

Cultural Experience: Notre-Dame Basilica

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On November 2, 2018, I visited the [Notre-Dame Basilica](#) in Montreal, Canada. The basilica is among the many fascinating and historic sites in Old City Montreal. I visited Montreal in 2016 and was in awe of this National Historic Site of Canada. I attempted to take the tour inside the Basilica, but the long lines and Summer sun deterred me. Nonetheless, during my recent visit, a short line and crisp Fall weather prevailed.

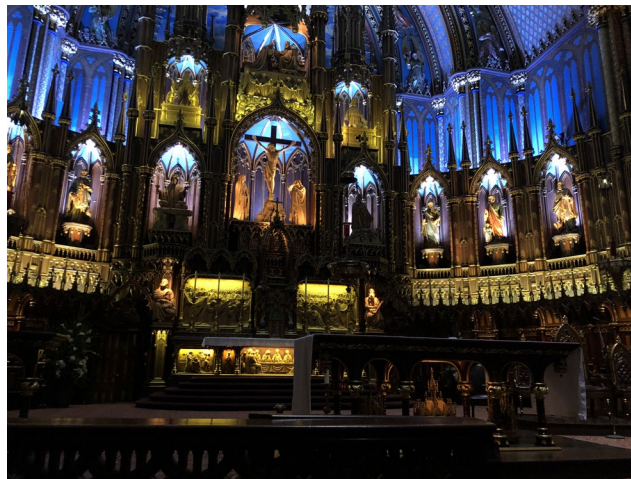
Built in 1672 as the church of Notre-Dame, and later reconstructed by James O'Donnell, an Irish-American Anglican who converted to Catholicism, the Notre-Dame Basilica is a Gothic Revival (commonly referred to as Victorian Gothic or neo-Gothic) style of architecture, an architectural movement that began in the late 1740s in England (Discover Notre-Dame Basilica: History). “The Gothic grew out of the Romanesque architectural style, when both prosperity and relative peace allowed for several centuries of cultural development and great building schemes” (V. Spanswick). The word Gothic, derived from the Goths, an alleged barbaric group who reigned in various regions throughout Europe between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the inception of the Holy Roman Empire from the 5th to the 8th century (V. Spanswick). As a result of their power during that period, the term Gothic began to apply to a type of architectural style (V. Spanswick).



*Notre-Dame Basilica, Montreal, Canada, 2016. Image Credit: Denrique Preudhomme
The Basilica suggests the Gothic style*

The Notre-Dame Basilica has daily mass from Monday through Friday: 7:30 am and 12:15 pm; Saturdays: 5:00 pm; and Sundays: 8:00 am, 9:30 am, 11:00 am, and 5:00 pm. “Masses on Saturday and Sunday are accompanied by the organ. Sunday Mass at 11:00 am is accompanied by the organ and the Notre-Dame Basilica Choir” (Pastorial Services: Masses and Adoration). However, guided tours of 20 minutes are held daily in French and English. Admission: adults \$6, and adolescents \$4. Children under 6 are admitted free. Special events: weddings, funerals, etc. are regularly held at the basilica. In fact, during my visit to the basilica, a funeral was in procession, and public visitors were asked to respect the family of the deceased by refraining from taking pictures. The tour guide refrained from talking and allowed the procession to exit the basilica before proceeding with the tour.

The interior of the basilica was redesigned between 1866 and 1882 by Montreal architect, Victor Bourgeau, under the direction and supervision of parish priest, Victor Rousselot (Discover Notre-Dame Basilica: Interior Design). The design was inspired by the [Sainte-Chapelle](#) in Paris, another Gothic style structure. “The most fundamental element of the Gothic style of architecture is the pointed arch, which was likely borrowed from Islamic architecture” (V. Spanswick). The pointed arch was designed to relieve stress on other structural elements of churches. The basilica bears the quintessential pointed arches. The altar of the basilica is a center-piece that illustrates the holy Eucharist, a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice. At the top of the altarpiece, a sculpture of the Virgin Mary is seen being crowned by her son. Six polychrome statues represent Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and evangelists, Mathew, Luke, Mark and John. The altar also displays artifacts indicative of Roman Catholic/Christian practices such as the Tabernacle, renderings of the angels in adoration, and the Last Supper. At the back of the church, the esthetically stunning organ took my breath away with approximately 7,000 pipes measuring from 10 meters (32 feet) and the smallest, 6mm (1/4 in) (Discover Notre-Dame Basilica: Interior Design). The stained-glass windows depict Montreal’s social and religious history, which is indicative of the concept of art—an esthetic expression of cognitive ability and historic knowledge that becomes visually appealing to audiences. Quebec artist, Jean-Baptiste Lagacé designed the cartoon-like images. The details are simply stunning, and my heightened visual acumen—keen attention to things (art, people, animals, etc.) existing in an environment—was drawn to lighting, shade, font, and symbolic colors of the renderings on the stained-glass.



The Altar, Notre-Dame Basilica, Montreal, Canada, 2018. Image Credit: Denrique Preudhomme



The Organ, Notre-Dame Basilica, Montreal, Canada, 2018. Image Credit: Denrique Preudhomme

As I followed the tour, I noticed visitors were in complete respect of the basilica as a place of worship. They whispered to communicate with each other. I also notice a significant number of families with small children sitting in prayer. According to George Holden, in his book *Parenting: A Dynamic Perspective*, religion “share an emphasis on the family and encourage parents to devote considerable time and attention to their children.” Since I was raised catholic and still practice Catholicism, the experience was especially interesting and moving. Although I was touring the basilica, I practiced the rituals of Catholicism from the minute I entered to the minute I left. At the entrance of the church I dipped my fingers in holy water and made the sign of the cross, bowed at the altar, and genuflected before sitting on pews.

In general, my experience at the basilica made me realize that art has no boundaries. This made me think about the relevance of intercultural experience in order to foster globalization. Art is appreciated and respected in everyday life regardless of religious practice, race, culture, gender, or political belief. Art brings people together. People traveled from all over the world to admire and respect a national historic site in Canada. This proves, art is truly an esthetic expression of cognitive ability and historic knowledge that becomes visually appealing to various audiences.

Works Cited

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Artwork Title

Preudhomme, Denrique. *Notre-Dame Basilica*. The Creative Writer, Montreal. Photo.

Preudhomme, Denrique. *The Altar, Notre-Dame Basilica*. Montreal. Photo.

Preudhomme, Denrique. *The Organ, Notre-Dame Basilica*. Montreal. Photo.