

# THE CURVES THAT SCANDALIZED MODERNISM

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Les Concours de la ville de la façades de Paris as a guideline to understand the quick shift in the use and role of ornamentation in the materials, construction and windows and whether the Art Nouveau was a cause for the lack of ornamentation in modernism.

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# Abstract

The Art Nouveau style included elaborate ornamentation on the façade. The style had a brief flowering around 1900. A few years later, Modernism came along and sought an abomination of ornamentation. Around the time of Art Nouveau, the City of Paris introduced the Concours de la façades de la ville de Paris, a competition to restore diversity to the city's façades after Haussmann's monotonous ones. Each year, the Concours published its reasons for holding the competition and the uniqueness of the winning façades, together with photographs or drawings of the building. The winning façades have different stylistic influences, such as Art Nouveau and aspects of Modernism in the ornamentation of materials, construction and windows. The Concours is used to understand the rapid change in the use and role of ornamentation in materials, construction and windows, and whether Art Nouveau was a cause of the lack of ornamentation in Modernism. Surprisingly, the Concours is a rarely used research source and is the main source of this thesis, after other books, architects' manifestos and (historical) photographs and an analysis. Modernism seems to have been a reaction to Art Nouveau, as their views on the ornamentation of materials, structural elements and windows are contradictory. Nowadays, the role of ornament is often discussed and the ideas of Art Nouveau versus Modernism could contribute to this discussion.

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## note

ChatGPT is used for looking for sources, these suggestions are ALWAYS read to ensure that the needed information is really in there.

Deepl is used to improve the text

The curves that scandalized Modernism

# Introduction

Art Nouveau is known for its elaborate ornamentation, but not always praised for it.<sup>1</sup> Which, frankly, is a shame. All those delicate lines, plant motifs and animals are so much more interesting to me than the hard lines of modernist buildings.

At the end of the 19th century, the ‘turn of the century’, was seen as something special. Architects felt they had to exploit new materials to the fullest and a reinvention of ornament was central.<sup>2</sup> Art Nouveau took this task seriously and sought new inspiration. This was found in nature, Japanese art, the female body and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The 1900 World’s Fair in Paris was a catalyst for the style to spread around the world.<sup>4</sup> The history and development of Art Nouveau is well documented, with an antecedent in the Arts and Crafts method and the ‘forefather’ of modern architecture Viollet-le-Duc.<sup>5</sup>

Paris was a ‘starting point’ for Art Nouveau. The Parisian façade competitions, Les Concours de façades de la ville de Paris, or in short concours, were held from 1898 to 1905, and several designs were announced as winners, accompanied by phrases such as “the architect is a skilful decorator” or “showed great ingenuity in both construction and decoration”, but also comments such as “it is rather an abuse”.<sup>6</sup> The aim of these competitions was to create a more varied cityscape after the monotonous façades created by George Haussmann, during Napoleon’s reign.<sup>7</sup> Different architectural styles emerged as the winners of these competitions, one of the most elaborate being Art Nouveau. On the other hand, some other façades in the competition seem to contain elements that are in line with an early modernist point of view in terms of construction, windows and material ornamentation.

What is remarkable is that not long after the end of Art Nouveau, in which ornamental design was central, an era emerged in which the abolition of ornament was sought, modernism. In order to understand the thinking behind the ornament, four façades from the concours will be analysed. Two of the façades have characteristic features of Art Nouveau, the Lavirotte building, designed by Jules Lavirotte, which won in 1901. Following by Hôtel Céramic by Jules Lavirotte (1905). On the other hand, the façades of M. de Montarnal and M. Bousson, both winners in 1905, seem to contain references of early modernism in the windows, construction and materials.

In order to gain better insight of the quick shift in the use and role of ornamentation in the materials, construction and windows and whether the Art Nouveau was a cause for the lack of ornamentation in modernism with the Concours de la Façades de la Ville de Paris as guideline. While there is a great deal of data available on Art Nouveau and Modernism, the rapid change in ornamentation and its role remains underexplored, starting with the programme of the Concours, followed by the jury’s notes and an analysis of the Concours. The next chapter compares the aspects of the analysis with Art Nouveau and Modernism, with comments from critics. Finally, there is a conclusion. This is a historical work based on a study of the literature and an analysis of the façades of the Concours.

- 1 Grady, J. 1955. “Nature and the Art Nouveau.” *The Art Bulletin* 187-192.
  - 2 Frampton, K. 1980. *Modern architecture: A critical history*. Thames and Hudson.
  - 3 Fahr-Becker, G. 1996. *Jugendstil*. Battersby, M. 1968. *The world of Art Nouveau*. Arlington Books.
  - 4 Fahr-Becker, G. 1996. *Jugendstil*. Battersby Art Nouveau
  - 5 Curtis, W. J. R. 1982. *Modern architecture since 1900*. Frampton, K. 1980. *Modern architecture: A critical history*. Thames and Hudson.
  - 6 *La Construction Moderne*. 1905. *Les concours de façades de la ville de Paris*. Paris: La Construction Moderne.
  - 7 Jallon, B., Napolitano, U., & Bouttée, F., 2021. *Paris Haussmann: A model’s relevance*. Park Publishing.
- Saalman, H. 1971. *Haussmann: Paris transformed*. George Braziller.

# Les concours de façades de la ville de Paris

## Reason for constructing the competition

The contest was first introduced in 1896 during a municipality meeting by of the members as a competition between all the owners of houses to be built on the Rue Réamur in Paris. After the council saw the positive effects it had on the city of Brussels, it was introduced in Paris. The four winners of the competition were exempted from paying half of the road tax and received 1000 francs in compensation. The jury was made up of the Director General of the Department of Architecture of the City of Paris, five members of the City Council, the Chief Architect of the City of Paris or the Deputy Chief Architect and two architects appointed by the owners. The competition took place between 1896 and 1899. From 1898 onward, the competition was held annually throughout Paris. Competitors were now exempt from all road taxes on new buildings, as well as 1000 francs.<sup>8</sup>

The aim was simple according to the concours: to beautify Paris. Meanwhile, the city's hygienic conditions were to be improved and owners were to be encouraged to build houses 'worthy of their aesthetics'. This was done by giving architects 'free rein' in their designs, so that the end result would be more picturesque, more artistically imaginative in the construction of buildings and the decoration of façades. The aim of the organisers was to counteract the monotony of large houses with plain façades and balconies on the 2nd and 4th floors, with that comment, the concours referenced to the Haussmannian style which was dominant at the time.

