





in the building were not good for the building's structure, either. So this moment could be the opportunity to reconcile the different needs of the devout and of the tourists in a better way.

As Notre Dame now benefits from a surplus of new funding for its restoration, those in charge must be careful not to change fundamental aspects of it. The monument should remain a living part of the city and not become isolated from it by a barrier and tickets that would turn it into a museum. Moreover, the restoration of Notre Dame must under no circumstances become an opportunity to impose a false history on the cathedral at the expense of what is extant. Something along these lines [recently played out at Chartres Cathedral](#), which sustained a decade of restoration that imposed a 21st-century interpretation of its pre-modern interior, at the loss of its many 13th- through 19th-century layers. The Venice Charter clearly states that a unity of style is not the goal of a restoration — the past should not be fabricated to align with people's imaginations or expectations of it. This is what some call “creative iconoclasm.” Whatever is done should be easily identifiable as different from the older parts and clearly documented as such to allow future generations to understand the past on their own terms.

Notre Dame was the first building constructed entirely in the Gothic style without any significant interruptions, from 1160 to about 1340. It remains one of only a few extant monuments in Paris that display architecture and architectural sculpture from the 12th through the 14th centuries relatively unaltered and legible as such. Its 19th-century restoration, limited mostly to the upper levels, parts of the exterior and the treasury, should be preserved as examples of that period's values and practices. Because there are so few examples like Notre Dame left in the very city that generated this architecture in the Middle Ages, this particularly important and historic cultural and political capital, we must work to preserve its historical integrity while maintaining its functionality as much as possible. Never simple, the past is instead messy, complex, and difficult to understand and interpret. In our drive to control an ever more unwieldy and unstable present, what will it take to preserve our past for the future?

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