

‘Exploring the Lasting Impacts of Gothic Style on Contemporary Architecture’

People often separate contemporary architecture from the past buildings and consider Gothic, another form of classical style architecture. The truth is that contemporary buildings also have elements of the Gothic style. One can clearly observe the Gothic legacy and influence in the English Gothic revival style, as well as in modern-day buildings. Here are two buildings in Toronto, Canada: St. Michael's Cathedral (Fig 1.0) and Art Gallery of Ontario (Fig 2.0), chosen excellent examples of gothic legacy. Italia gallery, the newly expanded part of the AGO facing northern Dundas street, will be mainly discussed here. This essay argues that these buildings inherit the characteristics of Gothic architecture.



Figure 1.0 (Source: City of Toronto)

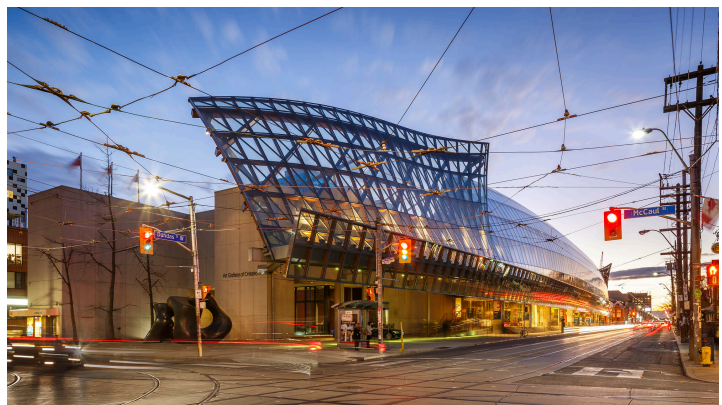


Figure 2.0 (Source: sartle.com)

Both buildings were built on flat sites as Toronto has relatively generous topography. St. Michael's Cathedral is a religious building in the English Gothic style that British immigrant architect William Thomas, began construction in 1845 and was completed in 1848 (Pound, 2005). It nestles at the intersection of Shooter Street and Bond Street downtown. The surroundings include religious buildings (United Methodist Churches) and commercial and mixed-use buildings. Even as the years pass, it still

functions well through continuous maintenance and preservation to maintain the building. In the other part of the city, a group of individuals and members of Toronto Society of Arts established AGO (formerly Art Museum of Toronto) in 1900 (O'Rourke, 1997); it underwent several renovations and expansions. Most of the current design is by Canadian-born architect Frank Owen Gehry (completed in 2008), and it has taken on its present form. It is in the Grange Park Neighborhood in downtown Toronto, surrounded by Chinatown, residential homes, and institutional contexts.

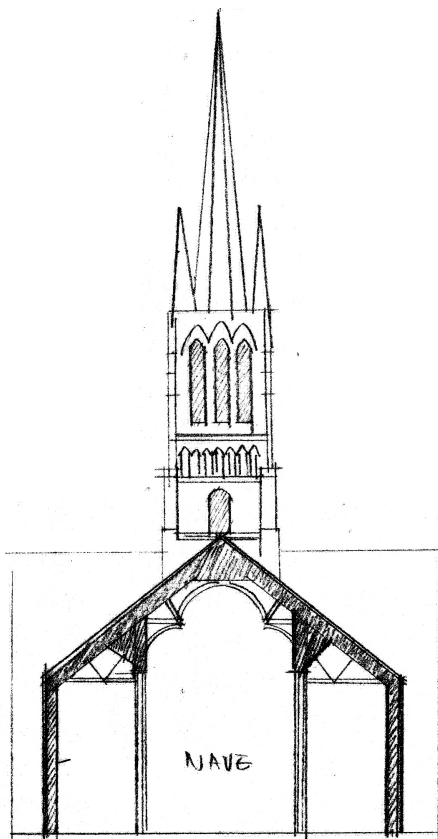


Figure 1.1 Section of St. Michael's Cathedral
(Drawn by myself)