After the industrial advances in Great Britain, the industrial revolution finally reached France, introducing coal mines, steam engines, modern forges, textile mills and railways. Then France's Second Republic (1852-1870) was established, after a coup by Lodewijk-Napoleon Bonaparte in 1851. After 1860 and the country rapidly grew into a modern power.<sup>9</sup> Haussmann was hired by Napoleon to make Paris into a world city. Haussmann made broad boulevards, on which the buildings had strong architectural guidelines, with the goal to have a continuous horizontal façade.<sup>10</sup>

- 8 La Construction Moderne, Les concours
- 9 Embassy of France. 2022. The history of France. <https://nl.ambafrance.org/De-geschiedenis-van-Frankrijk-19218>.
- 10 Shavelson, N. 2022. "Caillebotte and Haussmann: Art as Commentary on the Modern Built Environment."
- 11 ansichtkaartenverkoop. n.d. "CPA PARIJS 9e - Carrefour Chateaudun (51878)." Ebay. <https://www.ebay.fr/itm/224210994269>. *edited by author*

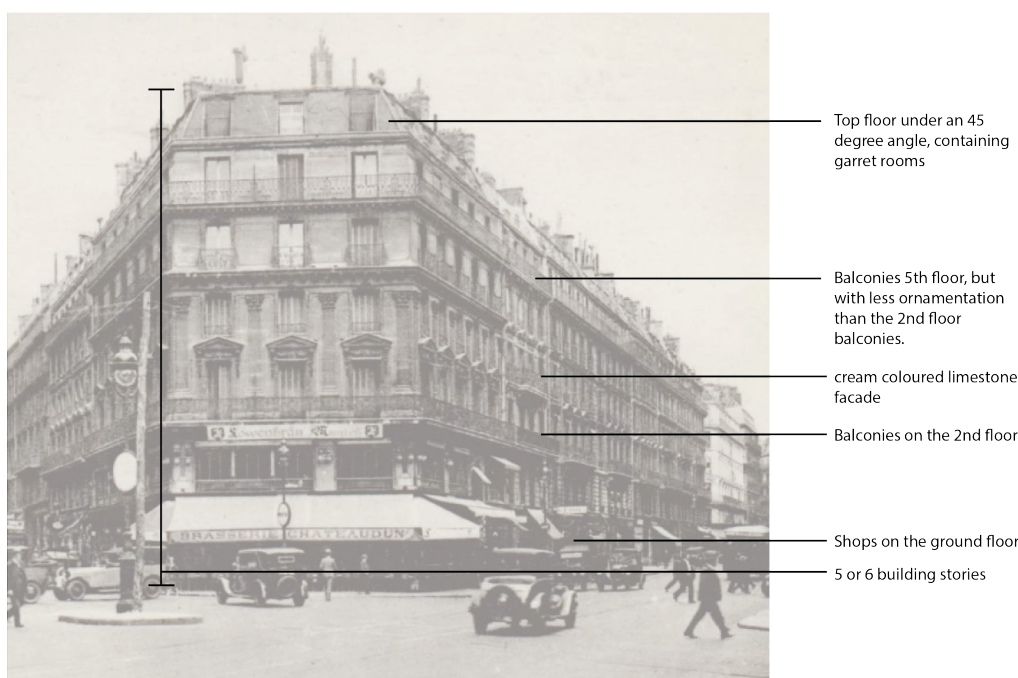


Figure 1: typical Haussmannian façade<sup>11</sup>

# The competition during the years 1901 and 1905

## The competition in 1901

In 1901, the competition had been held for four years, but there was not a great variety of candidates, and the jury consisted mainly of the same members, along with architects nominated by the competitors.

Each year, according to the concours, the façades were examined in a specific order. This was continued in 1901. First, the buildings were divided into districts, then into three parts according to the distance between them. Each day, about 20 to 25 buildings were visited, staying long enough to examine them carefully and to complete the task within three days. When examining the buildings, each jury was given a list indicating the order in which they were to be examined, together with the address and architect of the building. The merits of each building were discussed and, before leaving, each member of the jury was given a piece of paper on which to record marks from 1 to 20 for certain points. It was suggested that a photograph should be taken along with the notes to help discuss the façades later, or in the event of a draw.

During the final discussion, the director reminded the jury that, as in previous years, there would be six winners and that these would not be ranked but would be anointed in alphabetical order. Each member of the jury was given a piece of paper on which they were to write down the six most deserving architects. After the first round, five winners were announced and the sixth was chosen in a second round.

The six winners are, as in previous years, the result of the decoration and beauty of the streets of Paris, and there is no official type of architecture. They were chosen for their beauty or for the decorative research of their designers, but they are of very different types and the research they demonstrate has been carried out in completely different directions as mentioned by the concours.

## The competition in 1905, Rue Réaumur

“No one disputes that the city of Paris is the most beautiful capital in the world. It owes its supreme beauty not only to the magnificence of the Seine, its avenues, its parks, its gardens and its squares, all of which are admirable in every way, not only to the variety and number of its sumptuous monuments, but also to the happy layout of its wide streets, which, producing deep perspectives, give it a stamp of opulent originality, the like of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world”.<sup>12</sup>

As explained by the concours, the annual façade competition between house builders, and the rewards that encouraged them to make financial sacrifices if necessary, proved effective. The results were justifiable. However, despite all these positive results, the buildings along rue Réaumur were lacking. The buildings that were erected along this street during these competitions did not correspond to the aesthetic studies or research carried out by the architects. This was considered to be a great pity in this well-situated street, which has the most lively street ends in the city. The jury found barely ten façades that were pleasing to the eye, with taste and care in their decoration. As stated by the Concours de la Façades de la Ville de Paris<sup>13</sup>, the jury found that most of the façades were in search of a ‘false original’, the original being closer to eccentricity than to wise rationality, which in no way implies coldness, but on the contrary, with talent, produces true originality, since a well-understood façade must above all be the sincere expression of the building’s internal purpose.

12,13 La Construction Moderne, Les concours

# Judging Beauty: Argumentation and Analysis of Winning Façades

Lavirotte, 1901

Jules Lavirotte was the architect of the house at 29 avenue Rapp. This building had been rejected in the previous year's competition because it had not been completed by 31 December 1900, as stated in the concours. The architect showed 'great ingenuity in both construction and decoration'. It was one of the first examples of the use of ceramics on this scale, which was commented on as 'Il y a plutôt abus' or 'It is rather an abuse', but was accepted as this building was made for its client to exhibit his product.<sup>14</sup>

"The entire frame of the carriage entrance, with its crown forming the balcony of the crossing above, is applied to the stone; the lintels of the crossings, the arches, the bow window columns, the voussoirs, landings, balustrades, clerestory, gutters, tiles, etc., are in flamed sandstone in a variety of very strong, very bright colours, contrasting with the background tones of the stone on the ground floor and entresol and the brick on the other floors. For the sake of completeness, we would like to mention a slight criticism we heard during our visit about the round-headed entresol windows at the bottom".<sup>15</sup>

It was thought unlikely by the jury that similar buildings would be seen in Paris. Lavirotte has shown how flamed sandstone can be used to advantage in many ways in the future. The façade as a whole has a 'pleasant effect' and adds to the decoration of the street on which it stands according to the jury.

