

Art and design: a review of the renaissance, 17th-18th centuries and 21st century...

[Art & Culture](#), [Renaissance](#)



The study of design and its evolution through the ages is very intriguing. The study of various trends and how they compare to each other has certainly made this semester exciting and intriguing. “ Classification relies on time and space” is a statement that has echoed out throughout the whole semester and has made the understanding of past and present design trends easier and more relatable.

At this time of the semester, the study of 17th century rococo design is by far the most interesting thing I have learnt. The rococo technique is the embodiment of beauty and finesse in design and has made this course particularly exciting to me.

One of the most intriguing aspects in the rococo technique had to be the use of elegant and florid designs that transformed architectural designs into works of art. Designers during this age rebelled against conventional design trends giving up symmetry in favor of smooth curves, complex shapes and incorporation of natural elements in the design. These designs were elegant and classy; they were true works of art.

A classic example of rococo designs is the Louis XV chairs and the installments within the Antechambre de l’Oeil Boeuf in Versailles, France designed by Pierre Le Pautre and completed in 1707. These chairs were designed for both functionality and beauty describing the nature of rococo designs.

Technological advancements, need for sustainability and efficiency has led to decline in creativity amongst modern designers. Computer graphics have

largely replaced the pen and paper system used in the past. Elegance and class have all been abandoned for the sake of efficiency and cost management. It was refreshing to learn of an age when designers strived to develop a distinct work of art that will astound people for generations to come.

Rococo designs renewed art and design that had died after the collapse of the great Roman Empire. I believe that the renaissance designers were heavily influenced by classical works hence they lacked true creativity. Rococo designers rebelled and sought to institute their own trends in design.

These trends have spilled over to our generation influencing most artists and designers. The Pink Salon in G Hotel located in Galway, Ireland is one example of modern designs inspired by Rococo. The building completed in 2005 and designed by Douglas/Wallace designers contains aspect of rococo both in its designs, installations and furniture. The Preference of curves common in modern architecture can also be traced back to Rococo designers.

I have truly enjoyed this course especially learning about the rococo technique. It is common to hear people looking for antiques and by looking at the various rococo designs one can understand why. Art is about beauty and elegance, capturing something that people will marvel at for years to come.

The rococo technique achieved all this and as such learning about this fashion has been both exciting and informative. The rococo technique also

introduced many new ideas and trends. Playfulness in art, asymmetry and naturalism are some of the trends that resulted from this technique. As a designer in the 21st century, the rococo technique can offer many lessons. I expect I will continue enjoying this course and I wait to learn more about design, art and architecture.

Design in the 21st century has undergone a dramatic change from classical design. Designers are no longer constrained by rules and guidelines set by earlier design schools. Design in the 21st century is heavily influenced by modernism rejecting traditional ideologies about art. The various trends in modern design depict the progress made by human beings in improving and reshaping the world they are living in.

There are many trends common to modern designs however three trends have played a big role in defining design in the 21st century. Environmental concerns during design, design as a brand and the fusion of architecture and fine arts are three trends that best describe design in the 21st century. These three trends are completely new to design and have led to drastic changes in design concepts leading to new and more innovative projects.

The first important trend in modern design is environmental sustainability. The wide publicity on global warming has made people to become more environmentally friendly and as a result modern design has been heavily influenced by sustainability. The use of recyclable materials, reduction of waste and energy efficiency are just but part of the many steps taken by designers to protect and conserve the environment.

Design in the 21st century seeks to work with regards to the environment and not against it. The Al Nasser Capital Center in Dubai is an example of modern projects that have integrated sustainability considerations in their design. The project designed by ONL (Oosterhuis Lénárd) and was completed in 2007 has integrated various sustainability aspects. The shape and design of the tower are such that it utilizes nature to reduce on building and maintenance costs.

The project also uses mass-customized components reducing waste during construction. Another project that can be noted for its environmental concerns is the Melbourne rectangular stadium in Australia. The project designed by Cox architects started in 2006 and was completed in 2010. The project uses a bio frame design that is more efficient and cost effective as it utilizes less steel than classic cantilever structures. The roof is designed to collect rain water in order to reduce the amount of potable water in the premise.

There are many aspects of sustainability within the project highlighting the level with which environmental concerns have influenced modern designs. Sustainability is a fairly new term that describes steps taken to conserve the environment. Earlier designers did not have to consider global warming or pollution during their design since it was not a pressing problem at the time. Before the industrial revolution, pollution was not a problem and most materials used at the time were environmentally friendly.

