

# Rococo Architecture

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Rococo architecture in France. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms and describe elements of the Rococo within the Salon de Princesse inside of Hotel Soubise in Paris, France. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

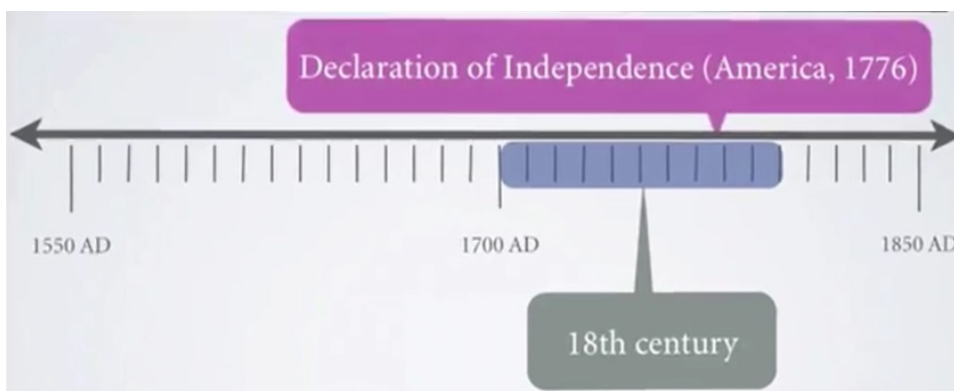


## BIG IDEA

Characteristic elements of the Rococo style include the use of pastel colors; an emphasis on interior space; rooms with a smaller, more intimate scale; and the extensive use of curvilinear lines.

## 1. Period and Location: Rococo Architecture

The Rococo—or late Baroque, as it's sometimes known—was a movement that began in Paris, France, during the early part of the 18th century.



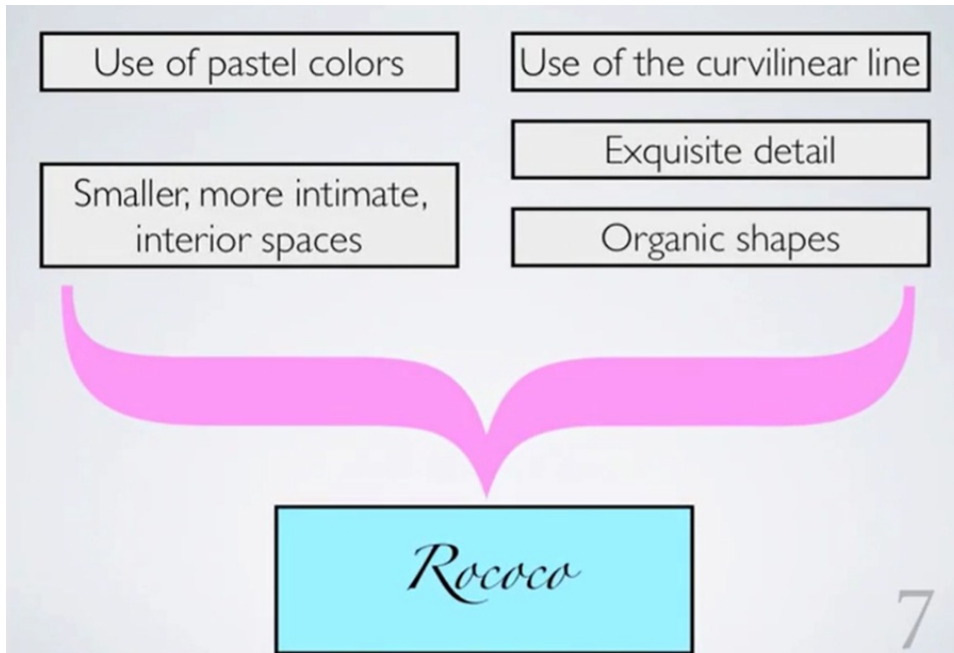
## 2. Stylistic Characteristics of Rococo Architecture

The term “Rococo” comes from the French word “rocaille,” which is a small pebble, referring to the use of the pebble and shell decorative motifs that comprise much of the detail of the **Rococo** style. Key stylistic characteristics include:

- The use of pastel colors
- The use of the curvilinear line, even to the point of designing some rooms in the shape of an oval
- Exquisite detail and attention to detail

- Organic shapes

Upon the death of Louis XIV, the nobility of his court took the opportunity to move back to Paris from Versailles and remodeled the interiors of preexisting structures, which is why you also find an emphasis on interior spaces, as well as rooms with a smaller, more intimate feeling.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Rococo

Also called “late Baroque,” an artistic style characterized by playful themes and creamy-pastel colors, asymmetry, curves, and gilded stucco decorations in floral shapes.

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## 3. Example of Rococo Architecture: Hôtel de Soubise

This period was truly an age of aristocracy. It was also a time when women held positions of power, at least among the nobility. The French court returned to Paris from Versailles and took the opportunity to really delve into the enjoyments of city life. It was a time when the aristocracy turned inward, in pursuit of pleasure, and emphasized games, frivolity, and artifice.



#### DID YOU KNOW

This air of frivolity has been suggested as being indicative of the declining power of the aristocracy, and played a role in conditioning the public’s anger toward the aristocracy, eventually resulting in the first French Revolution of 1789. King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were among the many aristocrats publicly beheaded during the revolution by the French people.

Sophistication and refinement were important among the nobility and were expressed in the visual arts, as well as on stage, in literature, and even in conversation. The idea of the salon—the gathering of individuals for intellectual conversation—was very important for the nobility. These often took place in more intimate rooms indoors, also called salons, in gathering places called **hôtels**.



The French meaning of this word, at this time, was different than its usage today. These were more like city mansions of the nobility that were occasionally occupied.

The Hôtel de Soubise is a beautiful example of one such place.



**Hôtel de Soubise (also known as Salon de la Princesse) by Germain Boffrand**

**18th century**

**Paris, France**

Its exterior is beautifully French classical in its design.



**Exterior of Hôtel de Soubise**

Its interior, however, has one of the finest examples of the French Rococo design aesthetic. The Salon de Princesse epitomizes French Rococo design. It's an oval-shaped room that is one continuous blend of architectural elements and painting. Notice how there are no dramatic shifts from wall to ceiling. The organic, twisting stucco design elements of vines, leaves, and other details merge almost seamlessly into the ceiling, appearing like a form of gilded overgrowth covering the entirety of the interior.





Salon de Princesse of Hôtel de Soubise

The detail carried over into the furniture, mirrors, and sculpture of the room, as well as the clothing of the people within it, to create a cohesive and complete work of art.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Hôtel

An apartment for members of the French nobility.



#### SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Rococo architecture in France**. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you also learned how to describe the **stylistic characteristics of Rococo architecture**, which include the use of pastel colors; an emphasis on interior space; rooms with a smaller, more intimate scale; and the extensive use of curvilinear lines. Lastly, you learned how to describe elements of the Rococo within the Salon de Princesse inside the **Hôtel de Soubise** in Paris, France.

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



#### TERMS TO KNOW

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