## Analysis of the Lavirotte building

The windows of the Lavirotte building are not too big, and usually only have two panes. Around the windows on the ground, first and fourth floor is some ornamentation. This consists of the glazed stone elements in flowing lines and beetles and other animals, figure 21.

The construction consists of mainly loadbearing walls. On the first floor, the stone above the windows lean forward a bit, which carries the balcony on the floor above. This happens on the third floor as well. On the fourth floor, columns are introduced to create a covered balcony, figure 16. These columns are covered in the same green ceramics as in other parts of the building.

The different construction and decorations in the façade show the 'ingenuity of the architect' which the jury mentioned.

The façade has many materials, it has beige stone elements on the ground and first floor, a different type of stone with a circular motif, figure 12, in it and many ceramics, as the jury of the competition mentioned as well. A lot of these ceramics are on the ground floor around the window, but also around the whole fourth floor, from the railing to the columns, to the arches above the columns. Other railings are made of steel or stone. The ones on the third floor have a simple linework. On the top floor however, are more curves and flowing lines.

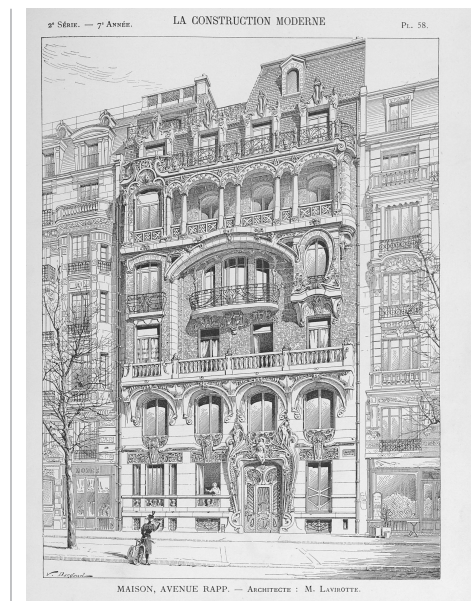


Figure 2: the Lavirotte building<sup>15</sup>



Figure 3: the Lavirotte building, recent photograph<sup>17</sup>

14,15,16 La Construction Moderne, Les concours

17 Dalbéra, Jean-Pierre. 2011. Wikipedia. 11 03. Accessed 03 20, 2025. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Immeuble\\_art\\_nouveau\\_de\\_Jules\\_Lavirotte\\_%C3%A0\\_Paris\\_\(5519755116\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Immeuble_art_nouveau_de_Jules_Lavirotte_%C3%A0_Paris_(5519755116).jpg).

## Hôtel Ceramic, 1905, regular competition

The house at 341 avenue de Wagram, by Lavirotte, was chosen by the jury for its interesting use of brick and glazed earthenware throughout. According to the concours, the architect is 'a skilful decorator and presented passers-by with a harmonious colour scheme; the construction seemed to defy the freest aesthetics and was therefore less pleasing'. Even though this building has been chosen as the winner, it should not be seen as an example of 'free architecture'. Majolica decoration can produce pleasant effects without resorting to arrangements that have little to do with the genius of French art, which is based on simplicity and logic.

## Analysis of Hôtel Ceramic

The windows of Hôtel Ceramic are quite simple, they consist of some bay windows and some straight windows. Some have a slight curvature at the top. The profiles of the windows are simple and do not have any ornamentation. But there is a sort of play with curving some of the top profiles of the windows, while leaving others straight. The ornamentation is more around the window frames and differs from grapevines to some more simple curvilinear lines, figure 18.

The construction consists of loadbearing stone walls, as well as slightly forward curving columns, which might be the reason for the jury to comment on them as 'defying the freest aesthetic'. Furthermore, the balconies are carried by some slightly forward leaning stones which have ornamentation on them, mostly plant motifs, figure 14 and 18.

Most of the façade consists of the brick. But there are different kinds used. There is a combination of big rectangular stones alternated by rows of brick, figure 10. The stones only have an engraving which is an offset of the edge. Most ornamentation consists of glazed earthenware grapevines, figure 14 with the fruit on certain places. This Majolica is coming back on multiple places, mostly around the windows. In this glazed earthenware, multiple colours come forth, ranging from a brownish-red and green-bluish colours.



Figure 4: Hôtel Ceramic<sup>18</sup>



Figure 5: Hôtel Ceramic recent photograph<sup>19</sup>

- 18 La Construction Moderne, Les concours
- 19 agoda. n.d. agoda. Accessed 03 20, 2025. <https://www.agoda.com/en-au/hotel-elysees-ceramic/hotel/paris-fr.html?cid=1844104>.

## M. Bousson, 1905, competition on Rue Ràumùr

The façade of number 119 was designed by M. Bousson. According to the jury the details are sometimes a little ‘vulgar’, especially in the sculptural decoration. However, the good will and talent of the architect overlooked this.

Although the jury is against the exaggerated tendency of architects to create complicated façades, tortured and overloaded with motifs, to the detriment of the whole, the jury has recognised the efforts of certain architects and has awarded them prizes.

### Analysis of Bousson’s façade

The windows of 119 rue Ràumùr have no ornamentation. The frames are simple, those on the ground floor and first floor consist of a single window on the ground floor that follows a steel beam and ends with another window above, this one with a curved head of the frame. The next three floors have the same window layout. There are bay windows to the left and right, and three windows in the middle, held between the floors by steel beams. The windows consist of a French balcony and two fixed panels on either side. Above the doors is another fixed panel, see figure 19.

The construction of this façade is quite straight forward. There are columns, the ones on the ground to first floor have a little ornamentation on the top. The column spanning from the second to fourth floor are a bit more minimalistic as there is no relief, the top part of the column has a small element of ornamentation, as shown in figure 15.

This façade consists of two materials. A stonelike materials, which is the base for the façade and steel, which is visible in the beams, windows and railing. The stonework is displayed relatively simple, figure 11, there are some small ornamental elements on top of the columns, which the jury found vulgar and overloaded with motifs without reason, which seems a bit. The beams showcase no ornamentation, as do the windows. The railings on every but the last floor is very basic and only consist of simple cylinders. However, the railings on the top floor have more organic forms.



