Let us begin by considering Metz Cathedral, a remarkably typical example of a major restoration and its consequences. First, though, a few words of introduction: in this building one finds an arrangement that is unique for a Gothic cathedral. Originally it had no west doorway, the reason being that when the cathedral was being built, the space in front of its west front was completely occupied by the buildings of the old Episcopal palace, making a doorway neither necessary nor feasible. Not until the second quarter of the eighteenth century was a clear space created there, with the demolition of the defective palace. Now the need was felt for a main entrance at the west end. The most immediate reason for the implementation of the plan is fairly typical. While visiting Metz in 1744, Louis XV was suddenly taken seriously ill and there was little hope of his recovering. The Cathedral Chapter mustered its entire capacity for intercessions and masses and, lo and behold, Louis made a full recovery. By reason of this happy outcome, the Cathedral Chapter resolved to build an entrance in the new main façade. Blondel, the court architect, was commissioned for the work, and the creation he delivered was fully in keeping with the fashion of the time. Making a new addition to an old building in anything but the style of one’s own age has never occurred to any period apart from the past hundred years. Blondel’s period had too much confidence in its own art for things to be otherwise. The doorway provided the cue for a larger continuous architectural composition in which the architect endeavored to organize both the squares in front of the south and west fronts within certain uniform frames. The stout doorway was flanked by a couple of smallish pavilions, the buildings surrounding the west square were given the simple, uniform character so well-known to us from eighteenth-century France. Along the south side of the cathedral, a host of small “parasite buildings” had been erected in the course of the centuries. In fact, such buildings clustered round the majority of big churches in medieval times, and it is only during the past century that they have been consistently stripped away. Blondel, however, made use of the parasite buildings, refacing them with a continuous, uniform façade. Opposite, on the south side of the square, an imposing Hôtel de Ville was erected at about the same time, and on the eastern side a lower, elongated pavilion was provided for the palace guard. A piazza complex that must have been truly monumental in character had thus been created, and the cathedral did not lose out. The low buildings with their emphatic horizontals provided a contrast that was solely calculated to lend the huge, upward-soaring Gothic edifice a still more fantastic and gigantic aspect.

And thus the building stood, up until the 1860s and the commencement of its latest historical phase—the restoration phase. At the end of the 1860s, (i.e., still during the period of French sovereignty,) the parasite buildings on the south side began to be demolished. After all, they were anachronistic appendages—away with them! Besides, a church ought to stand unobstructed, visible from top to bottom. The work of demolition continued after the cathedral had passed into the hands of the German nation, and before long the south side had
been cleared completely. But the cathedral had sustained a grievous loss thereby. It seemed less huge because the scale of it had been lost. And it had also lost a great deal of its previous anchoring in the townscape. The treatment of a monument’s surroundings is a very important matter. The urge to isolate it and put it onto a presentation salver is a capital misconception. Friends of ancient monuments, therefore, hail with the utmost gratitude the support given them by modern urban planning architects in this respect. The latter have long been inveighing against such inartistic systems of isolation, and they need to! [...] 

[...] Having now opened up the south side, work on the structural system began. Its buttressing and vaulting had suffered damage over the years and given way. A number of flying buttresses and buttresses had to be rebuilt and others built anew. A measure of this kind is unobjectionable; if it is not taken, the building will collapse. It is in my view quite correct for the newly constructed arches and pillars to adhere strictly to the shape, technology, materials, and bonding of the old ones. There are those who contend that in such a case the buttress and arch must be built to a design agreeing with present-day architectural forms, as a man of the Renaissance or an architect of the Baroque would undoubtedly have done. What good would this do? Well, we would instantly perceive that this arch had been rebuilt in 1905. This is taking historic pretention too far. It is tantamount to the orthodoxy of the old stylistic purists. We are duty bound to try and preserve the historical documents that have come down to us, but we are definitely not duty bound to write the history of repairs in bold type for posterity. Scholars of the future ought in this connection to be amply served by the arrangement proposed by a French architect, M. Naef, for such cases; namely, to carve the inscription F. S. 1906 (facsimile 1906) on the newly erected part of the building, so that this sign will be readily apparent to those who seek it but will not obtrude on others. I wish, however, to make quite clear at this point that I am speaking solely of purely structural parts that cannot be left unrenovated without endangering the structural survival of the monument. But I do not wish automatically to extend this argument to the sculptural decoration or to structurally indifferent minor flaws, such as a missing crocket or a superficially dilapidated but otherwise healthy expanse of masonry or suchlike.

Replacement works are always to be regarded as a necessary evil, because through them we invariably lose something: scholarship loses an original document and the building is bereft of its most previous jewel—the patina! And what is an old building, or any other old work of art, without its patina? It is a flower with no fragrance. I believe most architects would concede that they often long for the day when their newly erected building will acquire a little of the patina that accumulates only with infinite slowness.

But how the patina has been maltreated in restorations everywhere! The treatment given to the patina is a touchstone of the architect’s—and even more, the relevant public’s—aesthetic sensibility. It takes a high degree of artistic culture to overcome the more primitive predilection for that which looks neat, newly polished, freshly painted, and burnished. I recall my utter astonishment in 1904 on finding the ancient baptismal font in Hildesheim Cathedral [sic] looking like a highly polished brass mortar, having seen it a few years previously with the soft patina of the centuries; the spring cleaning achievement of a pedantic verger! But then the ideal of church restoration is for the ancient church on the day of its reconsecration to look as if it had been completed yesterday, so that the obligatory newspaper report can justly proclaim how “the church in its new state is exceedingly smart and modern.” It is no coincidence that the heirs of Italy’s ancient civilization should be the very people who have had the understanding to appreciate such a fine product as patina and therefore exerted themselves, even when delving deep into the body of a building, to preserve its artistic apex.

