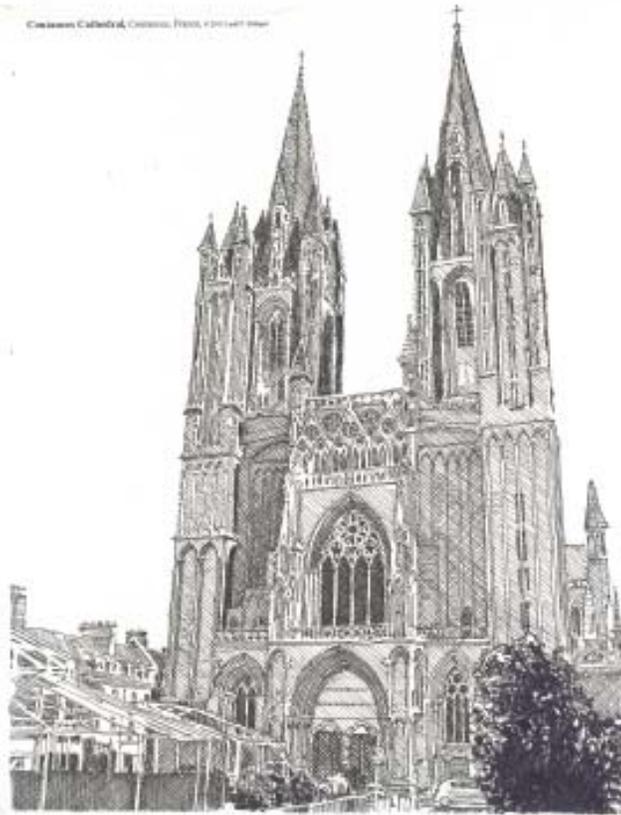




ARCHITECTURE

EHLINGER & ASSOCIATES

SECOND QUARTER



COUTANCES CATHEDRAL
Normandy, France

The article in quotes below was published in our newsletter of Second Quarter 1996. At that time the front of the cathedral was covered over with scaffolding, so the view sketched was the rear. On a recent trip, the front was now visible, and this issue's sketch is the result. The only other church where we have done two sketches is at Notre Dame in Paris. Like Notre Dame, Coutances is of a quality level that almost demands two drawings.

This issue's sketch also marks the one hundredth sketch and newsletter since we started doing the newsletters at the beginning of 1988, twenty-five years total. There was a two quarter interruption in newsletters in 2005 as a result of Hurricane Katrina, as there was no bulk mail service from the New Orleans area for six months afterwards. Otherwise, this milestone would have been reached in the fourth quarter of 2012.

"Coutances Cathedral is one of the

purest examples of Norman Gothic in existence. This occurred because it was built over an extremely short period of time - 55 years (1220-75), and because the characteristics of Norman architecture are so strong to begin with. It also is one of the most consistent in style Gothic buildings because of the short construction period.

Norman architecture, even in the vernacular, has many tall narrow proportioned elements, usually with tall pointed cone type roofs, all with a stark and sparsely decorated appearance. The Norman cathedrals that were in the Romanesque style such as Abbaye aux Hommes and Abbaye aux Dames, both at Caen, exhibit these characteristics as did the predecessor church at Coutances that burned. The predecessor was designed

by Geoffroy de Montbray, and the footprint of the building as well as most of the remains of the fire were incorporated and transformed into a Gothic style building.

The west front is framed by two soaring towers composed of multiple, narrow towers, with the flanking ones taller. The view in this edition's limited edition signed print by Ladd P. Ehlinger is of the south transept with the striking octagonal lantern on top of the crossing and a portion of the chevet on the east end with the flying buttresses that daringly leap over the double ambulatory.

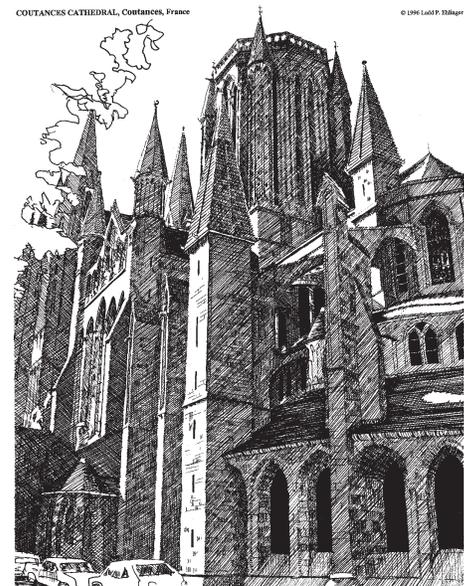
Coutances is worth going out of your way to see. It occupies a hillock on the Cotentin peninsula and is the religious and political center. The town was originally a Roman settlement named Cosedia. It changed its name to Constantia in the 3C. This Roman name

ultimately evolved into the French "Coutances" over the centuries."