Figure 6: Façade of M. Bousson<sup>20</sup>



Figure 7: Façade Bousson, current photograph<sup>21</sup>

- 20 La Construction Moderne, Les concours
- 21 Neoclassicism Enthusiast, 2021. Wikimedia. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:119\\_Rue\\_R%C3%A9aumur,\\_Paris\\_\(01\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:119_Rue_R%C3%A9aumur,_Paris_(01).jpg)

## M. de Montarnal, 1905, competition on Rue Ràumùr

The façade at number 118 was designed by Mr de Montarnal, who designed another striking façade at number 91, as stated by the concours. This façade is characterised by its bold design. It can be seen as a huge open bay in a stone frame, with an iron infill on all levels except the ground floor, which is also in stone. The low arch can be explained as a way of supporting the top floor, which is also in stone. At first sight, the jury thinks this façade is 'surprising' and 'a little worrying', following with mentioning that the architect, who did not want to be ordinary, achieved this with great talent. The motif is original and the jury liked it. The construction is 'meticulous' and shows the architect's taste for study.

## Analysis of de Montarnal's façade

The jury's mention of a bold layout, the long vertical windows attract some attention. The frames themselves on the second and third floors are plain. The frames on the fourth floor have some small ornamentation, see figure 20, such as the curves between the mullions. In addition to the lack of ornamentation on the window frames, the balustrade has a motif, and this motif is repeated on the third and fourth floors. The windows to the left and right of the centre are largely unadorned, with the same small profiles, but there is some ornamentation in the form of advertisements, see figure 8.

The construction on the ground and first floors is made of stone, figure 13. On the second, third and fourth floors, the construction is very visible. The beams are unadorned, but the columns contain some elaborate ornamentation at the top of them. This ornamentation uses plant forms, these elements folding and curving around each other, as shown in figure 17. The last two floors are made of stone.

The façade is made of stone, which has some ornamentation, but has also been left unadorned in some places. On the ground floor there are some basic rectangular motifs, see figure 8. The first floor has some ornamentation around the top of the windows of plant motifs. Then, on the fourth floor, there is a large ornament at the end of each window, consisting of curved lines, figure 20.



Figure 8: Façade of M. de Montarnal<sup>22</sup>

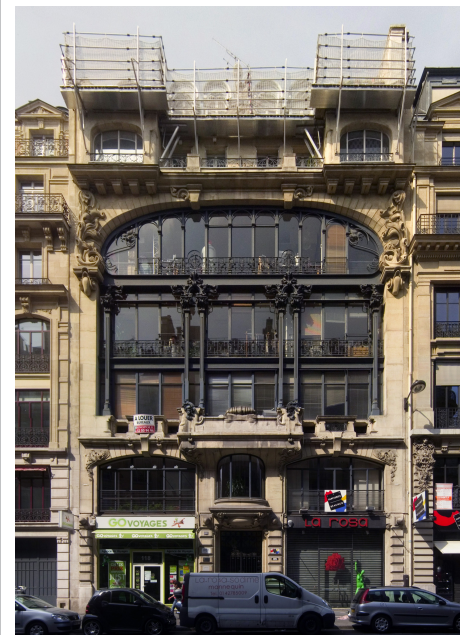


Figure 9: façade of M. de Montarnal recent photograph<sup>23</sup>

22 La Construction Moderne, Les concours

23 Poulpy. 2011. Wikimedia. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paris,\\_118\\_rue\\_R%C3%A9aumur\\_-\\_Fa%C3%A7ade.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paris,_118_rue_R%C3%A9aumur_-_Fa%C3%A7ade.jpg)

# Ornament and Modernity: Material, Structure, and the Window in Transition

## Material as Ornament: From Craft to Clarity

Art Nouveau lasted from about 1890 to 1914 and had a brief flowering period. It attempted to break away from the symmetry and hierarchy of the neoclassical period, resulting in a preference for asymmetry and free design.<sup>24</sup> Art Nouveau focused on the renewal of ornamentation. This renewal was based on floral motifs, which was a continuation of the previously popular Arts and Crafts movement that originated in Britain. The emphasis in Art Nouveau ornamentation was on flowing and often dynamic lines, figure 12. The first period of the style is characterised by the pursuit of an 'exciting', curvilinear formal language. In France, this curvilinear language was often displayed in iron and steel construction and woodwork, borrowed from the plant world.<sup>25</sup> It prioritised the use of technical innovations such as glass and iron, combined with the introduction of new materials. Artists sought an integration of all arts, a 'gesamtkunstwerk', there was an interest in using a wide variety of colours, in interiors and façades.<sup>26</sup>

These elements are very much visible in the façades of Jules Lavirotte, from the use of different materials in his façades, brick, different types of stone (figure 10), ceramics and the Majolica on the other, which show his innovation in these materials. The ceramics were used in large quantities due to the client of the Lavirotte building, as he wanted to showcase his ceramic works. Following with the incorporation of plant motifs, such as the grapevines and leaf patterns, the use of beetles, cows, horses, salamanders and the human body. Then Lavirotte includes a beautiful colour scheme in each of the building, one more with blue greenish tones on a yellowish stone backdrop, whereas the other façade has more white with red and green colours to it. The combination of these elements creates the 'gesamtkunstwerk', that the jury loved so much, see figures 2-5.

The façades of de de Monternal and Bousson have curvulair and organic ornaments too, but those are much simpler and are much rarer than the ones of Lavirottes buildings. This leads toward what Le Corbusier mentions in 1931, the use of raw materials which 'arouse' his emotions, that, Le Corbusier calls architecture.<sup>27</sup> This point comes across multiple times in his book, 'Towards a New Architecture', once as 'we no longer have the money to erect historical souvenirs'. Which makes sense, as there is a lot of craftsmanship involved with making these beautiful organic forms which the Art Nouveau loves so much.

But it is important to mention that le Corbusier wrote this book after the first world war, but some of his idea's such as working with 'pilotis' date back to the 1910's.<sup>28</sup> And after four years of war, the price was high for France: the north and east of the country were destroyed, the coffins were empty, the economy was ruined and the social progress that had been made was interrupted. Above all, the war was a humanitarian catastrophe, with nearly 1.5 million young men killed, nearly three million wounded and a collapse in the birth rate.<sup>29</sup>

However, the façades researched in this thesis are built before the first world war, therefore, the lack of ornamentation in these façades, see figures 11 and 13, are not due to the consequences of the first world war. But more due to the 'essential underlying qualities of form, proportion, clarity and measure were allowed to emerge unadorned', according to Adolf Loos.<sup>30</sup> Loos thinks craftsmanship is a waste of money, when used for ornamentation.<sup>31</sup> But where Le Corbusier's point is after the war, Adolf Loos comments on the cost of craftsmanship was made in 1910, which is before the war.

