

Where Modernism in the Built Environment Begins

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## **Introduction**

There is no clear beginning or singular building that can be marked as the start of modernism in architecture (A brief history on the beginning of modern architecture,2019, [www.rostarchitects.com](http://www.rostarchitects.com)). However, several independent strands of ideas were developing in Europe around the turn of the century (the 1800s-1900s) that show a clear connection to the movement (A brief history on the beginning of modern architecture,2019, [www.rostarchitects.com](http://www.rostarchitects.com)). The buildings that resulted from these ideas could all be strongly associated with the notions of progress, technological advancement, industrialization, and the development of new building materials (A brief history on the beginning of modern architecture,2019, [www.rostarchitects.com](http://www.rostarchitects.com)).

Personally, I believe that although Modernism belongs to Modern architecture, the time of its emergence is different. Modern architecture generously provided the platform and background for the emergence of modernism and without achievements and updated engineering structures, new materials discovered and etc, it was not possible for modernism to begin.

With reference to key architectural studies, this essay discusses regard emerging modernism; What is the difference between Modern Architecture and Modernism? When did the Modern Architecture movement begin? And when did the Modernism style emerge?

## **Modern Architecture and Modernism**

“Many people confuse the term modernist with modern” (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

“These two philosophies of modern architecture produced both a style and a way of building in the modern world— either tied to the earth or informed by the manmade materials (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). There are a lot of nuances within the thought of those two schools,” says

Carl Abbott, FAIA, and founding member of the Sarasota School of Architecture movement, a regional version of modernism (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

Modern architecture revolution in architecture begins with the use of iron, glass, and reinforced concrete to build stronger, lighter, and taller structures (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). In 1848, a sheet of cast glass was discovered that allowed every large windows to be produced (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). The Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph Paxton at the 1851 London exhibition, is considered the first example of modern architecture (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

The emergence of new materials and techniques inspired architects to move away from the neoclassic and eclectic models that dominated European and American architecture in the late 19th century (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). This break with the past is mentioned in the 1872 book “Entretiens sur L’Architecture” as follows;

“We can start a new architecture using the tools and knowledge that our time has given us, without traditions that are no longer obsolete today. Material for each function; its own form and ornament for each material.” Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

Building materials, as well as building types, have changed. Reinforced concrete, Steel, aluminum, and glass became popular materials of the new era of architecture, Architects began experimenting with new techniques with these new materials, which gave them more design freedom (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). Reinforced Concrete, which can be molded as desired and create large spaces, has replaced stone and brick as the main materials for modernist architects (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). In 1903-1904, in Paris, Auguste Perret and Henri Sauvage

built reinforced concrete apartment structures with concrete previously used only for industrial buildings (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

The development of science, technology, and industry brought with it a new system of thought. After the First World War, the 1920s was a period of utopia (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). In this period, the new architecture had to be different from the styles of the past (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). 19th-century architecture based on imitation and eclecticism and exaggerated decorations should have been avoided, the subjects, materials, and technology of the age were also very different from the previous period (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). Different building needs such as airports, hangars, many industries, and sports facilities arose (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). The concept of housing, on the other hand, would gain a whole new meaning and dimension in the 20th century (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

Geometric Modern continues the design language and many of the ideas of the Bauhaus and International Style through the work of the originators and their followers(Harwood,2012, p.684). Key characteristics include functionalism, geometric forms, little applied decoration, and new materials and technologies (Harwood,2012, p.684). During the period, Geometric Modern architecture and design enter the mainstream, particularly in the United States, which becomes the world leader of Modernism (Harwood,2012, p.684).

Modernism is a general term describing a broad design movement with many regional and stylistic interpretations (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). It evolved from two schools of thought — the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and the machine-like, industrial aesthetic of the Bauhaus School in Germany (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

In his introduction to *Modernism in Design*, Paul Greenhalgh outlined key features in modernist design including function, progress, anti-historicism and social morality (A.Rowe,2011, [www.inquiriesjournal.com](http://www.inquiriesjournal.com)).

