The great truths revealed to him. Here is one of them:

"It is to be generally observed that the proportions of buildings have nothing to do with the style or general merit of their architecture. An architect trained in the worst schools and utterly devoid of all meaning or purpose in his work, may yet have such a natural gift of massing and grouping as will render his structure effective when seen at a distance."

In all matters connected with art, Huxley comments, Ruskin is to be interpreted as we interpret dreams — by opposites. Thus, we may take it as more or less definitely proven that good architecture is, in fact, almost entirely a matter of proportion and massing, and that the general effect of the whole work counts for nearly everything.
Interpreted according to this simple method, Ruskin's pronouncement may be taken as explaining briefly and clearly the secrets of good architecture.¹

There was a time when Huxley, trained, in the Ruskinian school, to admire Gothic art, could not bring himself to appreciate Renaissance-type architecture such as that of Wren. The Gothic revival in England was a product of the Oxford Movement.² Pointed arches seemed better than round ones, as emblems of a fashionable religion, a certain way of life. Ruskin rationalized this ethico-religious preference in terms of aesthetics; and on these grounds ogival architecture was preferred to the

1. 'Sir Christopher Wren': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus 1948; pp.175-76.

2. The Gothic architecture united two ideas. One is the use of the ribbed vault and the pointed arch. The other is the flying buttress, which permits almost unlimited height combined with great lightness. Gothic architecture developed almost completely between 1150 and 1250.

3. Renaissance type Architecture: Italy was rich in the remains of Roman architecture. A study of this during the 1400's formed the basis for a new style of architecture called Renaissance. It was an attempt to adapt the ancient Roman architecture to modern needs. The styles of Renaissance architecture differed greatly in various parts of Europe. An outstanding example of this type of architecture is St. Paul's Cathedral in London, designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

4. The Oxford Movement, known also as the Tractarian Movement, was an attempt to make members of the Church of England realise the primitive and Catholic principles on which the Oxford Movement believed it depended.
Renaissance and baroque by people who would have disapproved of the original reasons for the Gothic revival. Huxley says that his parents, for example, had no great love for the Oxford Movement; but he was brought up in the strict and narrow way of Ruskinism; and it was not until he was at least twenty and had come under the influence of later aestheticians that he could perceive the smallest beauty in St. Paul's Cathedral.¹

**Proportion in Architecture:**

Proportion, we have seen, is to Huxley the very soul of architecture. Gumbril Senior (of *Antic Hay*), whom we may regard as Huxley's mouth-piece in matters pertaining to this art, has illuminating comments on the subject: *'Proportion! You can't help thinking about it in these London streets, where it does not exist. You can't help pining for it. There are some streets, oh, my God! It's like listening to a symphony of cats to walk along them. Senseless discords and a horrible disorder all the way. And the one street that was really like a symphony by Mozart — how busily and gleefully they're pulling it down now! Another year and there'll be nothing left of Regent Street. There'll only be a jumble of*

---

¹ *Beyond the Megalopolis: Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp. 124-25.*
huge, hideous buildings at three-quarters of a million \$ of a piece. A concert of Brobdingnagian cats. Order has been turned into a disgusting chaos. We need no barbarians from outside; they're on the premises, all the time .... It has always struck me as very curious that people are so little affected by the vile and discordant architecture around them. Suppose, now, that all these brass bands of unemployed ex-soldiers that blow so mournfully at all the street-corners were suddenly to play nothing but a series of senseless and devilish discords — why, the first policeman would move them on, and the second would put them under arrest, and the passers-by would try to lynch them on their way to the police station. There would be a real and spontaneous outcry of indignation. But when at these same street corners contractors run up enormous palaces of steel and stone that are every bit as stupid and ignoble and inharmonious as ten brass bandsmen each playing a different tune in a different key, there is no outcry.¹ The police don't arrest the architect; the passing pedestrians don't throw stones at the workmen. They don't notice that anything's wrong.

¹. Cf. Robert Lynd, in his essay on 'Noises': "Men are apparently more infuriated by what they hear than by what they see. Only a very sensitive man is kept awake by the unsightliness of modern life, but thousands lie awake cursing the noisiness of modern life."
It is odd, very odd..."

**Architecture and Music:**

"The fact is", continues Gumbrell Senior, "that architecture is a more difficult and intellectual art than music. Music — that's just a faculty you're born with, as you might be born with a snub-nose. But the sense of plastic beauty — though that's also an inborn faculty — is something that has to be developed and intellectually ripened. It's an affair of the mind; experience and thought have to draw it out. There are infant prodigies in music; but there are no infant prodigies in architecture... a man can be an excellent musician and a perfect imbecile. But a good architect must be a man of sense, a man who knows how to think and profit by experience. Now, as almost none of the people who pass along the streets in London, or any other city of the world, do know how to think or profit by experience, it follows that they cannot appreciate architecture. The innate faculty is strong in them to make them dislike discord in music; but they haven't the wits to develop that other innate faculty — the sense of plastic beauty — which would enable them to see and disapprove of the same barbarism in architecture."

Domestic Architecture:

Domestic architecture, says Huxley, in the past was marked by the desire for grandiosity. The fact was remarked by a poet, who was a boy when the Palais Cardinal was building and died before Versailles was completed — Andrew Marvell. Of all animals, says Marvell, it is only man who builds disproportioned buildings. Beasts have dens not bigger than themselves; birds build nests of an equal size. It is only man who 'loves an empty space' and 'demands more room alive than dead.' The marble palaces of the Grand Monarch expanded and the periwigs grew more luxuriant. Tottering on stilts and crowned with towering piles of horse-hair, he and his courtiers proclaimed themselves larger than life and hairier than Samson at the height of his virility.

Commenting elsewhere on domestic architecture, Huxley says that a man of means who builds a house today is in general concerned primarily with comfort. He will spend a great deal of money on bathrooms, heating apparatus...

2. The Devils of Loudon; Chatto & Windus, 1952; pp. 302-03.
and so on, and so regard his house as perfect. His counterpart in an earlier age would have been primarily concerned with the impressiveness and magnificence of his dwelling—with beauty rather than comfort. Instead of baths and central heating, marble staircases, a grand façade, frescoes, huge suites of gilded rooms, pictures, statues. Sixteenth-century popes lived in relative discomfort; but they had Raphael's frescoes, the Sistine Chapel, galleries of ancient sculpture.

The Architect Today—One view:

Gumbril Senior laments the lot of the modern architect who has to design houses for workmen rather than great works of art. "And to think that I've been spending these last days," he exclaims, "designing model cottages for workmen at Bletchley! I'm in luck to have got the job, of course, but really, that a civilized man should have to do jobs like that! It's too much. In the old days these creatures built their own hovels, and very nice

---

1. Raphael Santi (1483-1520), one of the most celebrated Italian painters of the Roman school.
2. Sistine Chapel, principal chapel of the Vatican at Rome, famous for the paintings which cover its walls and vaults.
and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture — which is the expression of human dignity and greatness, which is man's protest, not his miserable acquiescence. You can't do much protesting in a model cottage at seven hundred pounds a time. A little, no doubt, you can protest a little; you can give your cottage decent proportions and avoid sordidness and vulgarity. But that's all; it's really a negative process. You can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants — when you build for the spirit and imagination of man, not for his little body." 1

---