

1. Site. Our splendid Gothic cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris occupies the site of at least two older churches which were progressively demolished to make way for the new construction: a great basilica to the west—seen here on the right, thought to belong to from the age of the Emperor Charlemagne—and a smaller Romanesque church to the east.

2. c.1160 Construction Starts. At a date around 1160 the builders began in the choir to lay out the massive foundations of an edifice some 120m long and 28 meters wide. That they intended great height from the very start is indicated by the deeply-projecting buttresses that gird the outer wall enclosing two ambulatories and double aisles. More than this, the builders wanted a great church that looked to the glories of the past yet embodied the most innovative features of the revolutionary architecture we call “Gothic,” expressing the prestige of the burgeoning city that was becoming the seat of kings and capital of France. The lower choir was built from east to west: first the curving outer wall and then the double ranks of interior supports. The upper choir embodied a spacious gallery with a little round oculus opening into the gallery roof and small clerestory windows at the top. We learn from the chronicle of Robert de Torigny that the roof was in place by 1177—masonry vaults were installed soon thereafter under the protection of the wooden roof—remarkably rapid construction. At over 30 meters in height this was the tallest church in the North: such height combined with thin walls and supports was made possible with the use of a new constructional device- long-reach props or flyers springing from the outer buttresses. With the choir closed in by a provisional wall the clergy could take their seats to resume the Divine Office.

3. Nave. The nave may have been begun even before the upper choir was finished. A new master mason made modifications including greater height, new forms of articulation, and adjustments to the southern nave gallery in an attempt to admit more light.

4. Frontispiece. At the western end a massive frontispiece was begun towards 1200 even before the nave was finished. The double aisles are brought together to form the base of two great square towers, the northern one probably begun before the south. The corners of the towers are marked by four vertical buttresses, which divide three portals sumptuously equipped with figurative sculpture, which provided a kind of sermon for the enlightenment of laypeople entering the church. This powerful cubic composition is capped by a gallery of kings and a great rose window.

5. Overview: rotation. We may now assess the massing of the new cathedral, as it stood in the 1220s. Its transverse section is defined by a great equilateral triangle with its base spreading to the outer walls and its apex fixing the height of the vault—the cathedral is built *ad triangulum*. We can see the external props or flying buttress that leap directly from the outer buttress to the central vessel, oversailing the outer aisle and the gallery roof in a single bound. This complex structure is contained within a continuous peripheral wall: the transept, cutting the space of the longitudinal structure at roughly halfway point in the plan does not project. The continuous sweep of the rounded eastern hemicycle recalled the great funerary churches of Early Christian Rome.

6. Clerestory. As the cathedral went up its forms and spaces were subject to ongoing review—by its clerical and lay users, by its artisans and by visiting critics. There must have been some consensus that the interior was too dark—particularly at a time when other structures (like

Chartres, Reims and Soissons cathedrals) were being equipped with enormous upper windows. Around 1220, beginning in the choir, a radical transformation was initiated. The upper windows were extended downwards, the gallery roof was flattened and the little round oculi that had opened into the space under the gallery roof were removed. What had been a four-story interior was now transformed to three: arcade, gallery and enlarged clerestory.

7. Towers and nave chapels. Between the 1220s and the middle of the 13th century work was begun on the addition of lateral chapels inserted between the buttresses of the nave, thus providing additional space for tombs which allowed the privileged occupant to gain from intercessory masses mitigating the pains of purgatory. .

Simultaneously with the work on the chapels the western frontispiece was continued upwards into mighty square towers rising above the double aisles. Dominating the Parisian urban landscape and visible far beyond, it provided a compelling prototype for many other churches throughout the Middle Ages and an icon for the very idea of "Paris".

New, delicate, linear tracery forms appear and lavish foliate decoration in the towers—the same forms appear in the nave chapels which are capped by sharp exterior gables conveying to each chapel the look of a sacred shrine.

8. North transept façade. The addition of chapels served to dilate the envelope of the cathedral making it necessary to extend the transept arms with sumptuous facades to match the chapels. The northern façade, begun around 1240 by Master Mason Jean de Chelles, embodies a refined language of tracery forms, sharp moldings, niches and gables reaching a crescendo in the great rose window whose radiating spokes have lent the name applied to this characteristically Parisian architecture: *rayonnant*. The great portal, carrying images of the redemptive power of

the Virgin Mary, provided a ceremonial entrance on the side of the dwellings of the cathedral clergy or chapter.

9. Choir chapels. A smaller portal on the south flank was added as the chapels were continued around the choir in the decades around 1300. The choir gallery was also modernized with the addition of large windows admitting a splendid blaze of light. This, all in the highly refined style of gables and pinnacles that has led beholders to compare the forms of the cathedral with those of a precious gold reliquary.

10. South Transept Façade. The new south transept façade with its magnificent portal dedicated to Saint Stephen faced the bishop's palace. Here we find the work of the most famous Master Mason of French Gothic: Pierre de Montreuil, dubbed the "doctor," or teacher of masons. In this façade Pierre linked together the decorative forms into a linear grid with a strong vertical emphasis, topped by a great rose window.

11. Central Spire. The wooden crossing spire of Notre-Dame, probably from the mid-thirteenth century, in a very poor state of repair, was demolished in the 1780s. The advent of the French Revolution and the disestablishment of the clergy made it impossible to proceed immediately to a replacement. With the copious funding available for the restoration of Notre-Dame in the middle decades of the 19th century and the creative vision of Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc it was, at last, possible to replace the lost steeple with a taller, more magnificent one modelled on the Late Gothic "Golden Steeple" of Amiens Cathedral

12. Fire. April 15, 2019: words cannot describe our sense of horror as all of us across the world became aware of the impending disaster at Notre-Dame. On television screens and computers we watched the fire consume the magnificent roof and steeple and we gasped at the sickening

buckle and fall. But the Gothic system of construction with its protective masonry vaults did its job—shielding the interior from extensive fire damage—despite the falling fiery debris that punctured great holes in the vaults of the north transept, crossing and nave.

13. Rebuild. And now the great task of rebuilding falls to us. With the cathedral protected from the rain, the vulnerable buttresses and vaults shored up and the old fire-damaged scaffolding removed, work can continue to rebuilding damaged vaults and buttresses as well as the crafting of the wooden forms of the roof and the new steeple—intended to match the glories of the one that perished two years ago.

14. Finale. In our final flight, we experience the complex honeycomb structure and the force of the central crossing and transept as the space that reveals the essence of the cathedral's design. This sense of revelation culminates with our immersion into the glowing colors of the southern rose of the Incarnation.