

A It's a structure that isn't finished, yet two million people visit it every year. Antonio Gaudi began building his church, La Sagrada Familia, in 1883 - and work continues to this day.

B The architect Antony Gaudi was born in 1852 near the town of Reus, in the Catalan region of Spain. As a child, he was interested in the natural wonders of the Catalan countryside. When he grew up, he went to Barcelona to study architecture. Gaudi designed many structures in Barcelona during his career, but he was most committed to La Sagrada Familia. In fact, after 1910 he stopped working on nearly all other projects to focus on it.

INSPIRED BY NATURE

C Gaudi experimented with many styles early in his career, but eventually developed his own ideas about architecture. The natural world was main inspiration for Gaudi's designs "Nothing is art if it does not come from nature," he believed. Gaudi understood that the natural world is full of curved forms, not straight lines. With his idea in mind, he based his structures on a simple idea: if nature is the work of God, then the best way to honor God is to design buildings based on nature.

D The architect's love of nature combined with his religious beliefs guided the design of La Sagrada Familia. Gaudi designed the inside of La Sagrada Familia to feel like a forest. Inside the church, pillars rise up like trees. This theme continues outside. The outside of the church is decorated with sculptures of wildlife. For example, turtle - a symbol of the sea - and the tortoise - a symbol of the land - are carved into the base of two columns. Carvings of other animals, such as reptiles and birds, appear throughout the structure.

AN END IN SIGHT

E Gaudi died in 1926. Before his death, he made three-dimensional models of his plans for the building, hoping that others could complete his masterpiece. Many of these models were lost during the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939), but some survived. These models have helped Gaudi's successors. For example, Mark Burry, an architect From New Zealand, has worked on La Sagrada Familia for almost 40 years. He uses computer technology and the surviving models to bring Gaudi's plan to life.

F Gaudi's work illustrates a timeless truth. As the architectural historian John Bassegoda wrote: 'The lesson of Gaudi is..... to look at nature for inspiration..... (N)ature does not go out of fashion. In fact you might say Gaudi's architectural style was ahead of its time. The architect's nature- inspired designs can be seen as an early example of the modern signs of biometrics- a science that uses design in nature to solve modern problems.

G Work on La Sagrada Familia is expected to be finished in 2026, a hundred years after Gaudi's death. Gaudi was once asked why La Sagrada Familia was taking so long to complete. "My client is not in a hurry." he said.