By the middle of the 20th century, reinforced concrete shells (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). Highly curved surfaces, three-dimensional space Lattice systems, and suspended-tension structures led to the emergence of brand-new forms in architecture (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)). Structural engineers, who think and act like architects, have a great role in such designs (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

Thus, the possibilities provided by new materials and structural methods made a new architecture both necessary and possible that would respond to the needs of a constantly urbanizing modern society (Decombo,2022, [www.decombo.com](http://www.decombo.com)).

Modern is anything that is done today. Modernist refers to a style and philosophy of architecture that originated in the 1920s, peaked in the '50s and '60s, went away for 30 years, and now is coming back in popularity,” says George Smart, founder and executive director of USModernist, an online archive, and catalog of modernist homes and architects (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

### **What is the difference between Modernity and Modernism?**

“These two philosophies of modern architecture produced both a style and a way of building in the modern world— either tied to the earth or informed by the manmade materials (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). There are a lot of nuances within the thought of those two schools,” says Carl Abbott, FAIA, and founding member of the Sarasota School of Architecture movement, a regional version of modernism (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

## Modernity

Modernity is a broad term encompassing several concepts, but in particular it refers to a historical period that saw the evolution of capitalism and industrialization (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). The time period that is known for rational and secular thinking is the one that is characterized as modernity (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). Though modernity is close in meaning to modernism and all things modern, but it is talked mainly in terms of a specific time period that is said to have started in the 15th century and continues till date (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). Modernity has nothing to do with philosophy, and it restricts itself to social relations, mainly between the capitalists and the working class (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). The rise and fall of communism, Marxism, and all other related intellectual movements are embraced by the concept of modernity (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). For the purpose of analysis and deep study, the period called modernity is divided into three distinct phases referred to as early modernity (from 1453 to 1789), classical modernity (from 1789 to 1900), and finally, late modernity that is said to have started in 1900 and lasted till 1989 (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)).

## Modernism

In general, a person who can be considered as modern has attributes that reflect modernism (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). Modernism is reflected in behavior, thought, and action (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). However, the term modernism arose mainly in reference to all the

artistic and cultural movements that arose primarily in response to wide scale changes in the society on account of industrialization in 19th and 20th centuries (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). The development of cities with mighty industrial empires and migration from rural areas to urban areas characterizes the concept of modernism (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). The wars in Europe and the two world wars shaped the world and hastened the emergence of a modern world (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). Modernism gave birth to self consciousness and realization that is reflected in the works of prominent artists of the times (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)). Their path breaking works that inspired generations were labeled as avant-garde till the concept of modernism arrived (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)).

## **Conclusion**

Modern architecture began in the U.S. in the late 19th century with the industrial revolution as railroads carved paths across the country and telegraphs, telephones, and movies opened communication and spread ideas (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

“Modern architecture was going on in many places around the world, but its earliest and most fully formed ideas were rooted in America,” says Alan Hess, architect, author, and preservationist (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). Hess serves on the board of Palm Springs Modernism Week and the California State Resources Commission. “So much of modernist history we don’t know yet. We are only now redrawing the picture of what modern architecture is.” (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

Engineers planted the early seeds of the movement with never-seen-before structures, including the Crystal Palace, housing the Great Exhibition in London 1851, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). These engineered buildings became a catalyst for modernism, showcasing the potential of new, mass-produced materials and building methods (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). Architects and the public began to take notice and turned away from reinterpreting historical styles to focus on something new, modern, fresh, and experimental (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).

Modernity is a time period whereas modernism refers to the trends in art, culture and social relations that are characterized by development of a modern world (Difference between modernity and modernism,2012, [www.differencebetween.com](http://www.differencebetween.com)).

Legendary architect and product designer Michael Graves once said, “The future is rooted in the past because we are looking backward and forward.” (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)). At its core, modernism is this creative dance of using present-day technology and materials to build structures while looking to the past and the future (LeBlanc,2021, [www.homelight.com](http://www.homelight.com)).



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