- 24,25,26 Verbrugge, B., & Teunissen, M. 2018. *Architectuur- en bouwgeschiedenis in perspectief*.
- 27 Le Corbusier. 1931. *Towards a new architecture*. New York: Dover Publications.
- 28 Frampton, *Modern architecture*
- 29 *Ambassy of France. The history of France*
- 30 Curtis, *Modern architecture*
- 31 Loos, A. 1910. "Ornament and Crime." In *Dat is Architectuur*, by H., Loeckx, A., De Cauter, L., Van Herck, K., & Samenstellers Heynen, 63-66. Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010.

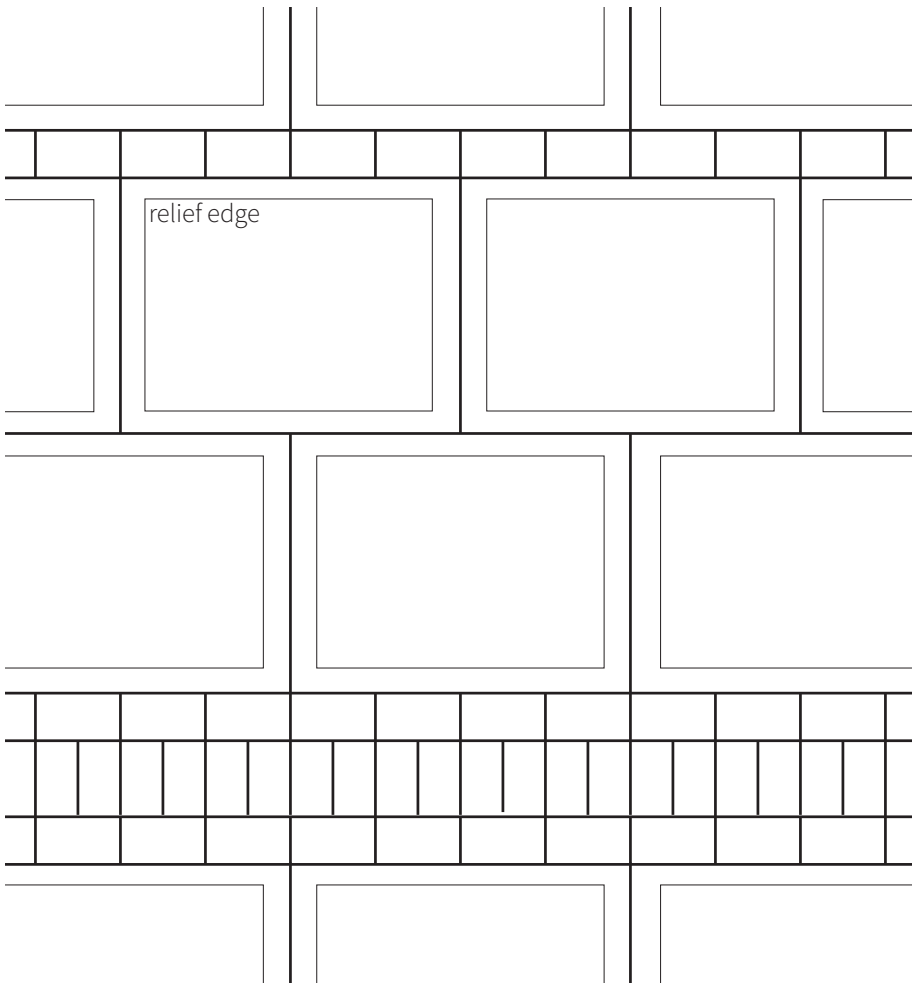


Figure 10: Hôtel Céramic façade material, brickwork and sandstone with a small relief with an offset to the inside.

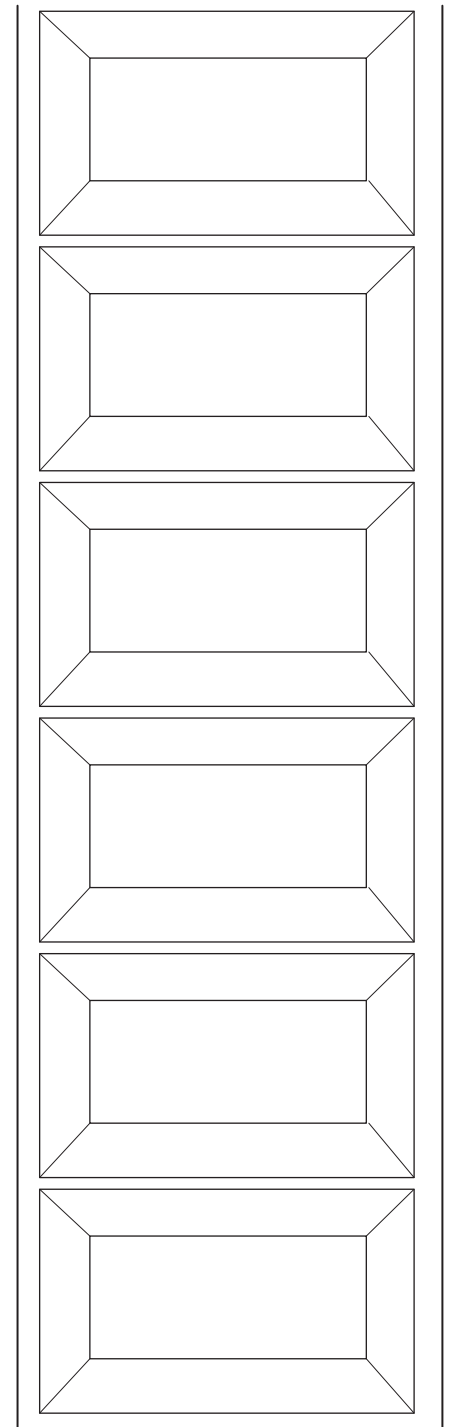


Figure 13: Stone pattern of de Monternal's façade, repeating raised 'blocks' with a angled edge.

