

Greek Architecture

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Greek architects provided some of the finest and most distinctive buildings in the entire Ancient World and some of their structures, such as temples, theatres, and stadia, would become staple features of towns and cities from antiquity onwards. In addition, the Greek concern with simplicity, proportion, perspective, and harmony in their buildings would go on to greatly influence architects in the Roman world and provide the foundation for the classical architectural orders which would dominate the western world from the Renaissance to the present day.

Of all the ancient architectural styles, Greek architecture has proven to be the most enduring. Sure, the Egyptians built some impressive structures, and the Romans pulled off some amazing feats of engineering. But you don't see us building pyramids anymore - at least, nowhere but Vegas - and even Roman engineering marvels incorporated Greek form and style.

Greek architecture is more than just impressive, it is timeless. You don't have to dig in ruins to find Greek architecture; it's all around you. Go visit a civic structure, city hall, a theatre, a bank, a library, a museum.

Greek columns are found in many buildings of importance in the West.

Orders of Greek Columns

Greek columns come in three varieties, or orders: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. All three share the same fluted column, or drum. Where they differ is at the top, what is called the capital of the column. For of all the world's cities, none is more indebted to classical Greek architecture than Washington, DC.

. Yet there was more to Greek architecture than just columns. The Greeks built breathtaking temples, as well as treasuries, stadiums and theatres.

Temples

The basic Greek temple is a roofed rectangle surrounded by columns.. Decorations on the entablature separated by triglyphs are called metopes

Inside the temple was a smaller enclosure called a naos lined with its own columns. This was the holiest place of the temple and usually housed an idol of the deity for whom the temple was built. Sometimes the Greeks would switch up column styles within the naos, putting the hefty Doric on the outside and the delicate Ionic or Corinthian within.

Perhaps the most famous Greek temple is the Parthenon. The Athenians began building this temple to Athena in 447 BCE and did not complete it until 15 years later. Like all Greek city-states, the Athenians built their most impressive temples atop the highest point in town, called the acropolis (literally 'high city'). The Parthenon had all the elements of a Greek temple: the columns and entablature, the pediment full of sculptures. It even had the extra features: metopes depicting a battle between Centaurs and Lapiths, the second row of columns with their accompanying frieze depicting a civic procession of Athenians in exquisite detail, and, within, the naos, recreated here by the fine folks at Nashville's Centennial Park: big idol of Athena, delicate Ionic columns on the inside.

MATERIALS

The Greeks certainly had a preference for marble, at least for their public buildings. Initially, though, wood would have been used for not only such basic architectural elements as columns but the entire buildings themselves. Early 8th century BCE temples were so constructed and had thatch roofs. From the late 7th century BCE, temples, in particular, slowly began to be converted into more durable stone edifices; some even had a mix of the two materials. Some scholars have argued that certain decorative features of stone column capitals and elements of the entablature evolved from the skills of the carpenter displayed in more ancient, wooden architectural elements.

The stone of choice was either limestone protected by a layer of marble dust stucco or even better, pure white marble. Also, carved stone was often polished with chamois to provide resistance to water and give a bright finish. The best marble came from Naxos, Paros, and Mt. Pentelicon near Athens.