2.1

Figure 2.1 The Circus, Bath

Figure 2.2 The Colosseum, Rome

2.2

would look boring. When an elevation contains too many identical visual elements they coalesce and read as a single object with a tendency to also bore the viewer. Five distinct elements appears to be the lower limit where choice of object to view is sufficient to stimulate. A composition containing more than nine elements may diminish in richness. A rich elevation is one where from any given distance, between five and nine elements are distinctly seen (Bentley *et al.*, 1985).

The classical approach to decoration in its purest form is based upon the 'orders of architecture'. The façade being subdivided horizontally and vertically by the main elements of the order, the entablature and the column or pilaster. Each floor is emphasized and distinguished by the use of a different order – the external façade of the Colosseum, Rome, and the Circus in Bath by John Wood being fairly typical examples (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Many fine buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, use classical detailing for doors, windows and other embellishments without following the full rigours of the architectural orders. The less formal decorative treatment associated with medieval periods in Europe depends for its effect upon an all encompassing pattern, a profusion of detail. In its more ordered forms the decorative pattern follows strictly upon structural imperatives. The internal wall of the Cathedral nave expresses this idea to perfection. The nave arcade supports the triforium arches or blind storey which gives borrowed light to the roof space above the aisle. Above the triforium is the clerestory which is the main source of light for the nave. The decoration emphasizes the elements in this structural pattern of superimposed arcades subdivided into bays by massive pillars which stretch from floor to vault where they branch into elegant patterns of graceful arches to support the weighty roof. A similar analysis of the external façade of the Gothic Cathedral can also be made. However, many fine buildings dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries use medieval detailing for doors and windows in a whimsical manner without follow-

Figure 2.3 The Crescent, Bath

ing the structural discipline associated with high Gothic architecture. Both traditions of decoration, classical and informal, are the birthright of the urban designer in the late twentieth century. The recent rejection of ornament and decoration, requires a re-evaluation of these older and deeper traditions in order to establish a *modus operandi* for the designer of today.

A building may be said to consist of three main sections: a foundation or base that connects the building with the ground or pavement; a middle section with its rows of windows and possibly containing the *piano nobile*; and the roof zone which connects the building to the sky by silhouette. These three sections or zones of the building are common to both the classically and informally composed building. The relative weight given to each section in terms of decoration depends upon the position of the building in relation to the viewer, its height, mass and the location of its most important function. In the Crescent in Bath, John Wood the Younger expressed these three elements with great clarity. He combined the first and second floors with one giant order. In this way he unified and differentiated the middle section of the Crescent both from the ground floor with its rhythm of doors and windows and also from the attic with balustrade and small dormer windows (Figure 2.3).

The emphasis of one or more of the major sections of the street façade provides an opportunity to introduce pattern, colour or highly modelled decoration. The elements may be emphasized by a simple horizontal string course or by a more distinctive treatment. The roofline will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. The base connecting the building to the street pavement is probably the part of the façade most often noticed by the viewer (Figure 2.4). It is at this point, around the front door and parlour window that the residential street receives most attention to detail. A typical neo-classical residential street in London often has a white or cream rusticated stucco base which supports the main part of the elevation above usually in brick with stucco trim around the windows. The stucco base may extend below ground with a basement; the well being edged in fine black ornamental ironwork (Figure 2.5).