**Meaning in Architecture**

**Architecture** is both the process and the product of planning, designing, and constructing buildings other physical structures.

A good building should satisfy the three principles of

[*firmitas(firmness), utilitas(commodity), venustas(delight).*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design)

* *Vitruvius (Roman Architect – Early 1st century AD)*

An equivalent in modern English would be:

* [*Durability*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design) – a building should stand up robustly and remain in good condition.
* [*Utility*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design) – it should be suitable for the purposes for which is it used.
* [*Beauty*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design) – it should be aesthetically pleasing.

Architect [Le Corbusier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Corbusier) wrote: "You employ stone, wood, and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces: that is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good. I am happy and I say: This is beautiful. That is Architecture”*.*

The meaning of architecture has undergone many changes during the progress of human civilization. The meaning has changed with changes in the *social pattern*.

In aristocratic ages – display of status and prestige

In religious ages – arouse emotions of wonder and awe

In communistic society - mass-producing collective housing.

In modern architecture – scope broadened to include more than individual building, now encompasses planning of neighborhood, the city and even the region.

[*Architecture is the conscious creation of utilitarian spaces constructed from materials in such a way that the whole is both technically and aesthetically satisfying.*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design)

The application of architecture as a medium for expression can be traced back to the first days of human evolution.

Ancient caves with featured paintings from that time represented an intellectual instrument to encourage discussion or storytelling.

Architecture as expressive medium exploits the layers façade, interior and structure, as a medium for expression.

They affect the way passers-by perceive their surroundings and potentially engage them into dialogues with others sharing the space. However they do not support direct or indirect interactions between passers-by and the architectural space.

Temple architecture is only one creation through which religion and divinity are expressed, but it is potentially a powerfully persuasive medium, which can support tremendous intricacy of expression.

The mainland Greeks expressed their conception of divinity in many ways through the design and function of Archaic and Classical temples of the Doric order.

Temples are the focal points of religious worship. Through architectural representation they can express religious ideology.

The concept of monumentality embraces several types of built structures: palaces, élite residences, administrative complexes and political centres; ceremonial centres and ‘temples’; fortifications and defensive compounds; and tomb constructions. Monumental structures can express power as well as mask it.

The building of monumental cathedrals in the middle ages was a reflection of faith and the channel for much of the creative energy of medieval European society.

Expression in architecture is the communication of quality and meaning. The functions and the techniques of building are interpreted and transformed by expression into art, as sounds are made into music and words into literature.

The nature of expression varies with the character of culture in different places and in different times, forming distinct modes or languages of expression that are called styles. Style communicates the outlook of a culture and the concepts of its architects.

The components of expression, which communicate the particular values of style, are [*content and form*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design). Since content can be communicated only through form, the two are organically united.

**Content**

* Content is the subject matter of architecture, the element in architectural expression that communicates specific meanings that interpret to society the functions and techniques of buildings.
* The second aspect of content is the communication of the structural significance of materials and methods.
* The characteristics of materials that are important in expressing design techniques are the properties of their composition (*e.g.,*structure, weight, durability) and the way they are used in structure.
* Their properties may be expressed and interpreted by the treatment of the surface, and their use may be expressed by emphasis on the dimensions and joining of the building units into which they are formed.

**Form**

* The architect’s principal responsibility in the formation of style is to create meaningful form.
* In the sphere of function and technique, the architect is responsible to the patterns of his culture on one hand and to the patterns of technology on the other; but, in the expression of form, he is free to communicate his own personality and concepts.
* When form is spoken of in the arts, not only the physical shape, size, and mass of a work are meant but also all the elements that contribute to the work’s aesthetic structure and composition.
* The basic formal elements of architecture in this sense are space and mass. The process of organizing these elements into an ordered form is called composition, and the principal means by which they are given expressive quality are scale, light, texture, and colour.

[Symbol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol) is something that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, belief, action, or entity.

[Symbolism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol) is transferred in architecture in terms of shape, form, mass, organization, orientation & nature of space, details & motifs.

Significance of symbols for communication in Architecture is in two stages:

* To interpret & comprehend the totality of the expression represented in part by the symbol.
* To relate the symbol to its whole.

Symbols & Symbolism are more effective in communicating rich messages than speeches or discourses. One of the basics of visual communication is non-verbal expression.

In architecture, this involves a development of an experience in terms of depth of space. The concept of space including the depth of space and time is the tool for symbolic expression in architecture.

This can encompass various applications such as in -

• Forms of structure/structures.

• Planning & organization of built forms.

• Details & motifs representing the particular belief/ideology.

***When architectural forms become the vehicles of content – in plan, elevation and decoration – they are symbolic.***

[**Symbolism**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design) can be understood consciously or unconsciously,

* by association (*e.g.,* spire = church) to a building one has seen before and
* by the fact that it suggests certain universal experiences (*e.g.,* vertical forms “rise”; low roofs “envelop”).

The meaning of architectural symbols—or of words—may even change, but the process must be both logical and gradual, for, if the change is irrational, the purpose—communication—is lost.

