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Boston Gothic

The Colonial Revival complemented an ongoing Gothic Revival. First popularized in Britain, the Gothic style was imported to the U.S. in the early 1800s. By 1840, Gothic villas were commonplace, and by 1900 college campuses and government buildings were being constructed in the Gothic vocabulary. In the 1890s, a young Boston architect named Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1941) led a resurgence of the Gothic that was applied mostly to church architecture.¹ He collaborated with many of Boston's best woodcarvers and stained-glass makers over the years, and silversmiths made ecclesiastical plate for Cram's churches well into the 1930s. He redesigned New York's massive Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine from 1911 to 1913, but one of his most memorable designs was a modest one, All Saint's Church in Ashmont, Mass., consecrated in 1895, with a chapel added in 1910. Cram, with his business partner Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, worked on it for more than 20 years. The interior is a Christian *gesamkunstwerk*, rich in texture, color and detail. The chancel (the eastern end, reserved for the clergy) is a masterpiece of American Gothic Revival. The altar is a four-ton block of stone, completely undecorated. (In practice, it's covered with embroidered textiles.) A jeweled cross and eight candlesticks designed by Goodhue rest on the altar. A carved stone reredos, or screen, rises behind it. The climax is a sculpture of *Christ Triumphant*, modeled by Boston woodcarver John Kirchmayer. The whole is illuminated by stained-glass windows lining the nave and clerestory. Most were made by the Boston firm of Charles Connick.

In All Saint's Church, glass, fabric, stone, wood, silver and painting are combined to produce an experience that is both sensuous and spiritual. It influenced the design of American churches until the 1940s and established a pattern of American churches commissioning prominent craftspeople for a variety of objects, from altars to crucifixes.