CHAPTER 12

Living as Befits a Knight: New Castles in Seventeenth-Century Holland

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1 Introduction: Seventeenth-Century ‘Gothic’ Architecture

From the 1630s onwards, the ideal of building according to principles of ‘true’ architecture as formulated in Antiquity by Vitruvius and more recently by Italian architects like Palladio and Scamozzi, had become decisive in the further development of Dutch architecture.1 The Mauritshuis in The Hague (1633–1644) was one of the first convincing specimens of this new building style. Thanks to Huygens’ mediation, Jacob van Campen became involved not long afterwards in one of the Prince of Orange’s key construction projects: in 1639, he designed the new front façade of, and oversaw an extensive renovation of, the Oude Hof at Noordeinde in The Hague, now known as Noordeinde Palace. From that moment on, Italianate Classicism came to be regarded as the Republic’s courtly style and went on to be imitated widely in the country, both among the nobility and by the civic authorities and leading bourgeoisie. Town halls, grand houses along the cities’ canals, churches and orphanages – almost all new public and private construction projects were designed in the new style from about 1640 onwards. Even in the instances where the result was not a runaway success, the Classical idiom was at least applied as façade ornamentation. It seemed that there was no interest in Gothic architectural forms in this climate. Where they were discussed in texts, they tended to be dismissed as the epitome of an antiquated building style, and some writers, aping a handful of influential Italian theorists of art, even called these forms ‘barbaric’ on...
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occasion. Nevertheless, there were some rare situations where the clean-lined classical idiom of the day was deliberately passed over in favour of the “old-fashioned” idiom of Gothicism. In fact, this was the case across Europe.

Most cases where Gothic applications were chosen were in the completion or extension of mediaeval churches, where preserving the unity of architectural style trumped the consideration of making a single component of the building a showcase of contemporary building. Examples of this from the Province of Holland include the “Gothic” designs of Jacob van Campen, circa 1645, for the (never-completed) tower of the Nieuwe Kerk on the Dam in Amsterdam, and the new vestry (1658) of St. Bavo’s church in Haarlem by Salomon de Bray [Fig. 12.1]. Even new churches built in a more up-to-date idiom often sported emphatically recognisable long, narrow windows with tracery redolent of the traditional church windows of the Middle Ages. In recognition of their origins, German sources of the age literally call them Kirchenfenster (church windows) or describe them as ‘windows in ecclesiastical style’ (kirchischer Stil). In many seventeenth-century Protestant churches in the Netherlands, too, elongated windows with modern tracery were installed, such as in Hendrick de Keyser’s churches in Amsterdam [Fig. 12.2], the Marekerk in Leiden, and the Nieuwe Kerk in The Hague. Evidently, this was a way of denoting a building, be it

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