

# Neoclassical Architecture

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Neoclassical architecture. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the stylistic characteristics of Neoclassical architecture, and identify examples of Neoclassical architecture. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

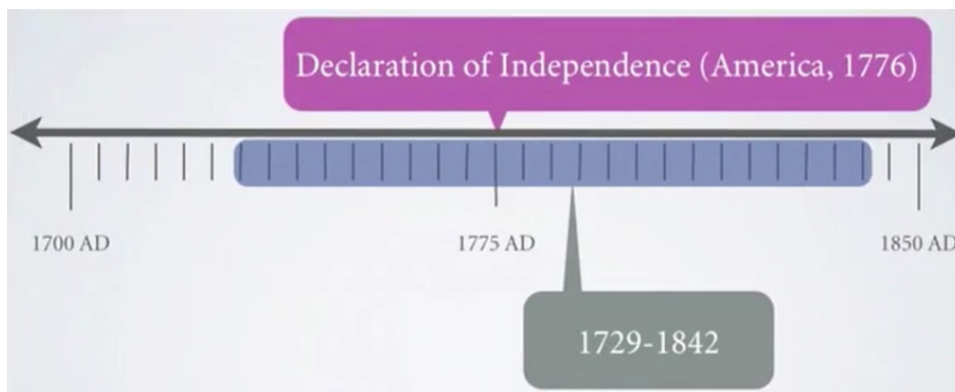


### BIG IDEA

Neoclassical architecture drew its inspiration from classical architecture, and incorporated the use of classical features such as columns, triangular pediments, and domes.

## 1. Period and Location: Neoclassical Architecture

The architecture that you will be looking at today dates from between 1729 and 1842, and focuses geographically on three locations: Chiswick, England (a suburb of London); Paris, France; and Charlottesville, Virginia.



## 2. Artistic Style of Neoclassical Architecture

The artistic style of Neoclassical architecture consists of:

- Overall minimalistic design
- **Planar** exterior
- Lack of decoration
- Simplicity

Keep these characteristics in mind as you examine the architecture examples in this lesson.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Planar

Two-dimensional quality; having flat characteristics.

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## 3. Examples of Neoclassical Architecture

### 3a. The Panthéon

The Panthéon in France—not to be confused with the Pantheon located in Rome—is considered the most typical example of Neoclassical architecture in France.



#### DID YOU KNOW

The Panthéon actually functions today as a mausoleum for important or notable French citizens, such as Marie Curie, who was the first woman to have her ashes interred there.



**The Panthéon by Jacques-Germain Soufflot**

**1790**

**Paris, France**

The Panthéon draws its inspiration from a number of places, including the designs of Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio of Italy, in its central plan design. The large façade is inspired by the ancient Greek and Roman temple designs, such as the “other” Pantheon, in Rome. The large dome on top with the columnar drum recalls the dome on St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, England. The sculptural program of the pediment is the only area of decoration, but it is far from elaborate.

In classical fashion, each element plays a role in the design that complements the other design elements of

the structure. The overall theme is one of simplicity and minimalism. The emphasis is on cohesive structure rather than decoration.



HINT

This simplicity of structure is a notable movement away from the grandeur and drama of the Baroque, and the elaborate and occasionally ostentatious—depending on taste—detail of the Rococo, both of which had come to be associated with monarchy.

### 3b. La Madeleine

If you didn't know better, you might mistake this next example, La Madeleine, for the Parthenon in Athens, Greece.



**La Madeleine by Pierre Vignon**

**1842**

**Paris, France**

However, it was actually inspired by the Maison Carrée in Nîmes, France, shown below.