Environment considerations during this time were only in the form of reconciling man to nature and understanding the natural order of things. In the 21st century design, environmental concerns during design has enabled construction activities to be carried with more concern for the environment and the future generations It has also led to the reduction of cost by reducing waste and the efficient use of materials and natural products such as light.

Sustainability has also led to the development of more peaceful and harmonious designs by incorporation beautiful landscapes within the design. However, sustainability has led to the constraint of artistic freedom. By concentrating more on sustainability functions designers are forced to work in a predefined manner leaving little room for experimentation. Designs that are too concerned with sustainability may suffer from poor form and aesthetics.

The next trend that stands out in modern design is that design seeks to establish a unique brand for a product. Globalization has led to increase in competition in many aspects of life, art included. Modern designers must therefore make their products stand out from the rest. The book spiral installed in the Seattle Central Library in Seattle, Washington designed by Ren Koolhaas of OMA and completed in 2004 has attracted many people promoting the library and strengthening its reputation.

The book spiral installed in the library is designed to exhibit non-fiction books while conserving the Dewey Decimal System used in the library. Visitors to

the library can access any book from the spiral without traveling to other parts of the library. The stairways in the library are also dynamic containing variety staircases that relate to the variety of books within the library.

Design as a brand can also be witnessed in the furniture collection of Roche Bobois.

The French company has distinguished itself by producing elegant collections that combine art, fashion and interior design to produce unique products. One of the main attractions in the company is the Gaultier furniture collection designed by Jean Paul Gaultier in 2008. The printed pillows assembled to look like a sofa is the unique signature of Roche Bobois. Their products are so unique such that one can identify the company by looking at a single piece of their furniture.

Design as a brand is not a new concept as it relates as far back as the 16th century design. During the 16th century, class segregation was an important aspect of society and this was reflected in many designs of the time. The Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, England Constructed during the late 16th century is one such project designed to display the status if the owner within the society and to cement their name as a brand.

The building designed by Robert Smythson was a prodigy house that was used to entertain Queen Elizabeth during her visit to the country side. The manor designer included large windows which was uncommon during the time. The windows were so design to reflect the source of Bess Hardwick's

wealth which was lead mining and glass manufacturing. Design as a brand has led to the immortalization of individuals, buildings and corporations.

It is now possible to identify an individual or corporation by a particular design connected with it. Buildings such as the Burj al Arab are icons in their country and by looking at the Burj one instantly thinks about Dubai in the UAE. Branding using design however can lead to disharmony in the design process. A well design project must fit with its surrounding environment. By using design as a brand, one may develop a project that is out of synch with the surrounding environment.

This is one of the main criticisms that have been put forward about the Seattle Central Library in Seattle, USA. Critics say that the building is mismatched with an unusual design that does not fit with the surrounding area. It has been called ugly mainly due to the fact that it does not complement its surrounding environment and was designed with disregard to the external environment.

The final important trend in modern design is the fusion of 'fine' art and architecture. In the past, 'fine' art was seen as just a small part of architecture. However, modern designers are using the basics of art for architectural designs. Artists are turning to architecture in order to escape the old-fashioned gallery framework.

The fusion between art and architecture can be seen in the butterfly house in Surrey England. The house was designed by Laurie Chetwood in 2000 who was inspired by butterflies. The whole house is based on the metamorphosis

of a butterfly from the early phase to the blossoming of the fully grown insect.

The awnings are shaped like butterfly wings while the stairs are designed to evoke the unfurling of new wings. Robert Venturi has also campaigned for the fusion of art and architecture in design. In his book “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture” written in 1968, he argues that narrative and symbolism are required in architecture to make it human. He advocates the fusion of art and architecture designs so that projects are not just functional.

The fusion of art and architecture has evolved over a long period of time. In the past, architectural designs were based on a distinct set of universal laws. After the building was constructed, it was common for artist to display their works in different ways in the building. The installation of sculptures or the painting of walls to complete the project was very common during the 18th century and the renaissance period.

The Vestibule and staircase of the Laurentian Library in Florence, Italy is an early example of the fusion between art and architecture. The structures were designed by Michelangelo and Ammanati in the period between 1524 and 1550. The walls of the vestibule were designed and built as sculptures with advancing and receding planes. The design of the convex staircase was also artistic emulating the flowing of lava by expanding as one descends while at the same time curving outwards.

In the past, art was a subset of architecture and was usually used to add beauty to architectural designs. In modern design however, art and

architecture work hand in hand in some case architecture is being used to bring to life what art has conceived. The fusion of art and architecture has led to the development of exciting and innovative architectural projects. Conventional box structures are now considered boring and modern architecture is adventurous, engaging and elegant.

