

# **“The Renaissance in Spain”**

Plateresque, Griego-Romano and Churrigueresque Followed  
the Gothic in Quick Succession

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The article begins:

“While the main current of Spanish architecture remained national during the Gothic era, it was highly flavored by foreign influences, chiefly French. But after the fall of Granada, the rich art of the Moors was brought more forcibly to the attention of the Spanish artists, with the result that a Moresco-Gothic quickly followed. This soon gave way to Plateresque, so called because of the similarity of its surface decoration to the ornamentation used by gold and silver smiths, the Spanish name for such artisans being *plateros*....”

This article, which begins on the next page,  
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Doorway of the Hospital of Santa Cruz.

## THE RENAISSANCE IN SPAIN

Plateresque, Griego-Romano and Churrigueresque Followed  
the Gothic in Quick Succession

WHILE the main current of Spanish architecture remained national during the Gothic era, it was highly flavored by foreign influences, chiefly French. But after the fall of Granada, the rich art of the Moors was brought more forcibly to the attention of the Spanish artists, with the result that a Moresco-Gothic quickly followed. This soon gave way to the Plateresque, so called because of the similarity of its surface decoration to the ornamentation used by gold and silver smiths, the Spanish name for such artisans being *plateros*. The founders of the style were the members of the Egas family, coming originally from Brussels, and famous for their architectural ability. During the last half of the fifteenth century they were influenced by the goldsmith, Pedro Diez, who had returned to Toledo from Rome, bringing back with him

inspirations through contact with the early Renaissance while in Italy.

The Plateresque is characterized by tapestry-like detail, especially around the wall openings, with elaborately chiselled arabesques, broken entablatures, twisted shafts and florid escutcheons, usually interspersed with a mingling of Gothic in the archivolts, statues under niches and the like. A fine example of the earlier or transitional Plateresque is shown in the entrance to the hospital at Santa Cruz at Toledo, by Enrique de Egaz (about 1504); a still earlier work is the College of Santa Cruz at Valladolid, by the same architect, but here there is a smaller proportion of classic forms.

Most of the cathedrals of the early Spanish Renaissance are considerably more Gothic in their motif than Plateresque. The ones at Salamanca, Segovia, Toledo, for instance,

are nearly pure Gothic. The churches built after 1525, on the other hand, show Plateresque domination, as evidenced by the cathedrals at Malaga and Jaen. Siloë's Cathedral of Granada, with its domical sanctuary, is distinctly classic in style. Renaissance orders with frieze and cornice transform the Gothic piers, and the design and detail are alike interesting.

The secular structures of the period and the more unimportant ecclesiastical buildings were quicker to adopt Renaissance forms than the cathedrals. As early as 1497, when the University of Alcala de Heñares was founded, we see the use of Plateresque by Pedro Gumiel. Most of these works were two stories and basement, or even two stories, and had patios with arcades loaded down with minute ornamentation. The exteriors rarely showed all-over decoration, although several were so planned. The best known of these were the Casa de las Conchas, at Salamanca, and the Infantado Palace at Guadalajara. The former has shells carved over the whole front; the latter offers a spangling of diamond-shaped carvings. Some

of the patios were Moorish, rather than classic, as for instance, the courtyard in the Casa de Pilatos at Seville. The pure classicism of the early Renaissance was introduced, according to Sturgis, by the architect Pedro Ibarra, probably influenced by Berruguete. The latter had spent several years in Italy and had become familiar with the ideas of Michelangelo and Bramante. It was while Berruguete was employed as a sculptor at Saragossa that he co-operated with Ibarra in the erection of the Santiago College. Certainly, as Sturgis points out, the influence of the Cancelleria and the Court of S. Maria della Pace is readily evident.

This coldly classic style was called the Griego-Romano and it lasted until the middle of the seventeenth century. Besides the artists above mentioned, other well-known names closely connected with the period are Juan de Herrera, who planned the Valladolid Cathedral; Juan Battista, who began the Escorial; and Machuca, who began the Palace of Charles V. The Escorial is generally considered the masterpiece of the era, although it was not completed until about



Patio of the courtyard of the Casa de Pilatos at Seville.

150 years after its inception. The scale is colossal—it is a huge block about 740 by 580 feet, with towers at each angle and the whole mass dominated by the domed chapel, a church of the Doric order, but having campaniles capped by domed lanterns. The interior of the chapel is in some respects similar to St. Peter's in Rome, with heavy piers and coldly austere details. It is doubtful if the Escorial would attract as much attention if it were not for the majestic scale of the composition.

The Griego-Romano style was succeeded in part (and almost entirely in respect to the ecclesiastical works of Spain) by the Churrigueresque, a term used to describe the Spanish equivalent of the combined French barocco and rococo. Like its counterpart, this style was the result of a natural reaction induced by the over-severity of the Griego-Romano, and consisted of an exuberance of treatment. Carried to the extreme, as it was in the doorway of the hospital at San Fernando, at Madrid, and, in the Palace at

San Ildefonso, it violated the properties of architecture; but held in check by good taste, it produced buildings of real merit, as we see in the Cathedral of Murcia and the façade of Santo Domingo, at Salamanca. The designer of the former was Jaime Bort, who flourished during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Curiously enough the name given to the type was that of the head of a family of architects who dominated Spanish architecture while the barocco craze was at its zenith, but who was otherwise of no special ability. This man, Jose Churriguera, was the royal designer for Charles II, and his principal work was the San Cayetano at Madrid.

His pupils, the Quinones, are famous chiefly for the Plaza Mayor of Salamanca. The Churrigueresque was marked by a profuse use of colored marbles, and one may gain some idea of the manner in which these materials were handled by a study of the chapel of San Isidoro Labrador in Madrid.



View of the principal stairway in the Palace at Madrid.