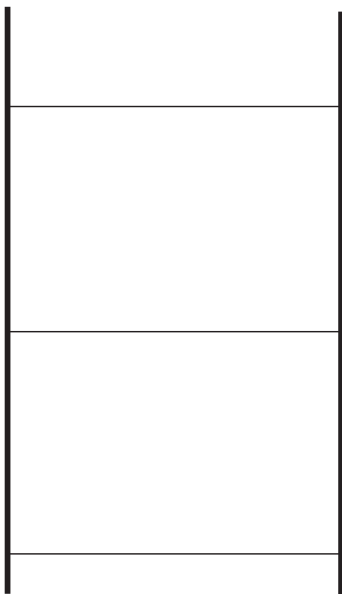


Figure 11: Bousson's unadorned façade stones, just repeating blocks.

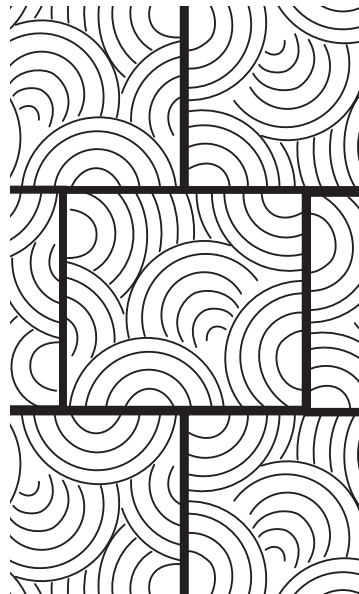


Figure 12: Tiles with a circular pattern of the Lavirotte building.

This lack in the use of craftsmanship was fear for a prominent British commercial designer and decorative artist, Lewis Foreman Day. He wrote an article in which he expresses his point of view, 'L'Art Nouveau', after the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris. Day feared that Art Nouveau would influence young artists and lead them astray, causing them to use materials beyond their control. Day argued that one of the effects of the popularity of Art Nouveau would be to remove the skill of making art. He saw a rejection of tradition, history, skill and experience that could not be communicated in a clear cultural message.<sup>32</sup>

### Where Function Meets Form: Ornament in tectonics

Viollet-le-Duc, an inspirational figure for both the Art Nouveau and Modernism<sup>33</sup>, suggested that the ornament should appear as a logical consequence of tectonic inspiration.<sup>34</sup> Which is clearly visible in the ornamentation on the top part of the columns of de Monternal's façade, see figure 17 and 20. But also, on the uppermost part of the sandstone columns of Boussons façade, figure 15. Continuing with the use of ornaments on Lavirotte's buildings the carrying parts just below the balconies in figure 14.

On contrary to most the construction techniques used in the buildings of Lavirotte, the carrying beams of the façades of de Monternal and Bousson and the steel columns of de Monternal showcase the framework beautifully, as shown in figure 19 and 20. On which Adolf Loos would be proud, as he pleads for showing the framework, and hiding it would 'deprive architecture of its sole legitimacy' and also 'strip it from its most beautiful ornament', a modern object should disappear.<sup>35</sup> Contrasting, Perret, thinks that the framework should be imposed by permanent conditions, which are subject to nature, as typically done in Art Nouveau. By being subject to nature, will acquire style, have character and be harmonious, which lead to true beauty, which seem to connect with figure 16.<sup>36</sup>

During the 1900 exhibition, Hermann Muthesius, one of the early pioneers of German modernism, expressed his dislike of the curvilinear lines of Art Nouveau, calling Art Nouveau ornamentation 'worthless additions' and urging the disappearance of these flowing lines if a new style was to emerge.<sup>37</sup> Some of these elements are still visible in the natural, vegetation like ornaments on top of the columns of de Monternal's building, fig. 17.

Even though some Art Nouveau like ornamentation is visible in the construction elements of Boussons and de Monternal's building, the shift towards a different construction method, column and beams of metal, and starting to shape these elements with less ornamentations as Lavirotte did show a change towards modernism. As le Corbusier says, construction has undergone so many innovations that the 'old' styles, which still consume us, can no longer clothe it. These innovations call for a new order, one without a mass of rules and regulations which have been employed for the past four thousand years. Following with that le Corbusier was convinced that walls should no carry weight, so that the windows could wrap around the house.<sup>38</sup>

- 32 Theiding, K., O. 2006. "Anxieties of Influence: British Responses to Art Nouveau, 1900-04." *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19 No.03.
- 33 Bressani, M. 2014. *Architecture and the Historical Imagination: Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1879*. Surrey: Farnham
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- 34 Picon, A. 2013. *Ornament: The politics of Architecture and Subjectivity*. John Wiley & Sons.
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- Frampton, Modern architecture
- 36 Frampton, K. *Studies in tectonic culture: the poetics of construction in nineteenth and twentieth century architecture*. Cambridge.
- 37 Muthesius, H. 1900. "Eigentijdse architectonische beschouwingen." In *Dat is architectuur*, by H., Loeckx, A., De Cauter, L., Van Herck, K., & Samenstellers Heynen, 32-36. Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010.
- 38 Picon, Ornament  
Le Corbusier. a new architecture.



Figure 14: Hôtel Céramic's bottom part of a loadbearing bow window, adorned with grape vines and grapes. The outward curving (bottom part of the drawing) part is adorned as well.

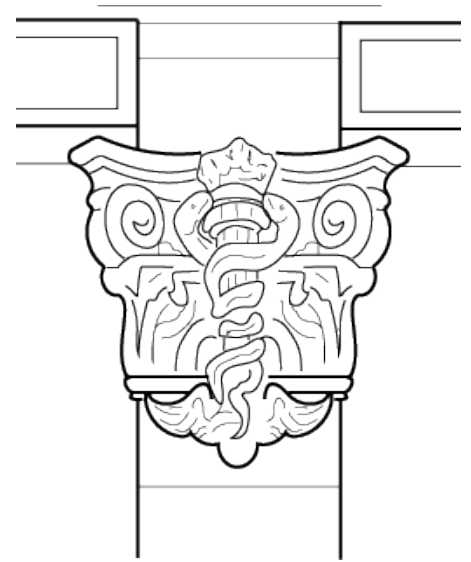


Figure 15: Tectonics of Bousson's façade, snakes curving around a torch. Natural forms and curves surrounding it.

