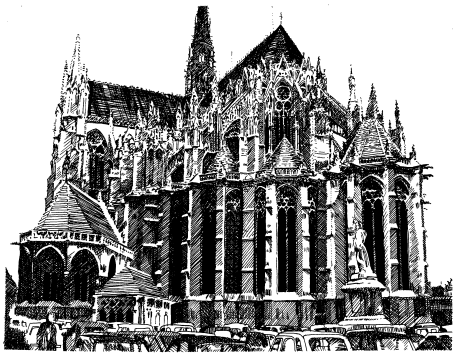
ARCHITECTURE

EHLINGER & ASSOCIATES **SECOND QUARTER 1997**



AMIENS CATHEDRAL

The Cathedral of Amiens is the subject of this issue's limited edition signed print by Ladd P. Ehlinger, AIA. The view in the print is of the rear of this Gothic cathedral from the east southeast looking toward the west. We can thank the architect and historian Viollet-le-Duc, who was the Amiens diocesan architect from 1849 to 1874, for the fact that one can see the cathedral in its entirety from nearly any vantage point around the perimeter. He cleared out buildings that blocked the view of this magnificent structure, while he was restoring various portions of it.

The present facility was begun not only to replace the previous cathedral that had burned before 1220, but to provide a suitable repository for the holy relic, the head of St. John the Baptist, that the Canon of Picquigny, Wallon de Sarton, brought from Constantinople in 1206 during the Fourth Crusade to Amiens. Amiens also became the church of St. Firmin the Confessor, because his church was torn down to make room for the new Cathedral along with the Hôtel-Dieu and the Bishop's Palace. The Bishop who laid the cornerstone in 1220 was Evrard de Fouilloy.

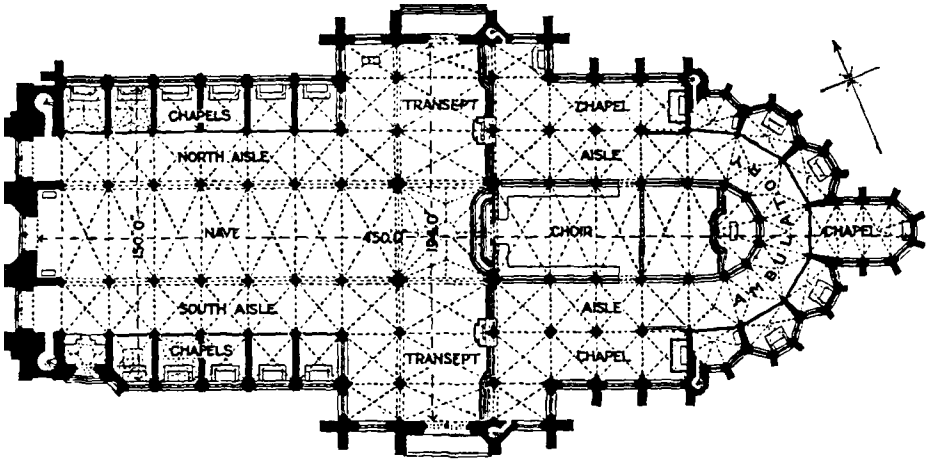
The writer had the privilege of being brought to visit the Treasury of the Cathedral in the Crypt (basement) by his French cousins, the DuRivault's, who were residents of Amiens in the 1970s. There he viewed the holy relic (a rather gruesome sight -- it actually looks like a shrunken monkey's head), as well as St. Firmin's Shrine, the Processional Cross, the Reliquary in the form of a crown, and the vase-reliquery. These objects were collected in the 19th century as most of the treasure was looted during the Revolution. One wonders if the head of St. John the Baptist is truly the one brought back in the 13th century or not, and if so, if it really is the Saint's actual head!

Amiens Cathedral is very much typically French Gothic, in the genre of Reims and Notre Dame of Paris. It is 450 feet long, oriented with the main entrance facing west, and a rounded end or chevet on the east with seven radiating chapels from each bay of the choir, and little projection at the transept or crossing. Like most Gothic cathedrals, it was built over a long period of time, but the majority of the work was begun in 1220 and finished by 1270. The nave (main portion of the church) was begun first, which is very unusual. It was completed in 1236, which is when worship began.

The main or west facade was completed in 1366 along with the south transept towers. Minor additions (chapels, choir screens, pulpits, railings, etc.) took place over the next 200 years. The original architect, the "MAÎTRE d'ŒVRE", was Robert de Luzarches, and then followed by Thomas de Cormont and his son Renaut, both of whom respected de Luzarches design. This, along with the speed of the initial construction, explains the impressive unity of design of the original construction.

