powerful influence on the European and American arts. In France, the Revolution had broken its ties with the Christian and monarchic past which created a deep social and cultural traumatism. Nostalgia for a glorious national past, an imaginary past was the source of new inspiration. The **Middle Ages** were considered to be the golden age of Christianity, the mystical source of religion.
The passion for the Middle Ages, obvious in the new**Troubadour Style** paintings (1802), highly appreciated by **Empress Josephine**, was hindered until the Restoration period when neo-Gothic imagery fully flourished in the arts. Indeed, Napoleon’s personnel tastes were more focused on Greek and Roman influences.
It was in architecture that the style really flourished with Prosper Merimee, the founder of the FrenchMonuments Historiques museum, and Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, the architect who restored many **French Gothic buildings**.
Influenced by Medieval architecture, symmetry was dropped and houses were adorned with vertical framing and highly decorated corner gables. Public buildings, churches and large Bourgeois properties were adorned with crenelations, spires and gargoyles.

Furniture and and art objects were equally influenced by neo-Gothic ideas; artists taking their inspiration from 15th century flamboyant Gothic objects **“à la cathédrale”** – “cathedral style”. Romantic literature picked up the Middle Ages, Walter Scott published best selling historical novels and Victor Hugo’s famous novel of **Notre-Dame de Paris (1831)** placed the Hunchback’s drama in the famous Gothic cathedral, which was both the setting and a character in the plot. A Neo-Gothic temporary façade was set up in front of the dilapidated front of the cathedral for Napoleon’s coronation in 1804 and later, a similar façade created by architect Hittorff was set up for the baptism of the Duke of Bordeaux in the “Gothic manner”. At that point the public was fed up of Greek and Roman architecture.

photo 1: Neo-Gothic facade of Saint-Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, 1885-1888, James Renwick Jr.
photo 2: Neo-Gothic style living-room project, watercolour, c.1836. Neo-gothic style permeated everything from furniture, to mirrors, to the mantelpiece...
photo 3: Princess Marie d'Orleans' neo-Gothic living-room at the Tuileries, by Prosper Lafaye, 1842, Paris. The painter placed Princess Mary before her gothic lectern, reading an illuminated book of hours.
Photo 4: Façade of Fonthill Abbey, England.

Princess Marie d'Orleans' neo-Gothic living-room at the Tuileries, by Prosper Lafaye, 1842, Paris. The painter placed Princess Mary before her gothic lectern, re