The fusion of art and architecture has led to projects that people can relate to on a personal level. “ Architecture is for people, not for abstract, conceptual conversation as its primary function”. The fusion of art and architecture however can lead to confusion when people fail to understand the final product. People should be able to identify with a building and due to the dynamic nature of art, it may became difficult for some people to identify the theme of the design.

Modern design is described by several trends that have developed over the years and can be seen in modern works of art and architecture. In many modern art and architectural projects, environmental concerns make up one of the crucial elements of designs.

This can be seen through the use of ‘ green’ materials, use of energy efficient designs and interaction between the project and the natural environment. Another important design trend is the development of art or architecture as a brand. Corporations and other individuals strive to stand out in the global village.

This has thus transformed design in that many projects symbolize their function and strive to strengthen the brand of the client or artist. Creativity is

used to link the project and client in such a way that the design leaves a lasting impression on others. The final important trend is the fusion of art and architecture. In the past, art was used to complement the architecture, wall details and the building elements with the structure.

However modern designers use art as a starting point for architectural projects. Art is now a source of architectural designs and acts together with architecture. Design in the 21st century has been termed as revolutionary in that new concepts are used discarding the old, conservative concepts. In the past, there was a gradual evolution in design concepts however developments in the modern world have led to the overhaul of old concepts with new, innovative and efficient concepts.

Design usually falls under classifications based on time and space. Designers from a given period in time from a particular place on the planet usually follow a given set of trends. However some design trends transcend both time and space and can be seen throughout different time periods. Although different generations have different design trends, it can be noted that there is continuity between these trends. The trends of past generations are just refined and improved but the underlying principle or motivation is largely the same.

The first important continuity between the renaissance and the 17th to 18th century design trends is *gout grec* (Greek taste). Designers during the renaissance period were very intrigued by Roman architecture and art. The

teachings of Vitruvius were very important to many architects and designers during this time.

Ancient roman buildings such as the Coliseum acted as inspiration to many architects. One of the most significant renaissance buildings in the world, the San Pietro in Montorio, Rome in Italy is heavily influenced by classical Roman architecture. Designed by Donato Bramante and constructed from 1502 to 1503, the building contains domes and Doric columns arranged in the circular plan of Greek temples.

Bramante adhered to Vitruvius beliefs about symmetry and order within his designs. The building was also inspired by the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli. This fascination with classical designs was revived in the late 17th century when ancient Greek and Roman artworks were discovered.

The armchair for Princess Marie of Prussia designed and built by Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1827 is an example of the continuity in classical imitation. The chair is design using specific harmonic proportions that was conventional in the renaissance period. The chair was intended to be used when learning about renaissance traditions and engagement with antiquity. The use of classical architecture and design has however diminished in the 21st century.

Modern designers have moved towards new and more artistic ways of designing structures and other projects. The use of domes can however be seen in many Arabic buildings such as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, UAE. The building designed by Adam Smith contains aspects of Islamic architecture

and art. Modern architecture has moved past classical model and the utilization of technology and scientific principle has enabled designers to develop more efficient, economic and artistic design projects.

The next important continuity is the use of ornamentation in design projects. The use of genre pittoresco (rococo) witnessed during the 17th and 18th century has its roots from the renaissance ornamentation system.

During the renaissance period, ornamentation was in the form of elaborate sculptures, symbolic marquetry and tapestry, and the use of C and S scrolls for finishing (grotesque). During the 16th century, a new form of ornamentation called Baroque developed in Italy. Baroque was more elaborate than previous forms of decorations and was more concerned with the natural order of things (Panofsky, 19).

Baroque art was more lavishing with designers concentrating on shapes derived from nature such as shells, leaves etc. The Loggia in Vatican, Italy designed in 1515 is a fine example of renaissance grotesque design. The designers Raphael and Giovanni da Udine used grotesque as ornamentation to the loggias in the palace. They combined living and inanimate components to develop a system of ornamentation which would thrill artists for many generations.

During the 17th and 18th century, baroque evolved into rococo which was more elegant, playful and ornate. The spirit of rococo is best represented by Louis XV designs in France during the period of the Monarch. The furniture was designed with floral decorations, curved legs, rounded backrests and

wider padded seats. In terms of interior design, the Sanssouci palace in Potsdam, Prussia is a good example on how rococo developed in Europe.

The interior design was carried out by Johann August Nahl used aspects of rococo extensively in the building. The sculptures in the building are more fluid and softer in color as compared to baroque sculptures. The use of carved wood in columns and other elements in the building is evident and can be traced back to early renaissance design. Rococo unlike baroque was largely composed of unsymmetrical object and broken curves (Lingwood, 1).