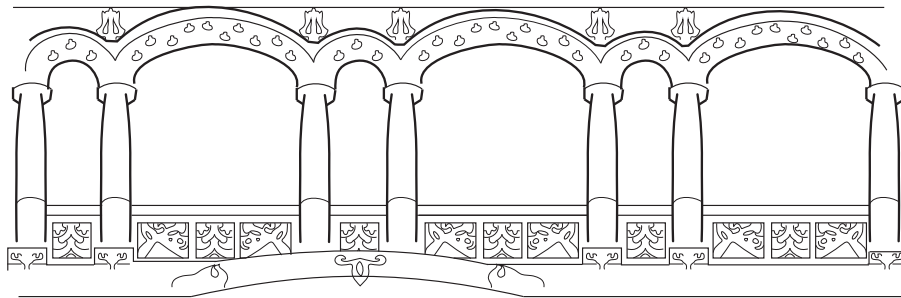


Figure 16: Balcony in the Lavirotte building, columns covered in green stone. Curved loadbearing 'beams' on top, adorned with small ornaments. Balustrade is made up of green elements, with a vegetation-like infill.

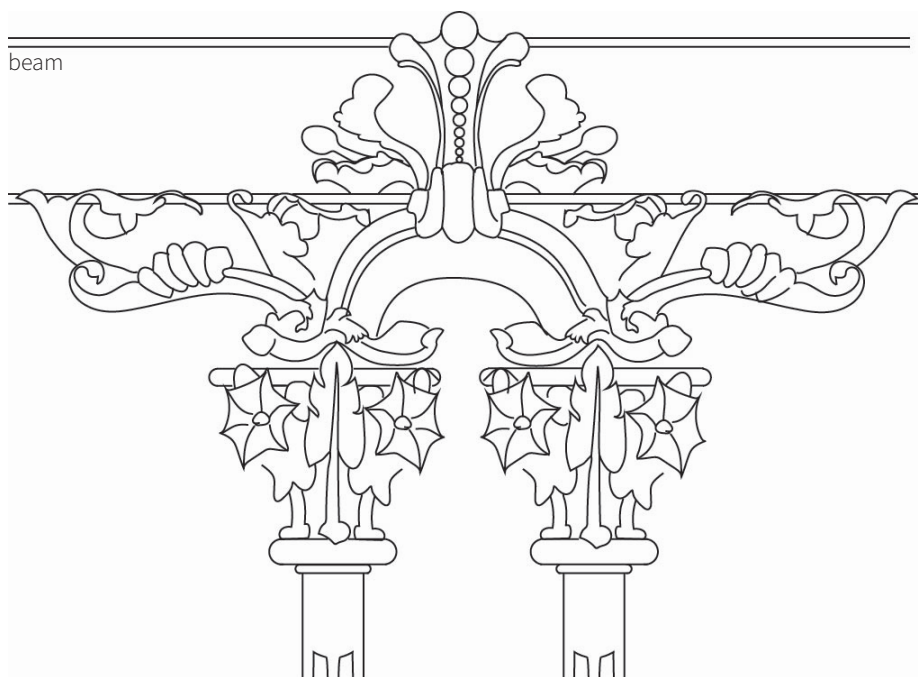


Figure 17: De Monternal's upper part of the column. vegetation and curves 'group' the two columns together. Flower elements under the connection part. The beam is unadorned.

The curves that scandalized Modernism

## Ornament Versus Function: The Modern Window Reconsidered

Modernism is characterised by a positive attitude towards the latest technological developments of the 20th century. They tried to give these developments their own place in architecture. Modernists used new materials and constructions in their designs, which they tried to make expressive through the use of modern materials such as concrete, steel and glass. Furthermore, there was an aversion to the use of ornamentation in the form of stylistic imitation without cause.<sup>39</sup>

This use of steel and glass is prominent in the façades of Bousson (figure 19) and de Monternal, where steel window frames are frequently displayed in the façade. Especially in de Monternal's façade, as here there are elongated windows, figure 20. These were according to Le Corbusier an important element as the function of windows is to introduce light and to see the outside.<sup>34</sup> Le Corbusier continues with his frustration with the then present-day building, which displayed elements which were obstructing the function of a window, to bring in light. These obstructions might be translated into the bay windows and covered gallery in the buildings of Lavirotte (figure 18). The bottom part of the bay window is impeding the window below, and therefore, according to le Corbusier obstruction the induced light and visibility of the outside.

One of the goals of these 'factory-like' windows was to make them suitable for mass production. Meanwhile Camille Maclair, an opponent of modern architecture and art, described Le Corbusier's buildings as ominous boxes.<sup>41</sup> But le Corbusier pleads for unity in elements as windows, methods of construction and materials. This unity le Corbusier speaks about is one of the elements which the jury of the Concours de la façades de la ville de Paris tried to break away from. Which can result to le Corbusiers' statement.

Meanwhile, Art Nouveau, as mentioned before, was all about the 'gesamtkunstwerk'. The ornamentation, such as the grape vines, around the windows of Lavirotte therefore make sense, they are part of a bigger whole, see figure 14. As do the outward curved masses beneath the bow windows in figure 18. They are an extension of the natural lines in nature. Muthesius spoke of how the aesthetics of external ornament seemed to have been replaced by an aesthetics of efficient form, an aesthetics of purity and sobriety, especially in the applied arts, or 'more substance, less art'. Which shows the aversion to the ornament again. But Muthesius was also an advocate of the British Art and Crafts movement. Therefore, he is convinced an architect should, during his studies, learn to master the fine arts, and this development of the sense of form should include the study of nature, the study of the world of plants and the human body, its whole natural environment.<sup>42</sup> Which is surprising as the Art Nouveau took the human body and nature as inspiration, see figure 21.

- 39 Verbrugge, & Teunissen, Architectuur- en bouwgeschiedenis
- 40 Le Corbusier. a new architecture.
- 41 Maclair, C. 1933. "Huizen zonder ziel." In *Dat is Architectuur*, by H., Loeckx, A., De Cauter, L., Van Herck, K., & Samenstellers Heynen, 233-236. Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010.
- 42 Muthesius, architectonische beschouwingen



Figure 18: Hôtel Céramic's bow window, windows are not elongated. Sometimes include curved elements at the edge of the window. The loadbearing lower part is adorned with vines and leaves curving around the element.

