

Restoration

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Restoration . . . Both the word and the thing are modern. To restore an edifice means neither to maintain it, nor to repair it, nor to rebuild it; it means to reestablish it in a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time.

There are few buildings, especially those constructed during the Middle Ages, that were built overnight, though; or which, even if they did go up rapidly, did not undergo notable modifications later, by either additions, conversions, or partial changes of one type or another. It is therefore essential, before any repair work actually begins, to ascertain exactly the age and character of each part of the building, and then to write up an official report on all these things based on solid documentation, a report that may include written notes as well as drawings and illustrations. More than that, in France each province had its own style; each had a particular school of architecture whose practices and principles it is always necessary to understand. . . . The architect in charge of restoration must have exact knowledge not only of the styles assignable to each period of art, but also of the styles belonging to each school. . . .

. . . Often buildings or parts of buildings dating from a certain era have been repaired, sometimes more than once, and sometimes by workers who were not native to the province where the buildings were constructed. Many difficulties can arise from this kind of situation. Both the earliest parts and the modified parts of the edifice need to be restored. Should the unity of style simply be restored without taking into account the later modifications? Or should the edifice be restored exactly as it was, that is, with an original style and later modifications? It is in cases like this that opting absolutely for one or the other of these restoration solutions could be perilous. It is in fact imperative not to adopt either of these two courses of action in any absolute fashion; the action taken should depend instead upon the particular circumstances. What would these particular circumstances be? We cannot list them all. It will suffice if we identify a few of the most important of them in order to bring out the element of the critical analysis always required in work of this kind. Ahead of everything else—ahead of any specific archaeological knowledge, for example—the architect responsible for any work of restoration must be an able and experienced builder, not in general but in particular. He must be knowledgeable about the methods and procedures of the art of construction employed at different times and by different schools. These various methods and procedures of construction have only a relative value, of course; not all of them are equally good. Many of them had to be abandoned, in fact, because they were not very good. Thus, for example, let us take a building constructed in the twelfth century without gutters for its roof drains, which had to be restored in the thirteenth century and at that time was equipped with gutters producing combined drainage. The crowning is now in bad condition and has to be completely rebuilt. Should the thirteenth-century gutters be abandoned in order to restore the cornice of the twelfth century (of which the elements are all still present)? Certainly not.

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The cornice with gutters from the thirteenth century needs to be reestablished and its form retained—for it would be impossible to find a twelfth-century model with gutters that could be used. To construct an imaginary twelfth-century model with the idea of preserving the integral architecture of that particular epoch would be to construct an anachronism in stone. Let us take another example: the vaults of a twelfth-century nave were destroyed as a result of some kind of accident and were then rebuilt later, not in their original form but in the typical form of the time of the rebuilding. But now these later vaults, too, are threatening to collapse; they need to be rebuilt. Should they be reconstructed in their later, remodeled form, or should the earlier, original vaults be reestablished? The latter. Why? Because there is no particular advantage in proceeding in any other way. Yet there is a distinct advantage in giving back to the structure its original unity. In this second case, it is not a question, as it was in our earlier example, of maintaining or preserving a rebuilt feature that was a necessary improvement on an earlier but defective model; it is rather a question of reminding ourselves that the earlier restoration or rebuilding was carried out in accordance with the practice of that time; all rebuilding was done in accordance with the style and practice then current. However, we want to follow a contrary principle; we hold that an edifice ought to be restored in a manner suitable to its own integrity. Let us, however, go on to consider yet another important point: suppose the rebuilt vaults, even though they are alien to the original structure, happen to be of remarkable beauty, and, at the time they were installed, they also made it possible to construct glasswork employing stained glass that is of equally remarkable beauty; moreover, when the modified vaults were added they were fashioned in such a way that the exterior construction of the building now also has great intrinsic value. Should all of these valued features now be done away with merely in order to restore the construction of the nave to its primitive simplicity? Should the beautiful stained-glass windows go into storage? And should exterior buttresses and flying buttresses be left in place if, the building having been restored to its original condition, they now no longer have anything to support? Our answer on all three counts in this modified example must be: Certainly not. It is easy to see from these kinds of examples that the adoption of absolute principles for restoration could quickly lead to the absurd.

There is another overriding condition that must always be kept in mind in restoration work. It is this: both the methods and the materials of construction employed by the restorer must always be of superior quality. The restored building needs to be given a longer lease on life than the one that is near expiration. No one can deny that the scaffolding, struts, and supports employed in construction, like any necessary clearing or removing of parts of the masonry, just might possibly have disturbed the fundamental structure in such a way as to provide a potential for possible accidents that could be highly unfortunate. It is therefore prudent simply to assume that any building that has been in place over time has lost some part of its strength as a result of such possible disturbances in the past as those we have indicated. It is necessary, therefore, as a matter of principle to compensate for this probable weakening that has occurred, by the use of new building materials of maximum strength, by devising improvements in the structural system where possible, by the use of chain bond or other ironwork to strengthen the structure, and, in general, by providing greater resistance to the construction by every possible means. It ought to be superfluous to have to mention that the choice of building materials is one of the most important of all factors in restoration. Many buildings threaten to fall into ruin only because of the mediocre quality of the materials out of which they were originally constructed. . . .

It is clear that the architect responsible for restoration needs to know the style and forms of the building he is working on, as well as the school of architecture to which it belongs. Even more, the architect needs to know the structure, anatomy, and temperament of the building. He needs to know these things because, before everything else, his task is to make the building *live*. He needs to develop a feel for it and for all of its parts almost as if he himself had been the original architect. Once he has acquired this kind of knowledge of his building, he must then have at his disposition several alternative methods of carrying out the work of restoration. If one method fails, he needs to be able to fall back upon another, and even upon a third, if necessary.

We have been able to give only some slight indication, and that in a very general way, of the difficulties that face the architect responsible for doing restorations. As we said earlier, we could describe only the broad lines of the kind of overall restoration program called for as a result of all the critical analysis of the problems of restoration. The real difficulties, though are in no way merely material difficulties. Since all the edifices whose restorations have been undertaken actually have a purpose and in some way continue to be used, it is impossible to be merely a restorer of ancient dispositions that are no longer of any practical use to anybody. Once it leaves the hands of the architect, a building has to continue to be as suitable for its assigned purpose as it was before its restoration was undertaken. Too often, archaeologists of a speculative bent fail to take such practical questions as these into account; they are therefore capable of blaming an architect rather harshly for what they consider his caving in to present exigencies—as if the building he was responsible for restoring somehow belonged to him personally, or as if he was never under any obligation to carry out the program of restoration that was given him.

These, then, are the kinds of circumstances that usually present themselves to the restorer; the sagacity of the architect must show up, precisely, in how he works in the circumstance given to him. He is always under the obligation to reconcile his role as a restorer with his duty as an artist to deal creatively with unforeseen circumstances and necessities. The fact is that the best of all ways of preserving a building is to find a use for it, and then to satisfy so well the needs dictated by that use that there will never be any further need to make any further changes in the building. It is clear, for example, that the architect responsible for transforming the beautiful refectory of Saint-Martin-des-Champs into a library for the Ecole des Arts et Métiers [sic], if he was going to respect the construction at the same time as he was restoring it, had to organize the bookshelves and compartments in such a way that there would never again be any necessity to alter the dispositions of the room.

In such circumstances, the best thing to do is to try to put oneself in the place of the original architect and try to imagine what he would do if he returned to earth and was handed the same kind of programs as have been given to us. Now, this sort of proceeding requires that the restorer be in possession of all the same resources as the original master—and that he proceeds as the original master did.