This trend is especially evident in Louis XV ornaments and chairs such as the bergere in France. The baroque and rococo techniques have not been lost in the 21st century as certain designers still use their concepts. The use of intricate patterns and incorporation of natural patterns can still be seen in modern designs. Landscaping in the 21st century is usually based on themes that can be traced back to rococo design.

The use of curves and asymmetrical shapes common in modern designs has its roots back to the 17th and 18th century after designers rebelled against the symmetrical forms that were common during the renaissance period. The city of arts and sciences in Valencia, Spain is an example of modern buildings that have incorporated rococo aspects in their designs. Designed by Santiago Calatrava and whose constructions works began in 1991, it incorporates various design features that were common during the rococo era.

The museum of science section of the building contains asymmetrical repetition of tree like forms while at the same time utilizing glass to illuminate the building. The ribbed forms in the building also modulate light enhancing the impression of light and shadow. This aspect conforms to rococo design where by asymmetrical shapes, use of nature inspired forms and playfulness with color/light (illusions) were very common.

The final continuity between the two generations is the incorporation of human values in design. This was mainly seen in paintings and sculptures where designers tried to display their understanding of morality, divine order and understanding of nature.

During the renaissance period, it was common for major buildings to include works of art to signify their purpose, standing in society and beliefs.

Iconography was used to complete designs and reflect human values. The wall details in the Sala di Gallatea villa located in Rome, Italy is an example on how iconography was utilized for this purpose.

The building completed in 1512 was designed by the famous renaissance designer Raphael who used art to tell a Greek story on the wall. He uses various Greek characters to tell a story of love and beauty all intended to display the wealth and class of the client. The client also wanted the house to tell the story of his love affairs. This was achieved through the use of tapestry and paintings in the form of Cupid and Psyche.

The whole house is full of intricate patterns and complex forms which was the trend of the renaissance period. The 17th and 18th century designers

were also fascinated with aesthetics and design as reflection of humanity. The Villa Albani in Rome designed by Winckelmann utilizes sculptures as a means to interact with nature. The sculpture niche and the garden design create a place where people can interact with each other, nature, ideals and ancient antiquity.

The use of design to communicate human values and relationship with nature is still evident in 21st century designs. Although very few buildings contain authentic wall paintings, the use of wall papers and strategically placed windows serve as a means for people to connect with nature and humanistic values. Unlike the renaissance and 17th-18th century designers, modern designers do not place such a huge attention to ceiling paintings preferring to send their message on the overall design of the structure or project.

The D-Tower in Doetinchem, Netherlands completed in 2004 and designed by Lars Spuybroek is a prime example of modern projects that allude to humanism and nature. The project shows how aesthetics as understood in the renaissance period has evolved over time. In the project, aesthetics are designed not for mental judgment but for physical experience.

The tower is linked to a website where people can interact and communicate their feelings and day to day emotions. The emotions are then linked to lamps illuminating the building such that everyday one can know the most prevalent emotional condition in the neighborhood. As it can be seen, the

use of aesthetics has evolved over the generation and has reached a point where it interacts directly with the people.

From the renaissance where it was used to reflect humanistic values such as love and beauty, to the 17th century where it was used to reflect the natural laws of God, aesthetics has reached a point where it interacts directly with the people reflecting emotion, beliefs and values. In the 21st century aesthetics do not portray what people aspire instead it portrays what is (problems, ideologies beliefs etc.).

Design is governed by time and space however it is evident that there are continuities between one generation of designers and the next. The renaissance period was characterized by the use of symmetry, iconography and ideals inspired by ancient roman antiquities and art.

The baroque system was developed at this time and was characterized by the use of dynamic movement, religious themes, dramatic techniques and wide spaces. Baroque art mainly alluded motion as can be seen by the painting of many artists of the era such as Barocci and Michelangelo.

This technique was replaced by the Rococo technique of the 17th to 18th century. The Rococo technique was more graceful, articulate and elegant. Basic furniture was designed playfully with intricate curves and ornate decorations. During this period, mirrors were also utilized to complement the architecture of the buildings. The Rococo technique was later replaced by the neoclassic technique which led to the modern 21st century technique.

The 21st century broke the chain of evolution by taking art to a different level.

The continuities noted in the past generation are rarely seen in the 21st century. However aspect such as the use of ornamentation, curves and humanistic ideologies still exist to some level. The reduction of walls and the use of wide window spaces facing well designed landscape still offer a means for people to connect to the environment and humanistic values such as transparency.

Lingwood, Anthony. A brief history of interior Design. Lingwood, 20th Nov 2010. Web.

Panofsky, Erwin. " What is Baroque?"-Three Essays on Technique. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995. Print .