

FINIAL OF THE CHURCH OF THE SAGRADA FAMILIA
BARCELONA, SPAIN
BY ANTONIO GAUDÍ

The church of the Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) is Antonio Gaudí's best known work. It is also the work with which he was involved throughout his life. Born in 1852 the son of a Catalan coppersmith, Gaudí graduated from the University of Barcelona School of Architecture in 1878. Joining the Barcelona architect Villar, Gaudí succeeded him as chief architect of the Sagrada Familia in 1883. Over the next ten years, the crypt, chevet walls and pinnacles were completed after Villar's Neo-Gothic plans. Gaudí's remarkable imagination, however, is already apparant during this time in a number of projects he executed, particularly for the Guell family.

In the following decade he and his skilled masons and sculptors constructed the lower part of the transept's east facade. The sculptural décor of the portals displays a variety of floral forms ranging from the naturalistic to the abstract. They seem to contradict the traditional character of the figurative parts as well as the architectural frame. But the transformation into vegetative forms was as inherent in the Gothic elements as it was logical in Gaudí's development: the beginning of his search for an equivalent of what he called "God's architecture."

Under the influence of the several contemporary Art Nouveau tendencies Gaudí arrived at a style in which the organic forms become autonomous and grow into space -- a style which is the very expression of his singular sculptural sense. The Park Guell (1900-14), The Casa Batlló (1905-7), and the Casa Milà (1905-10) popularly known as "The Quarry" are considered Gaudí's most important contributions to modern architecture. Being an architect he was as interested in structural problems as in formal invention. His investigations of curved shapes and even of hyperbolic paraboloids, often conducted with intricate test models, led to the original solutions in the school of the Sagrada Familia and the chapel of Santa Coloma.

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