In the special provisions that the Italian government has promulgated concerning the basic principles to be followed in the care of ancient buildings we read that the changes brought about by atmospheric influence and by more casual damage that do not impair the stability of
the building should be respected. With little prospect of success, however, I beg to address an earnest appeal to those who have any say in these matters to endeavor to ensure that the patinated surfaces of our churches and their furnishings be not unnecessarily scraped clean and polished. I hold no truck with sentimental or unreasonable *noli me tangere* principles. If an alteration is necessary for clear and incontrovertible material reasons, then let it be made frankly and straightforwardly, but spare us unnecessary burnishing for burnishing’s own sake.

Let us now return once more to Metz. In 1877 the roof was destroyed by fire; the result of a firework display put on by the joyful city to celebrate Kaiser Wilhelm’s first visit following the conquest. A new roof had to be constructed, and iron roof trusses were decided on. This was a wise precaution. The old roof, dating from 1468, had had a very low pitch and had been hipped over the transepts. A “real” Gothic church has a roof pitch of sixty degrees and apse gables, “so that’s what we must have,” the argument went. And so now we have a correctly steep roof and two correct gables. Needless to say the ancient, plain west end had to be rebuilt in the process, and the opportunity was taken to make it richly ornamented. The south tower, which hitherto had been by far the dominant feature, now barely reaches above the roof ridge. The building has lost its accent, so to speak. This does not escape the architect. “We must make a new accent,” he says. “We’ll build up the lower tower on the north side and make it much taller and lovelier than the south one.” This proposal, however, founders on the fact that the foundations are too weak. “Then we’ll make a tall ridge turret, because that’s what they have in Paris and Amiens.” A scheme is drawn up and approved and will shortly be put into effect if it has not already. We see here the consequences that can follow in the wake of such a stylistically correct enterprise. If you start in one place and then one thing leads to another, in the end little remains of the building’s ancient character. The last sacrifice in Metz was Blondel’s grand portal with its pavilions. It was replaced with a new, stylistically correct, extremely figural and magnificent Gothic narthex, the design and workmanship of which, *per se*, are nothing if not praiseworthy. No other work of imitation Gothic, to my knowledge, has been so superbly executed, especially as regards the sculptural decorations. It was consecrated in 1903 and the bill came to 1,300,000 marks.

Do we really have cause to rejoice in this elaborate restoration? I think not. Previously we had a uniform, monumental piazza composition, a nicely balanced overall picture of the cathedral and, all in all, an interesting and picturesque representation of historical evolution before our eyes. What have we acquired instead of all that, which has now been lost? An isolated and, consequently, shrunken, “stylistically pure” cathedral with three new variations on Gothic gable motifs and a new ornamental portal in an extinct style, in which a deft sculptor has played hide-and-seek with time. Beautifying, stylistic additions and supplements of this kind to ancient historic buildings should be rejected as resolutely as possible. Old buildings must not be allowed to become stylistic experiments, no matter how eminent the experimenter. Such treatment *always* detracts from a building’s historic interest and, more often than not, from its artistic merit. *Maintain and repair carefully, bring out what may peradventure be hidden, but otherwise leave the building alone.* […]

Quite a different state of affairs occurs, of course, when ancient monuments have to be enlarged and added to for practical reasons. Then architect should then have a completely free hand and be intent solely on accomplishing his task as practically and artistically as possible, quite unhampered by any bonds of stylistic catechism. If he is an artist (and no others should be let loose on such tasks) he will always try to harmonize his new work with the old, no matter whether he chooses a historical style or a freer, more modern design. And I would like to emphasize that we should not prevent the vocabulary of a more recent age from mingling its voice with that of the old styles. […]

We expect authenticity of the ancient, but we expect it of new things as well. Felicitous resolution of enlargement issues, however, calls for a good deal of tact and artistic
sensibility. Domineering modern attitudes can never be tolerated. Anyone placing their new addition next to the ancient monument without any understanding or love for it, mindful only of their self-assertion, is giving it the kiss of Judas. Better a plain, solid design adjoining a historic style than a costively contrived experiment in modern originality. Respect for the ancient monument! “But,” someone may object, “past ages, which always made additions and suchlike in the style of their own time and whose procedure today is considered so praiseworthy, did not respect the ancient monuments at all but ruthlessly refashioned them according to their ‘modern’ taste. But you expect us modern architects to show such consideration, and at the same time as you desire personal art.” Truly spoken! Very rarely indeed did past ages have an eye for earlier art. They considered their own to be uniquely right and proper, and therein lay both their strength and their weakness. But surely development has brought us to a new tread on the staircase? The nineteenth century dawned, with its powerful development of man’s “sense of history.” The more it developed, the more capacity we find for esteeming the different arts of past ages, one after the other. For a long time it looked as though this capacity would have to be bought at the price of losing faith in our own stylistic development and in our own innovative creativity—at least in the field of architecture—for what followed was an age of servile, abject imitation. But the reaction—the breakthrough—has come, and now once more we have a belief in our own art and in our own possibilities of development, just like in ages past. This process of development should leave us more richly endowed than previous ages. Not only can we warm our mind and feast our eye on the art of our own age, we can also look back with delight and understanding on the copious art treasures of past ages that the discoveries of historical science can make more and more vivid and manifoldly rewarding to us. This combination of belief in one’s own art and the ability to appreciate that of the past and to derive knowledge and happiness from it seems particularly characteristic of the endeavors of our time. God grant that our ancient art treasures can enable the future to discern those endeavors reasonably clearly! […]