The lantern is the most striking feature of this cathedral. There is a dome over the clerestory lighting, all expressed within the cathedral as well as on the exterior. The keystone of the lantern dome is 134' above the floor of the crossing. The interior is also unusual in that there is no triforium. It was eliminated to make the arches taller that carry the groin vaults.

One final comment about the consistency of style of Coutances: the two west front towers are not identical. They are very similar, but have very subtle differences in architectural organization. Its not nearly as dramatic as that at Chartres, but they are different.



Social Engineering Through Architecture Part II: The Automobile

Before the industrial revolution, travel was a commodity limited to walking and horses. The roads and urban planning of communities were designed around those modes, as was the architecture.

When trains became commonplace, roads and urban planning changed to accommodate them; the tracks were “super” roads, akin to fast rivers. Cities either thrived or failed based on how close they were to the train tracks. The first suburbs were born; communities built specifically around train tracks serving cities, for those who could afford to leave the city.

The philosophy and architecture of housing and buildings, however, didn’t change greatly because of trains. People still walked or used horses to get to and from the trains, and buildings stayed pretty much the same.

It wasn’t until the automobile that architecture, along with society, saw major transformations in the way buildings interacted with transportation. Freed from the train tracks, horse and carriage, and their own legs, people used the automobile to move away from the large cities. But not too far, as they still had to commute to work. The result was a mish-mash of planning techniques for suburban developments, with sprawling winding roads intended to mimic gently winding country roads; places to which suburban dwellers desired to be moving, without truly being separated from the city life. Roads which, without an automobile, no one would ever deliberately plan, as they are directionally confusing, and very long to walk compared to a gridded street layout. Concerns which a car removes.

The freedom of movement that came with the automobile also brought changes



Twisting, winding, curvy suburban development road planning.



Poorly designed, overpowering garage.

to the houses people live in. The most obvious of these changes being the garage, an overpowering visual element, particularly when placed on the front of a house. The house pictured above visually proclaims that its garage is more important than the entrance to the house. A design like this is so common that most people would not even question it, even if they don’t like the house itself. Design decisions like this, whether we agree with them or not, have precedent.

Two famous architects, both car lovers, incorporated the automobile into their philosophy of design. Their solutions helped define how architecture and automobiles would interact for generations; sometime with disastrous results.

Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps the most famous American architect, was one of the first to design buildings to accommodate the automobile. In fact, he coined the word “Carport”, designing both attached and detached garages and carports, even incorporating them into his design philosophy for residences.

On most Wright houses, the first thing one encounters is the carport, with the house entrance either hidden or set back from the street view, though Wright did so with much more grace and aplomb than that pictured above.

At the same time, however, his decision to do so had a spiralling effect on the way subsequent designers treated the house and the automobile. Wright’s philosophy of the residential was that everything important happened inside, and the house turned its back on the street, ignoring its neighbors. The focus of the house was on its fireplace, the source of comfort, and every other use issued forth around it. While his design philosophy had a nice structure and appeal to it, making for some very wonderfully designed spaces, both by him and many multitudes of architects who followed in his steps, the deliberate choice to isolate the house and its functions from



Street View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Malcom-Willey House, 1965.



Street View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Herbert-Jacob's House, 1937.



Street View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Goetsh-Winkler House, 1939.

the surrounding neighborhood had consequences: the social isolation of the suburban family.

It’s arguable that this social isolation was partially inevitable simply by the use of the automobile (and then later the TV and the Air Conditioner), and that Frank Lloyd Wright’s design solution was a foresight of, and not contributor to this problem. By accepting the isolation up front, and focusing on the social impact of the family and visitors within the house, Wright was struggling to not only accommodate the automobile, but its potential problems as well.

Regardless of Wright’s intent, his philosophy of turning the function of a house inwards and rejecting its larger role as part of a community became a standard practice of many suburban designs.

The second architect of note who set precedent designing for automobiles is Le Corbusier, a famous French architect whose impact on modern and international architecture is still felt today. For the next issue....

R. Perrin Ehlinger