

The City Transformed, Part I & Part II:

New York's Architecture and Urban Planning from the Dutch Days to the Present

Part I (Fall Semester) From the Dutch Days until 1890



James Watson house 1794-1806.

Photo: Aron Eisenpress

#1: The Colonial and Federalist Eras 1650-1830

The Dutch make us different, the English expand our boundaries and the early American Federalists lay the foundations for the future world capital.

#2: The Greek Revival Era 1830-1845

Yankee functionalism and Greek temple imagery frame the emergence of the modern metropolis. Immigrants and industry change the city forever.

#3: The neo-Gothic & the Italianate 1845-70

The neo-Gothic style changes both church and civic design while it revolutionizes the concept of the modern suburban home.

The Italianate style shows us how to use upscale imagery to market a “product” bringing illusions of Medici luxury to the first department stores, to our earliest middle-class “Levittowns” and even to Lower East Side tenements.

#4: The Cast-Iron Era 1845-70

Our first “glass boxes” arrive wrapped in the fabulousness of the Venetian Renaissance, while a home-grown yen for modernism produces the stirrings of a nascent skyscraper style.

#5: The "El" Trains & the Brooklyn Bridge 1869-83

A rapidly expanding city develops modern mass transit: el train lines in both New York and Brooklyn and their linking via the Bridge become, like the interstate highways of our own times, the circulation system of a newly scaled metropolis.

#6: Central Park & Victorian City Planning 1857-90

To civilize our cities we “greened” them with parks, parkways and garden suburbs. New York pioneers the “park” but the City of Brooklyn pioneers the “plan” with a three-tiered park system, parkways (Eastern and Ocean) and a garden suburb, Richmond Hill, in the exurbia of Queens.

#7: The Post Civil War Era: neo-Baroque Ladies' Mile & neo-Grec SoHo 1865-1885

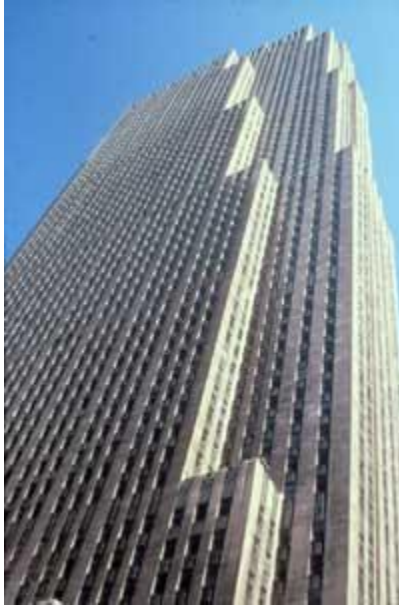
The Parisian-inflected neo-Baroque is used for establishment corporate headquarters (on Wall Street) and grand department stores in the Ladies' Mile (in today's Flatiron District).

Avant-garde architects pioneer a nascent modernism with the form-follows-material brick and stone Metropolitan Museum of Art and the frankly metallic loft buildings in the commercial district (today's SoHo) crossing the Renaissance with Buck Rogers for the modernistic neo-Grec.

#8: The Arts & Crafts Era-From Park Slope & Bedford-Stuyvesant to the Upper West Side & Harlem 1880-1900

An early “modernism” triumphs with its form-follow-material formula: high-rise elevator commercial buildings pioneer a Yankee skyscraper style; while brick, stone, tile, stained glass and wood give domestic architecture a lively individualism.

Part II (Spring semester) From the Beaux-Arts (1890) to the post- Modern (1990)



RCA Building, Rockefeller Center, NYC 1931-1933.
Photo: Paul Heyer Collection

#1: Beaux-Arts NY / 1890-1925---Skyscrapers & Public Buildings

Americans merge Renaissance neo-classicism with Yankee efficiency and practicality to create the modern city. The result is a new class of public building, from the NY Public Library to the Metropolitan Museum, that can serve a mass-market democracy. At the same time, we literally “stretch” neo-classicism to create the world's first generation of skyscrapers.

#2: Beaux-Arts NY / 1890-1930---Apartment Houses & Grand Mansions

Typical of New York's rapid change, Gilded Age mansions line Fifth Avenue only to be replaced in a generation by that new form of urban living (at least, to Americans), the apartment building.

#3: Alternatives to Establishment Beaux-Arts—1890-1930 "Chicago style" skyscrapers, Times Square theaters and Coney Island wonderlands.

New York's Beaux-Arts trained architects were more flexible and "modern" than we think. From quirky skyscrapers and functionalist factories to music halls and amusement park fantasies, New York produces creative solutions for the needs of modern living.

#4: Beaux-Arts NY / 1890-1940---Planned Neighborhoods & Garden Suburbs

Today we call them "new urbanist" communities and we think it's a new idea, but a century ago we built planned urban neighborhoods, accessible to rapid transit, with "town centers" for shopping and theaters, community clubhouses for socializing, and gardens, parks and sports facilities for a healthy, outdoor life. Forest Hills Gardens, Jackson Heights and Sunnyside Gardens are among the pioneering new urbanist neighborhoods we'll be "visiting".

#5: Art Deco NY: The 1920's NY Skyscraper & Its European Roots

The New York skyline is re-made with legendary Art Deco skyscrapers of 1920s including the Chanin, Chrysler and Empire State Buildings. Their iconic imagery is rooted in predecessors as varied as Germany's Expressionist fantasies and our own Woolworth Building.

#6: Brooklyn & the Bronx in the 1920's

New York's urban outer boroughs change dramatically as the offspring of the 19th century's immigrants rise into the middle class bringing new populations to both Flatbush and Fordham.

#7: Art Moderne New York: The 1930's NY Skyscraper, from Rockefeller Center to Parkchester

Depression-era New York produces two of America's most interesting urban complexes: the one for commerce, Rockefeller Center, and the other for living, Parkchester. We will look at the new shape of 1930's skyscrapers and the city planning vision they become a part of.

#8: Post-World War II NY / 1950-1990 The International Style (the Modern) and the Post-Modern

We conclude the series with the glass boxes of the Seagram Building era (1950s and 60s), the post-Modern of the 1980s and the revival of New York at the turn of the 21st century.