Maison Carrée

1st century

Nîmes, France

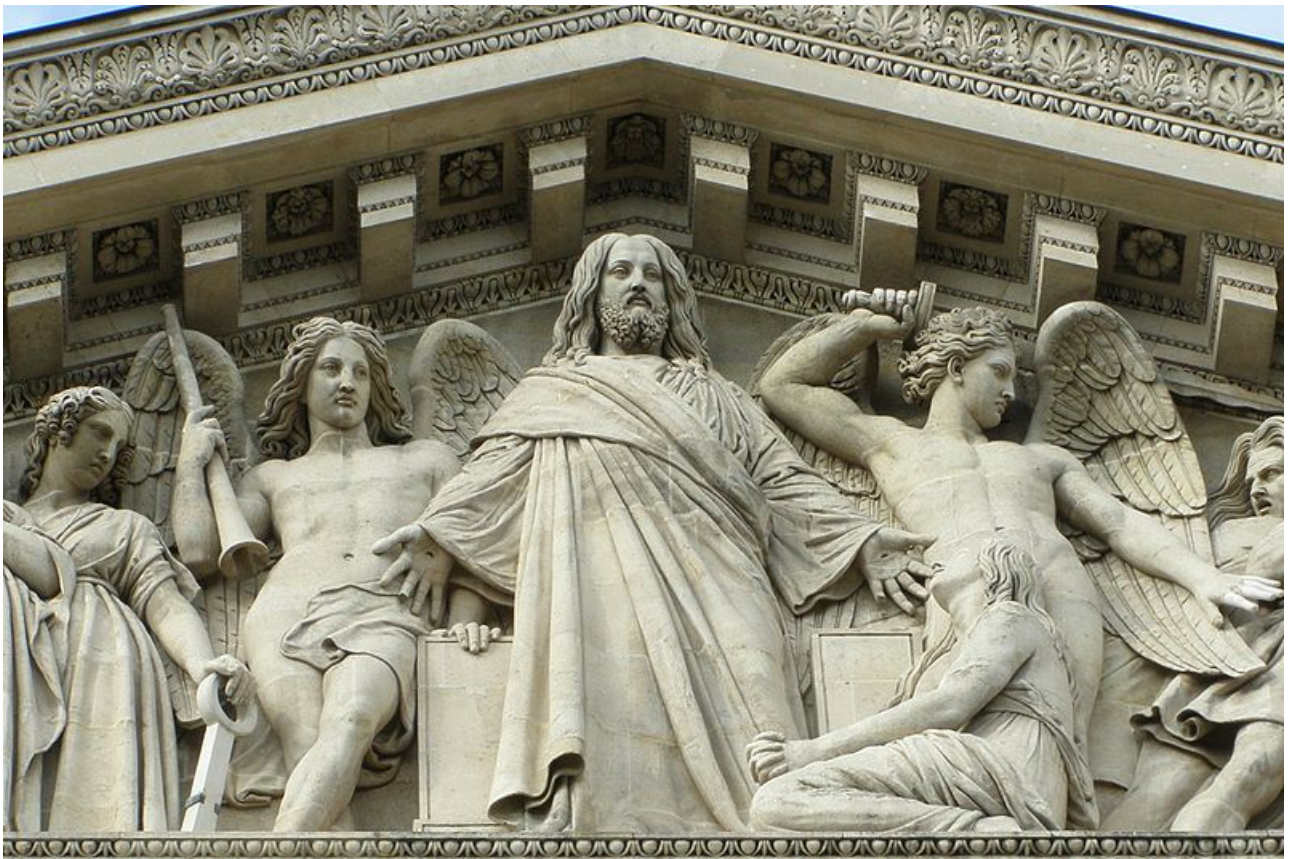
Regardless, it's clear where the root of influence exists. The Neoclassical design ethic borrowed elements such as the column, triangular pediment, and the dome from classical designs. Similar to the Pantheon and Maison Carrée, La Madeleine has a colonnaded exterior that supports a massive group section that terminates in a large triangular pediment.



#### DID YOU KNOW

Because of its design, you may think that La Madeleine looks like a pagan temple. However, it's actually a church. The pediment is filled with an **enframed bas-relief** depicting the “Last Judgment,” seen below.





