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Excerpt from Yves Lucas's, Voyage dans les Marquises, « tout sur les dessous des marquises » (Journey through the Marquees, unveiling marquises).



Porte Dauphine métro station marquee, by Hector Guimard.



Example of a very ornate marquee.

Originally a marquee - or marquise - was a cloth canopy set up before a tent or building for protection from the rain and sun. They were found especially on boats. Architecturally a marquise is a permanent protective canopy often made out of metal and glass projecting over an entrance, a porch or a window, and which serves as a shelter. It is both an architectural decoration and a useful urban shelter. A small projecting roof, it can be called a marquise only if it is a metal structure paned with glass (either clear or cathedral glass, with a metal grille) often with a curved belt above and supported by brackets. Both the brackets and curved belt are made out of cast iron, the brackets are designed to hold it up against the wall through force. They are thus called cantilevers or cantilevered suspensions. Real glass, tightened with steel, marquises can be quite elaborate, decorated with wrought iron ornaments like volutes, and often adorned with beautiful lanterns. It generally reaches up towards the sky, so rain runs back down towards the gutter against the wall and falls down the drainpipes often referred to as columns.
It is hard today to find references of the first marquises, but there are some Renaissance style marquises that are elaborately decorated. Some bigger and more elaborately decorated marquises belong to the Louis XIV style. Louis XV marquees were elegant with curved belts and highly adorned brackets, while the Louis XVI style developed a high level of refinement in the design of their broad glass panes and artistry of the wrought iron work. At first reserved to inner court yards, marquises were not found adjoined to the exterior facades of buildings until the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Parisian facades were embellished with extraordinary wrought iron marquises as the rigid Haussmanian architectural law subsided. They were placed above the entrances of homes and hotels, theaters, cafes and restaurants but most famously above the stairways of Hector Guimard's Metro station.
Today there are a wide range of industrial marquises, made in series, indexed, and cataloged, some are even made out of plexiglass. Marquises are sometimes called concrete canopies or made out of other materials, which do not alter the elegance of the marquises but are specific materials used for concrete marquises.

See also

Haussmann — Hector Guimard — Metallic architecture — Louis XIV style — Louis XV style — Louis XVI style

See our exterior architecture