

# Example of a historical background research paper

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



## **Analysis of Architecture at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City**

New York City, the U. S. holds within its territory, a famed gem, in the name of St Patrick's Cathedral, midtown Manhattan, which is symbolically set in Neo-Gothic Architecture. Being a Roman Catholic Church, it is a prominent landmark, as it is the sitting place of the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of New York. It primarily serves as a parish church, and is located along Fifth Avenue, between two streets, the 50th and 51 Streets; facing the Atlas Statue, and directly across from the Rockefeller Center. It is a masterful, massive Gothic structure, set uniquely amongst New York's Midtown, which is adorned by boutiques amongst other areas of business. It has been the city's primarily focal arena of Catholic Christian worship, since its inception in the year 1879. It is the paper's aim to analyze how the structural features are set, with consideration for the spatial configurations present. It is towards the greater understanding of the latter, that I aim at showcasing the historical design influences present, as well as the precedents, which have and continue influencing the structural basis of the building (Broderick 120).

The building was built, as a sanctuary and place of worship, aimed at providing the Catholic community present (within New York), with a place for their spiritual nourishment. The Jesuit community in existence, bought the land in 1810, and proceeded to build a college. It was made an archdiocese in 1850, by Pope Pius IX, and is a replacement of the former Cathedral, as carried out by Archbishop John Joseph Hughes. Its design was by James Renwick, Jr., who themed it in Gothic Revival architecture. Its completion, abate the American Civil War's interruption, was welcomed news, as

provided in its time of dedication, 1879, May 25th. Currently, an extensive period of restoration is underway; having began in 2012, and is planned to last three years. The overall cost figure, pegged at \$177 million, will cater for the 3-phased renovation work, especially due to the nature of the building's structure.

This is so as to cater for its acid-rain polluted Tuckahoe marble, crumbling bricks and faulty heating. Extensive work will engage in restoring, repairing and cleaning the exterior, which is soot-covered; in addition to continued cleanup measures on its inside and outside surface areas of the structure's stained glass windows (Farley 23).

## **Architecture and Design: Influences**

Its design is undeniably inspired by European culture

This is through its portrayal of Neo-Gothic architecture, with American touches being included, by way of the massive bronze doors on which the various statues of American saints are curved in niches. Its twin towers, 330-feet long, like the rest of the structure, are made of white Tuckahoe marble. The whole building bristles with various foils, crockets and pinnacles, amongst other forms of intricate masonry; which is majorly symbolic of Gothic architecture (Handlin 75).

## **Architectural representation: The Interior and Exterior**

As Broderick (1958) portrays, its basis is themed on Gothic architecture, its interior is exquisitely detailed, in the aforementioned manner, with soft lighting penetrating through the various stained-glass windows. This results in wonderful lighting that floods the expansive cavernous space within. Its

floor's plan is shaped in the image of a short-armed crucifix, with its nave's porch being at 5th Avenue. There is the Lady Chapel at Madison, which was added in 1901, with the existing transepts opening onto the aforementioned two streets, the 50th and 51st. the nave, is filled with pews, which face its ornate sanctuary, with alters lining along. Beneath the sanctuary, lies a crypt, which is the famed resting-place of all archbishops (Hughes 67).

The Cross within is made of exquisite marble stations, with the Lady Chapel being characterized by its polished marble-windows, which are heavier-leaded. The aforementioned Rose Window is the building's masterpiece, designed by Charles Connick, a stained-glass designer. The ribbed vaults that are pointed, spread the building's ceiling more evenly, thereby allowing its walls to be segmented with the massive windows present. These architectural genius provides natural lighting, thereby highlighting eco-friendly architecture and design (Hughes 74). Its exterior resonates well with the rhythmic energy present within the space, unlike the surrounding spaces. Additionally, it is representative of symmetric composition, with regard to considerable grace and beauty, which dominates the skyline of midtown Manhattan.

### **Beautiful interior despite the lack of much artwork**

Being a majestic Gothic-inspired space, it epitomizes the ideal structural makeup of lobbies within the larger city. First are its famed stained-glass windows, especially the Rose Window (Hughes 79). Pieces of art are few such, such as the Pieta, its Stations of the Cross and Pope John Paul II's bust, which is in the rear, as a commemorative representation of the Pope's visit. Its alter, was designed by Paolo Medici, a Roman artist, who themed it under

St. Elizabethan architecture. The existing Papal bull, which is featured, is found in the adjoining window that is made of stained-glass. Included within is the sanctuary's bronze baldachin, with a stone altar being present in the middle.

The organs, present, crucial musical instruments vital for the various forms of church masses, were replacements of the original pipe organs. The existing chancel organ, which is located in the northern ambulatory area, has 3, 920 pipes, in addition to the grand gallery organ, which has 5, 918 pipes. This brings the total number of pipes to 9, 838, with 177 stops, which can be played either from the two existing five-manual consoles (Broderick 96).

## **The Building's Architectural Representation**

While themed on Gothic architecture, its designer and architect, Renwick wanted to differentiate it from other existing Gothic churches. This he achieved through his focus on a symmetric form of structural basis, as opposed to the more common asymmetric plans present. This he did through building two massive towers, topped by huge spires, which created the symmetry and hence categorizing the church as uniquely different from others elsewhere. Initially, the roof inside was to be stone-vaulted, but later on was replaced by wood due to the lack of funds. The stone-like features of the wood were achieved through treatment, partially as an avenue of masking the cheaper design inside. There is the presence of the heavy flying buttresses, which hold the massive stone-vaulted ceiling (Farley 43).

Handlin provides that the cluster columns ribbed and pointed arches, buttress piers, spires and stained glasses provide Gothic cultural tradition (77). A unique feature would be the elevator-looking front part and the high

pinnacles, which enhance the building's overall grandeur. There is also a semi-circular dome, which is at the building's back elevation. The sculptures of Saints, provides a unique thematic feature, which enhance its Gothic outlook. Its vault design does blend perfectly, with the existing arches which are pointed, due to the fact that it is entirely detailed in spiky setting. The columns present, are made up of smaller ones, joint together, thereby providing a perfect touch.

### **Space, proportion and shape**

The building's uniqueness emanates from its sense of grandeur, whereby various types of stained glass windows puncture its long walls. This is essentially enabled by way of the strong columns and pinnacles present, which hold onto the entire roof's weight. The interior's shape is themed on the crucifix, an appropriate symbolism of the Catholic Church's affiliation with the symbol. The high ceilings and pinnacles enhance the space within, especially when well-lighted by way of the large windows present (Handlin 83).

The structure, though placed in the modern and bustling Manhattan settings, it maintains its unique Gothic theme setting, especially as symbolically portrayed by the various items, structural formations and thematic settings. Spaced within a space of 2 acres, the structural standards of the building are impressive, especially due to the nature of its portrayed grandeur. A meaningful experience, often cited by visitors to the building is that of high-quality abstract art, which is tactfully placed. This alludes to a different perspective of how architecture is portrayed and interpreted further than just the consumption of space, or in the aspects of proportion and shape.

## **Works Cited**

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