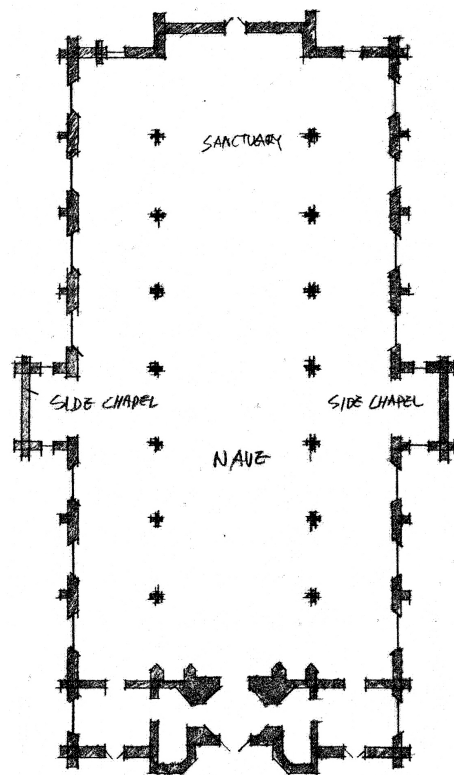


Figure 1.2 Plan of St. Michael's Cathedral
(Drawn by myself)

First, structural excellence enables a high ceiling, which is a vital characteristic of Gothic architecture. These two buildings in Toronto demonstrate the use of a minimal and appropriate amount of material to create tall spaces. St. Michael's Cathedral is composed of simple spaces centred on the nave, taking the form of a basilica. The side walls serve as flying buttresses, structurally dedicating the high ceiling on both sides and creating a space known as the side chapel (Fig 1.1). The diamond-shaped decorative columns and pointed arches of the main structure disperse the boundary of the roof, creating a vast and high space (Fig 1.2). The northern façade of the Art Gallery of Ontario, consisting of four

organic masses, displays the building's core design. The Galleria Italia, which stretches 200 meters, the length of a Canadian football field from east to west (AGO, 2020), is in the shape of an half pointed arch (Fig 2.1 and 2.2). Forty-seven radial arches support the outer glass skin layer, transferring the weight to the concrete columns below and protecting it from lateral wind forces (Canadian Wood Council, 2009). The idea from Gothic architecture combined with the latest technology generates architecture like this.

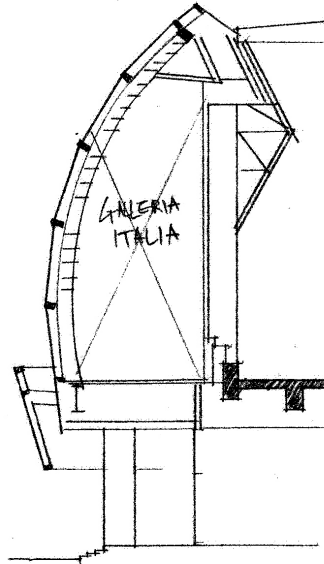


Figure 2.1 Section of AGO (Drawn by myself)

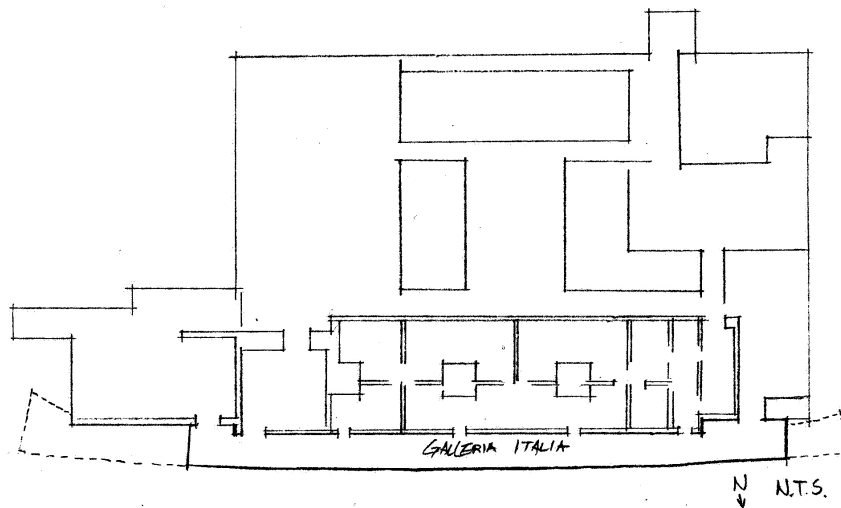


Figure 2.2 Plan of AGO (Drawn by myself)

