

FAQs

Explain the reasons why the skyscraper movement had to begin in Chicago of all places. Why not London. Paris or New York?

It is no mere accident that in the 1880s Chicago produced a group of architects, now known as the "First Chicago School," whose work would have a profound effect upon architecture.

Within a decade after the [fire of 1871](#), Chicago was a boomtown. By 1890 it had a population of more than a million people and had surpassed Philadelphia to become the second-largest metropolis in the United States. The value of land in the [Loop](#) soared. Quickly, the low buildings constructed just after the fire were seen as an inefficient use of valuable space.

While experiments with new technology were taking place in many cities, Chicago was the crucial laboratory. Industrial capital and civic pride drove a surge of new construction throughout the city's downtown in the wake of the 1871 fire.

The technical limits of weight-bearing masonry had imposed formal as well as structural constraints; suddenly, those constraints were gone. None of the historical precedents needed to be applied and this new freedom created a technical and stylistic crisis of sorts. A grammar for high-rise buildings were created and this evolved into Chicago school of architecture.

Explain the link between classical antiquity and the design of early skyscrapers and how they took inspiration from the classical antiquity.

While the technical innovations of the First Chicago School had been sensational, what it needed to become a truly notable architectural movement was style. Drawing inspiration from antiquity was crucial in developing character for Chicago school of architecture. The exterior of the Home Insurance Building, with its gray and green stone columns and its brick upper floors embellished by stone stringcourses and pilasters, was, to say the least, banal.

-The Louisiana-born architect Henry Hobson Richardson

Although he was trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, Richardson rejected the *école's* dictum that the Greek and Roman classical style was the ultimate standard of design. Instead, his ideal was the rugged Romanesque of the South of France. In 1870 on Boston's Commonwealth Avenue, Richardson designed the trailblazing Romanesque revival Brattle Square Church, whose tower fired the architectural aspirations of Boston native Louis Sullivan when he was a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And it was the revelatory presence of Richardson's Marshall Field Wholesale Store of 1885, filling the block bounded by Adams, Quincy, Wells, and Franklin Streets, that radically altered the design of Adler & Sullivan's Auditorium Buildings.

Louis Sullivan was not the only member of the First Chicago School to fall under the spell of Richardsonian Romanesque. It was essential to the designs of Solon S. Beman for the brick and granite Pullman Building of 1883 on Michigan Avenue and the Fine Arts Building of 1885, also on Michigan Avenue. Burnham & Root embraced the Romanesque for the Art Institute next to the Fine Arts Building and for the Rookery on LaSalle Street, completed in 1888. But it was Sullivan, with his interior of the Auditorium Theater and the entrance to the Chicago Stock Exchange of 1894 on LaSalle Street, who brought Chicago Romanesque to its most complete and impressive development.

Explain the life and works of Louis Sullivan with relevant quotes and sketches.

Louis Sullivan was an American architect, who is often referred as "the father of skyscrapers". The phrase "Form follows function" is attributed to him.

Historical context:

- He worked in partnership with Dankmar Adler, a structural engineer. Sullivan himself was more concerned with the artistic expression of skyscrapers rather than with their technical features.

- Sullivan is credited with being the first to give the high-rise building its unique visual expression as “*a proud and soaring thing*”.
- He wanted American architects to stop imitating buildings “*from other lands and other times*”. He envisioned an American architecture that was democratic and would reform and elevate society- an architecture “*of the people, for the people, by the people*”.
- Sullivan argued that a building’s structure should express its function, and he coined the famous architectural catchphrase “*form [ever] follows function*”. This became a central theme for much twentieth century architecture.
- The first skyscrapers did not emphasize their verticality. Instead they appeared more like a series of classically-inspired buildings piled one on top of another, as evident in Daniel Burnham’s *Rookery Building*, Chicago, 1888. In contrast Sullivan’s *Wainwright Building*, Buffalo, 1891 proclaims its tallness. Horizontal elements in the design is secondary to the verticals, in particular the series of unbroken brick- faced vertical piers.

Louis Sullivan’s Style –

With the *Wainwright Building* Sullivan solved the problem of how to design the newly developed skyscraper; by treating the structure as a classical column: the lower two floors form the *base*; floors three to nine a *fluted shaft*; and the ornate frieze and cornice on top form a *capital*.

Sullivan unified the facades of the *Wainwright Building* by treating them as grids of vertical and horizontal members. He emphasized the vertical members by broadening the corner piers and allowing them to rise freely to the cornice.

Between the windows Sullivan introduced thin vertical piers that visually connect the base and cornice, while the recessed, decorated spandrels beneath the office windows provides a counterpoint of less defined, horizontal lines. It is through this method of knitting the façade

together with vertical and horizontal accents that Sullivan created, by casting aside historic styles, a modern visual expression for the skyscraper.



Wainwright Building

Guarantee Building

St. Louis Missouri Buffalo, New York



Carson Pirie Scott Building,
Chicago, Illinois, 1904