



Sullivanesque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation

Ronald E. Schmitt

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Sullivanesque offers a visual and historical tour of a unique but often overlooked facet of modern American architecture derived from Louis Sullivan. Highly regarded in architecture for inspiring the Chicago School and the Prairie School, Sullivan was an unwilling instigator of the method of facade composition--later influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, William Gray Purcell, and George G. Elmslie--that came to be known as Sullivanesque. Decorative enhancements with botanical and animal themes, Sullivan's distinctive ornamentation mitigated the hard geometries of the large buildings he designed, coinciding with his "form follows function" aesthetic.

Sullivan's designs offered solutions to problems presented by new types and scales of buildings. Widely popular, they were also widely copied, and the style proliferated due to a number of Chicago-based interests, including the Radford Architectural Company and several decorative plaster and terra-cotta companies. Stock replicas of Sullivan's designs manufactured by the Midland Terra Cotta Company and others gave distinction and focus to utilitarian buildings in Chicago's commercial strips and other confined areas, such as the downtown districts of smaller towns. Mass-produced Sullivanesque terra cotta endured as a result of its combined economic and aesthetic appeal, blending the sophistication of high architectural art with the pragmatic functionality of building design.

Masterfully framed by the author's photographs of Sullivanesque buildings in Chicago and throughout the Midwest, Ronald E. Schmitt's in-depth exploration of the Sullivanesque tells the story of its evolution from Sullivan's intellectual and aesthetic foundations to its place as a form of commercial vernacular. The book also includes an inventory of Sullivanesque buildings.

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