The architectural plan, when used symbolically, communicates through its shape. From prehistoric times and in many cultures, the [circle](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/118259/circle), with its suggestion of the planets and other manifestations of nature, gained a symbolic, mystical significance and was used in the plans of houses, tombs, and religious structures.

By slow processes it came to be employed for *memoria* and shrines and for hero cults in both the East and the West. When building techniques permitted, its symbolism often merged with that of the dome.

In Hindu temples, the square (and the cross plans developed from it) expressed celestial harmony. The central-plan Christian church (circle, polygon, Greek cross, ellipse) fascinated the architects of the Renaissance with its symbolic and traditional values.

Plan symbolism remained almost exclusively in the sphere of religion after antiquity, and its traditions gradually disappeared in the course of the 19th century. The modern plan is determined by problems of form (space-mass relationships, etc.) and by the practical demands of use rather than by symbolic communication.

In elevation the most consistent symbolic forms have been the [dome](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome), the [tower](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome), the [stairway](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome), the [portal](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome), and the [colonnade](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome).

A [dome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphere) is an element of architecture that resembles the hollow upper half of a sphere.

A dome can be thought of as an [arch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arch) which has been rotated around its central vertical axis. Thus domes, like arches, have a great deal of structural strength when properly built and can span large open spaces without interior supports.

[Domes](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome) imply the meanings of the circle and more, since a dome is a covering.

Long before masonry domes could be built, the hemisphere was associated with the heavens as a “cosmic canopy,” and throughout history domes have been decorated with stars and astrological symbols.

In ancient Rome and among Christians and Indian Buddhists, the [dome](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome) came to mean *universal power*. During the Renaissance it spread from religious structures to palaces and government buildings, retaining some of its implications of power.

In the United States the national [capitol](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/94002/United-States-Capitol) is domed, and there are few state capitols without domes; the symbol has survived the loss of its original meanings.

A [tower](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168457/dome) is a tall structure, usually taller than it is wide, often by a significant margin. Towers are distinguished from masts by their lack of guy-wires.

Towers are generally built to take advantage of their [height](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Height), and can stand alone on the ground, or as part of a larger structure or device such as a fortified building or as an integral part of a bridge.

The [tower](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/600962/tower), with origins in primitive nature rites, has consistently symbolized power. Towers were also an important element of [castles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Towers_in_medieval_fortifications).

Some of the earliest towers were [ziggurats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggurat), which existed in [Sumerian architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_architecture) since the 4th millennium BC.

The most famous ziggurats include the Sumerian [Ziggurat of Ur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggurat_of_Ur), built the 3rd millennium BC.

The [Etemenanki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etemenanki), one of the most famous examples of [Babylonian architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_and_architecture_of_Assyria).

The Chinese pagoda extends central-plan symbolism into towers; many towers and spires rose from the northern European Gothic cathedral.

The medieval Italian city was a forest of towers erected by nobles in constant competition to express their supremacy. This meaning survives in modern skyscrapers; their height is more frequently boasted of than their efficiency or beauty.

Architectural elements conceived to facilitate the use of buildings may also take on symbolic significance. Like,

* + - * + STAIRWAY
        + PORTAL
        + COLONNADE

A [stairway, staircase, stairwell, flight of stairs, or simply stairs](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase) is a construction designed to bridge a large vertical distance by dividing it into smaller vertical distances, called **steps**.

Stairs may be straight, round, or may consist of two or more straight pieces connected at angles.

The [stairway](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase), employed in the past to give “monumentality” to important buildings, frequently became more expressive than convenient, especially in Baroque palaces.

[Portal](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase)is a general term describing an opening in the walls of a building, gate or fortification, and especially a grand entrance to an important structure.

[Portals](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase), from the time of ancient Egyptian temple pylons and Babylonian city gates, became monuments in themselves, used to communicate a heightened significance to what lay behind them. In the Gothic cathedral they became the richest element of the facade—a translation of biblical doctrine into stone.

A [colonnade](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase)denotes a long sequence of columns joined by their entablature, often free-standing, or part of a building.

Since the development of the classical Greek temple, the [colonnade](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562573/staircase) on the exterior of buildings has borne similar implications as portals.

When in front of a building, screening the door (Latin *porta*), it is called a [portico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portico), when enclosing an open court, a [peristyle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peristyle). A portico may be more than one rank of columns deep, as at the [Pantheon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheon,_Rome) in Rome or the [stoae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoa) of [Ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece).

Paired or multiple pairs of columns are normally employed in a colonnade, but the porch of columns that surrounds a *peripteral* classical temple (such as the [Lincoln Memorial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_Memorial) in Washington, D.C.) can be termed a colonnade.

Such symbols have become archaic in modern culture and appear as a sign of resistance to new forms. This resistance is especially evident in the popular symbolism of domestic architecture, where the atmosphere of the home is often expressed by cottage-like roofs, shutters, trellises, mullioned windows, grilles, and other associations with a more peaceful past.

The virtual absence of traditional symbols in modern architecture is evidence of the failure of these symbols to express the cultural patterns of the 20th century. In these times, architecture, like painting, [sculpture](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/530179/sculpture), and other arts, has tended to be abstract, to emphasize qualities of form rather than the communication of familiar ideas through symbols.