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# SKYLINE AND ROOFSCAPE

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## INTRODUCTION

The city skyline is a prime location for decoration. The skyline and its roofscape can be appreciated from many viewpoints. When viewed from afar the city appears in profile as a distant silhouette. The city profile is often most clearly seen from the arrival points, that is from the great city gateways or portals. Alternatively it may appear dramatically in view from highpoints in the surrounding landscape while from elevated positions within the city, panoramic views of roofscape are not unusual. From pavement level within the city, the skyline is appreciated in quite a different way. As the viewer moves about within the city, the roofline which encloses and encircles the streets and squares presents an ever-changing dark silhouette against the paler sky. Landmarks which may be remote from the viewer, the dome of a cathedral or the delicate spire of the local church, stand out from, and impose themselves on, the surrounding skyline. Such landmarks perform the main decorative role in the city skyline: they are the jewels in the crown, often emblematic of the city. Man's intervention between earth and sky is a powerful image of occupation, signifying a meaningful place in a particular locality

and having distinct form which makes manifest its *genius loci*. The decoration of the city, and in particular its skyline, can act as a collective symbol, something that represents the city and with which the citizens can identify 'it testifies that a group of people share a place and a time, as well as operate in close proximity with a good deal of interdependence' (Attoe, 1981).

## DEFINITIONS

Skyline is a very recent term. Until the mid-nineteenth century the word skyline was a synonym for horizon, used in travel literature in reference to the meeting of sky and land (Attoe, 1981). Typical dictionary definitions are 'the line where earth and sky meet', 'the horizon' and 'the outline of a . . . mountain range seen against the sky'. Use of the word 'skyline' in relation to buildings did not appear until the 1890s. Its new currency was directly related to a new building type, the skyscraper. Maitland's American Standard Dictionary of 1891 is the first known dictionary to include the word skyscraper: the meaning given is 'a very tall building such as now are being built in Chicago'