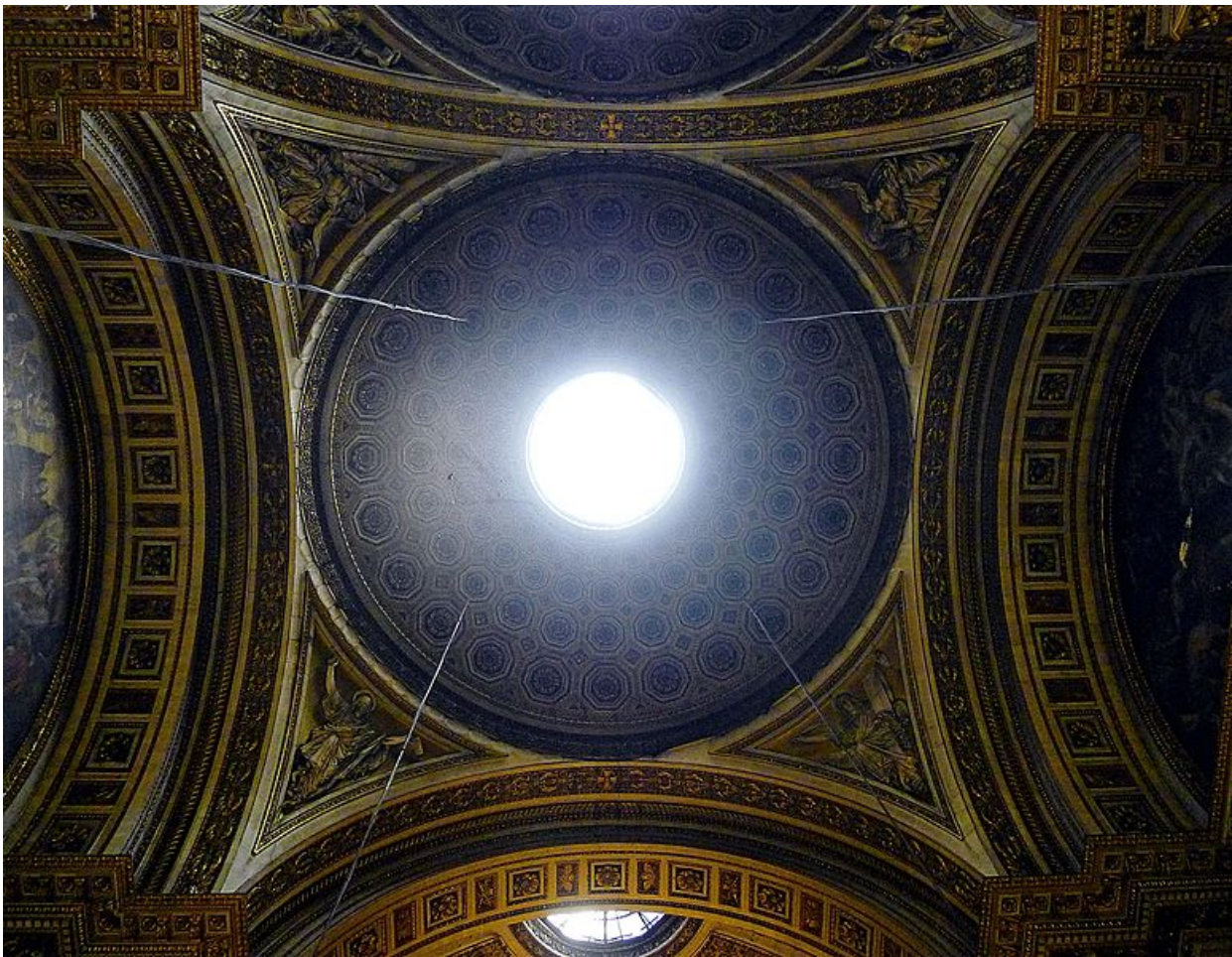
Pediment showing the Last Judgment at La Madeleine

In the interior shots below, you can see evidence of the dome and some lavish decorations in the **gilded** capitals, which contrast rather noticeably with the more austere exterior.



Columns and gilded capitals at La Madeleine





Interior dome at La Madeleine



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Enframed**

Enclosed, as within a picture frame.