The main vaults of the nave are 140 feet high with a span of 150 feet, giving the impression of soaring height to the observer. The roof structure on top of the vaults is of wood, with the ridge at 200 feet above the ground. The slender flèche at the crossing of the transept is also of timber and soars 180 feet above the roof. The interior woodwork comprising the choir screen is famous and inspiring.

During the Revolution little damage was inflicted on the cathedral. Nor was there much damage during the two World Wars. Most of the "damage" to the building appears to have been the result of uninformed and amateurish restorations of minor parts, and the destruction of most of the original stained glass by the monks themselves in later centuries because they complained that they could not get enough light to see by. Opacity is typical of the glass of the period that was installed originally.



AMIENS CATHEDRAL

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REVENGE OF THE WOODPECKERS

Recently, the writer gave a seminar talk to the CSI (Construction Specifications Institute) Chapter in Huntsville about Forensic Architecture. The damaged building aspect of the talk was illustrated with the following story:

In 1968, the writer had built two four plex apartment buildings for his own account, being young and ambitious, and creditworthy enough for a business loan, but not a house loan. He also had joined the Audubon Society that year.

These apartments were of wood frame and brick veneer construction on the first floor and wood frame with redwood plywood siding on the second level which overhung the first level. The windows on the second level had a fin and roof cap motif design, also built of the redwood plywood in part.

The first apartment to be finished was the writer's, which was moved into shortly before Christmas in 1968. Awakened in the morning after the first nocturnal residence on a Saturday by a banging noise similar to the hammering of a nail, he wondered why any carpenters were there on a Saturday. He opened the bedroom window to see and was just in time to see a large bird with a small red tuft of feathers on the back of his head fly away and noted that the banging noise had stopped. The remainder of this bird's coloring was tan and brown on the wings and white on the belly with some yellow markings also.

The hammering noise was repeated the following morning, and again on Monday morning. Sightings were made of additional birds. Inspection of the buildings indicated that the birds were damaging the plywood siding in the corners of the fins at the windows. He asked his partner who was knowledgeable about birds if he knew what this bird was. The answer was that they were flickers, a type of woodpecker.

The manufacturer of the plywood, Simpson, was called in California to determine if this problem had ever occurred before, and if the plywood was an attractant to the birds. Simpson referred the writer to a California State Forester, who in turn referred to a U.S. Forest Service friend in Memphis: who opined that the birds were in fact flickers, that they were very destructive, that they typically attacked under the eaves of vacant buildings to build a nest, that vacation homes in Tennessee were sometimes totally destroyed by flickers, and that the only way to get rid of the birds was to kill the lead bird. The remainder of the flock would leave if the leader were killed.

An experienced hunter friend recommended and lent his 22 rifle with cartridges full of bird shot that would kill the birds and not break the glass or damage the siding. Several birds had to be killed before the remainder of the flock were driven off. The writer's Audubon Society membership flew off with them. The total damage to the buildings was over $1,500 -- a considerable sum at that time.

The morning after telling the CSI Chapter this story, the writer was awakened by a fast rhythmic banging noise, similar to that of an air hammer. He scrambled out the door, not bothering to turn off the alarm, to see in the dim first light a bird fly away from the flat roof of the building. It was not bright enough to see the coloring of the bird, but it was not as large as a flicker, and the banging had a different rhythm. Now the alarm service had to be satisfied. The bird sighting prompted an inspection of the roof and its appurtenances to find any damage. None was noted. No birds returned the next day.....

WELCOME ABOARD

Roy J. Guderian, AIA has rejoined the staff of E&A in the New Orleans office after an eleven year hiatus. Roy previously spent five years with us and was Project Architect for the Woodson Junior High School project for Orleans Parish School Board, the Audubon Elementary School for the Jefferson Parish School Board, and the Division Place Office Building for the Division Place Partnership.

Roy graduated from Tulane University in 1953 with a Bachelor of Architecture degree, then spent four years with the U. S. Air Force Installation Engineers fulfilling his military obligation. When released, he did post graduate work with a four year Fellowship with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin East in Spring Green, WI and Taliesin West in Scottsdale, AZ. Mr. Wright, proclaimed a genius by most critics and certainly the most notable architect in America, was still alive and kicking at the beginning of this experience which made it a very memorable one.

Roy holds Louisiana architectural license and an NCARB (National Council of Architectural Registration Boards) certificate.

Experienced in every aspect of the practice of Architecture, from design, to multi-disciplined coordination, to Life Safety, to Building Code requirements, cost estimating, space planning, contract documents production, and contract administration, Roy is a welcome and reliable addition to the E&A staff.