The large window that pervades light is a characteristic of Gothic architecture (de Luca, 2021), exemplified by St. Michael's Cathedral, designed by Pugin-influenced Canadian architect William Thomas (Thurlby, 1990). The wide pointed arch windows, composed of several lancet windows, stained glass, rose windows, and quatrefoils,

demonstrate the beautiful gothic style that is pervasive throughout the building. The main structure of the cathedral is composed of brick and timber. On the other hand, the primary materials of AGO's Galleria Italia are timber, metal, and glass. Particularly, glue-laminated timber, as an embodiment of technological advancement, supports the weight of the extensive glass skin solely through the strength of wood. Additionally, installing a series of large glass windows on a wooden mullion maximises the light flowing into the space, creating a much brighter interior. Technological advancement enables large windows and bright interiors as Gothic features.

Both buildings are still performing their functions effectively; they operate as they did when they were first constructed. Another defining characteristic of Gothic architecture is its function of gathering. As French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc saw "gothic architecture was first inseparable from civic concerns. Cathedrals were supposed to serve these civic concerns by enabling gatherings" (Picon, 2005, p. 9). As a religious facility, St. Michael's Cathedral handles worship services and, as a public building that gathers multiple people, imposes restrictions on movement due to its religious function. The layout (referred to in Fig 1.2) allows users to enter through the west-facing entrance, move into the nave or side chapel for worship, and then exit back through the main entrance. This simple circulation effectively reflects the function of the building. On the other hand, AGO serves as both an exhibition space and a hub for various community activities. Galleria Italia, in particular, is designed with six entrances to facilitate various movements, such as art appreciation, walking, and resting in its long, aisle-like space. Also, the galleria and its garnish-like structures attached on both sides serve as canopies for public circulation on Dundas Street below. St. Michael's Cathedral and the Art Gallery of Ontario both possess minimal columns and spacious spatial characteristics influenced by the Gothic style, providing visitors with an enjoyable experience.

Throughout history, humanity has undergone numerous trials and errors, resulting in the continued evolution of architecture to the present day. The Gothic architectural style has left an indelible impression on contemporary architecture, whether this was done consciously or unconsciously. Investigating the history of architecture reveals the fascinating connections between seemingly disparate styles. Consequently, it is essential to consider the legacy of the past when studying contemporary architecture. This essay narrates the contrast between two types of architecture with distinct purposes: religious and secular. St. Michael's Cathedral is a self-evident choice. However, the other building, Art Gallery of Ontario, leaves room for people to wonder. Extracting Gothic characteristics from such an unexpected project was an enjoyable exercise. So many of today's buildings exhibit structural excellence, tall interior spaces, ample illumination, facilitate civic gathering, ornamentation, and craftsmanship. It is essential to comprehend architecture in order to comprehend the origins of the things we now take for granted.

References

AGO (2020) '*The view from "Toronto's living room"*', AGO,
Available at: <https://ago.ca/>
(Accessed 22 Dec. 2022)

Canadian Wood Council (2009) *Art Gallery of Ontario: Renovation and Addition*, Wood Works, pp. 6.

Caulfield, J. (1995) 'The Growth of the Industrial City and Inner Toronto's Vanished Church Buildings', *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire Urbaine*, 23(2), pp. 3–19.
Accessed 19 Dec. 2022.

De Luca, L. (2021) 'Basilica of Saint-Denis: The Cradle of Gothic Architecture', *The Collector*,
Available at: <https://www.thecollector.com/>
(Accessed 22 Dec. 2022)

O'Rourke, K. (1997) 'Ontario Society of Artists: 125 years', *Archivaria*, 44, pp. 181–182.

Picon, A. (2005) 'Construction History: Between Technological and Cultural History', *Construction History*, 21, pp. 5–19.

Pound, R.W. (2006) *The Fitzhenry and Whiteside Book of Canadian Facts and Date*. Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.