##### **Bas-relief**

A type of sculpture where the background is carved or modeled significantly lower than the forms or figures but is not viewed in the round.

##### **Gilded**

A surface that is thinly covered with gold paint or with gold that is hammered into an extremely thin sheet (called gold leaf).

### 3c. Chiswick House

In this next example, in Chiswick, England, you can see the inspiration of the late Italian architect Palladio on private homes at this time. In what was later dubbed "Neo-Palladian" after the architect, the style recalls those elements that made the villas of Palladio so influential. Chiswick House's architect, Richard Boyle, was inspired by Palladio's design on a visit to Italy.



Chiswick House by Richard Boyle (Lord Burlington) and William Kent

1729

Chiswick, England

This house is similar to Palladio's own vision, with some noticeable differences. The symmetry is bilateral, versus the quadrilateral that was typical of many of Palladio's villas. In Chiswick House, only two entrances exist versus four, and the interior is octagonal versus round.



You can tell that the interior is octagonal by looking at the drum that supports the dome. Speaking of the dome, like Palladio's designs, it also recalls the Roman Pantheon. Also notice the lack of excessive or extravagant decoration. It's a careful and cohesive application of basic classical design elements.

### 3d. Monticello

The influence of Palladio is rather impressive. Oftentimes, such influential designs would proliferate within a confined geographic area, but Palladio's extended well beyond Italy's borders into England and further overseas into the American Architectural aesthetic taking form in places such as Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson was a man of many hats. He was one of the principal authors of the Declaration of Independence and was the third President of the United States. He was also an amateur yet very skilled architect. The design of his home in Monticello, Virginia, is a wonderful example of the Neo-Palladian design in the United States.





Monticello by Thomas Jefferson

1772

Charlottesville, Virginia

The simple temple façade and classical design elements fuse with later architectural developments, such as the balustrade that lines the edge of the roof, and what appears to be a Georgian colonial influence in the brick exterior and the window treatments. It was a plantation home and a design that undoubtedly affected the designs of other massive plantation homes that started appearing in the United States as a result of slavery and the associated agricultural boom.

One could say that Monticello reflects Jefferson's belief that the classical style had a sense of **patriotism** and **civic responsibility** in that he used local materials of brick and wood directly from Virginia, rather than stone, which was used by Europeans.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Patriotism**

An act of commitment, dedication, loyalty and/or defense by a citizen of a country.

##### **Planar**

Two dimensional quality; having flat characteristics.

### 3e. University of Virginia Rotunda

The influence of the Roman Pantheon, shown below, is readily apparent in many Neoclassical designs.



The Pantheon

2nd century

Rome, Italy

Nowhere is this influence more apparent in Jefferson's designs than in his rotunda at the University of Virginia. Like Chiswick House, it relies on a careful and cohesive balance of classical design elements rather than decoration and ornamentation to achieve its balanced and pleasing appearance.



University of Virginia Rotunda by Thomas Jefferson

1822-1826

Charlottesville, Virginia

The white temple front and façade feel perfectly balanced with the brick rotunda and drum that support the brilliant white dome. The classical design elements that you see here, which were originally used to construct temples of worship, are then re-purposed and beautifully arranged to create a more modern temple of learning.



## SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Neoclassicism in architecture**. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms and how to describe the **stylistic characteristics of Neoclassical architecture**. Through the exploration of designs such as **The Panthéon**, **La Madeleine**, **Chiswick House**, **Monticello**, and the **University of Virginia rotunda**, you learned how to identify **examples of Neoclassical architecture**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Bas-relief

A type of sculpture where the background is carved or modeled significantly lower than the forms or figures, but is not viewed in the round.

### Civic Responsibility

Expectation of an individual viewed as a member of society to participate in duties, obligations or functions.



**Enframed**

Enclosed, as within a picture frame.

**Gilded**

A surface that is thinly covered with gold paint, or with gold that is hammered into an extremely thin sheet (called gold leaf).

**Patriotism**

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