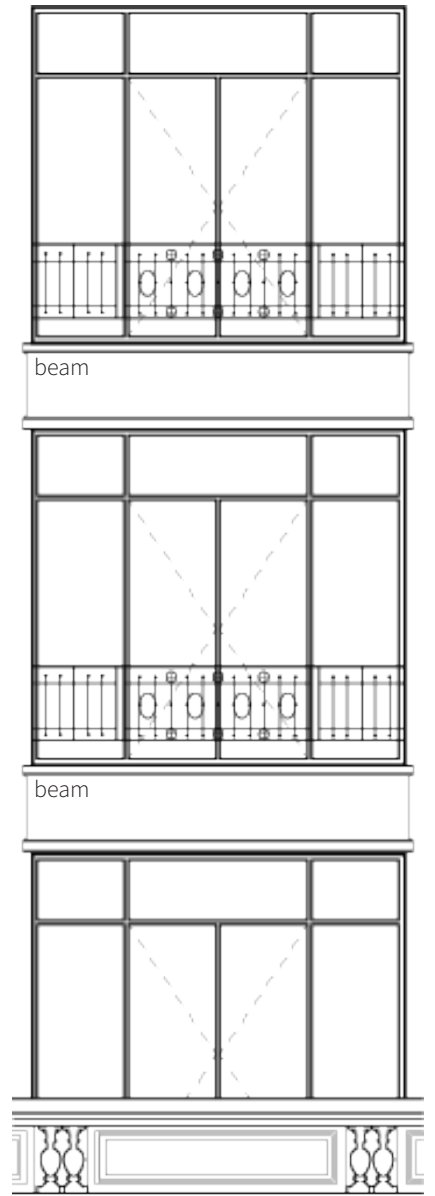


Figure 19: Boussons's windows, they are made out of four panes, a bit longer than the ones seen in the buildings of Lavirotte. The frames are unadorned, as are the beams connecting the windows. Only the balustrades have some ornamentation, but are quite minimalist already.

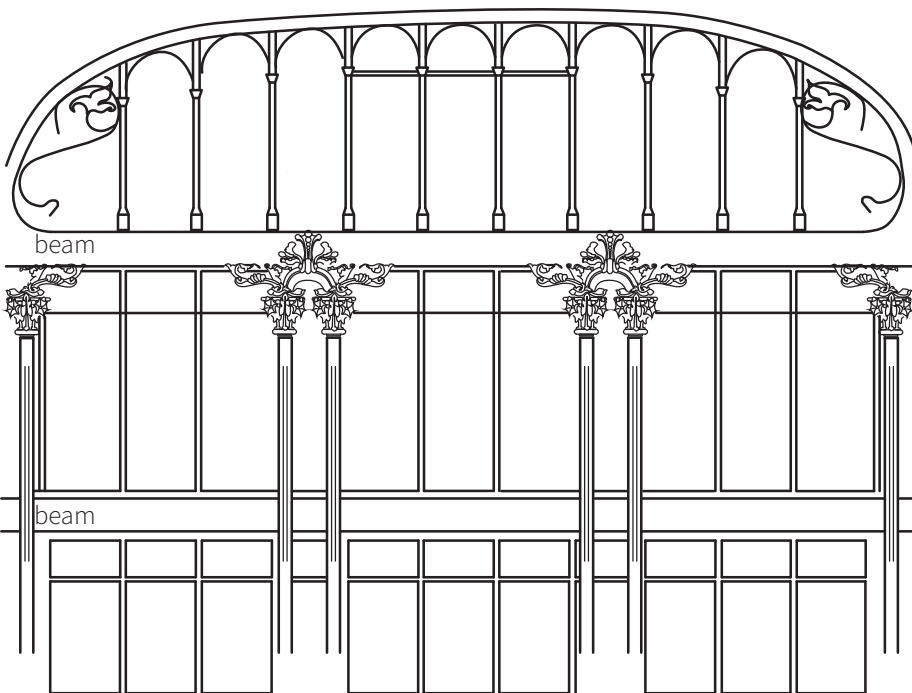
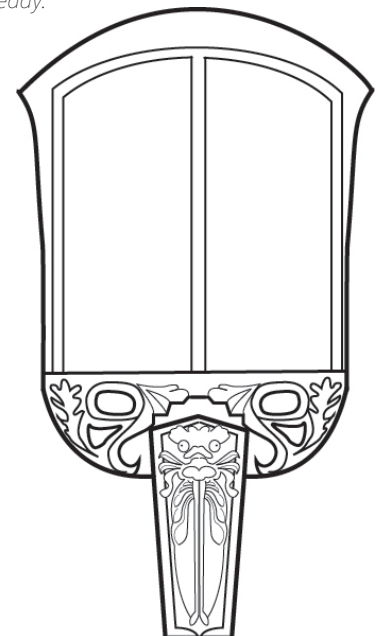


Figure 20: Window in de Monternal's façade. All the windows are elongated and coupled to each other. The construction is in front of the window and therefore visible from the outside. Beams have no ornamentation. Some small natural elements and curves on the upper row of windows.

Figure 21: Window of the Lavirotte building. The top of the window is curved. At the bottom a small balustrade covered with natural elements such as leaves and vines. A beetle is connecting the façade with the windows



# Conclusion

In conclusion, the Conours is a helpful guide to understanding the rapid change in the use and role of ornament in materials, construction and windows, and whether Art Nouveau was a cause of the lack of ornament in Modernism.

Both Art Nouveau and Modernism valued craftsmanship and meaningful design, but the two styles used them differently. Art Nouveau embraced ornament and sought to reinvent it, moving away from the historical use of ornament. They also used new materials for their ornaments, such as ceramics and iron, ideally creating the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. These aspects are very visible in the two façades of Lavirotte, due to the rich use of materials, combined with the wild range of colours and different motifs in the ornamentation, such as floral motifs, animals and human forms. All of this shows the craftsmanship required to create these ornaments. The construction is not really emphasised, only the outward curved bays are complemented by swirls of plants. The windows themselves do not have as much ornamentation, but the facade around them does. The windows are much smaller than those of de Monternal and Bousson.

Modernism focused more on mass production and 'purity of materials' without 'distractions'. The cost of craftsmanship led to a simpler form, the world wars later seem to be a catalyst for this, but as the facades of Bousson and de Monternal were built before the wars, this catalyst was not a reason for the less ornate facades in the Concour. The use of less ornamentation and 'purity of materials' is clearly seen in the façades of de Monternal and Bousson. They still have decorative elements, such as around the top of the columns, but they are less elaborate. The materials are almost unadorned, with only occasional ornamentation. The structural elements are also simpler, the beams are unadorned and there is often a small decorative element at the top of a column. The windows seem to have been designed more for their function, to let in light, and are usually unadorned.

Comments on Art Nouveau by Loos and Muthesius show that the style was not always perceived positively. The parts that were criticised, such as the curved lines or the need for 'basic qualities of form, proportion, clarity and measure to be left unadorned'. Le Corbusier wrote about his ideas for what was later called Modernism in 1931, but his ideas began around the 1910s. These aspects show how these architects had an aversion to Art Nouveau and drastically changed these aspects in Modernism.

Finally, Art Nouveau seems to be a reason for the lack of ornamentation in Modernism. Critics mention many objections to elements of Art Nouveau, and these are simplified in parts of modernist facades.

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