

Recording script E8: Beijing Stadium

Good morning, everyone. Today, as part of our 21st century architecture series, I'm going to tell you a bit about a remarkable structure which I'm sure you're all familiar with, the stadium that was built for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

OK, let's start with a few background details. The stadium was designed by Herzog and de Meuron, a firm of architects from Switzerland. They studied Chinese ceramics, er, plates, cups and bowls, to get inspiration. The stadium is actually two structures, which are completely separate from each other. In the middle there's the seating area, which was originally designed for 100,000 spectators, but this had to be reduced to 90,000. Around this area is the frame, which is made of 110,000 tons of steel in horizontal beams and vertical columns. The architects wanted the roof to open and close, but they changed it because it could have been dangerous if there was an earthquake. The big advantage of changing it was that it reduced the cost by several million dollars, although the building still came to an incredible \$423 million.

So, what makes this stadium such an amazing building? Let's start with the general impression it creates. For this, the best place to look at it is from a distance. Why from a distance? Well, that's where you'll really get an impression of what it looks like and how big it is. You'll also notice how it really stands out in its surroundings. This is not just because of its size — and it is big — but also because it stands on a low hill which helps make it higher than any other buildings in the area. Then there's its unusual shape, which has helped to give it its nickname of the Bird's Nest. The unusual shape of the stadium also does something else. You see, if you stare at it for long enough, you also get the impression that this structure isn't standing still, that it's moving in different directions, almost like it's a living, breathing creature. This is especially true at night, when the stadium is lit up from inside with lights that continually change color.

In the stadium, everything changes. There are visitor entrances all around the outside, and as you enter, you get the impression that you're walking into a forest, and not just any forest, but something magical from a children's story. As you cross towards the spectator area, colored light comes through the clear roof panels, creating strange pools of light and shadow. Now you're no longer in a forest, but on a set that's been built for a fantasy film. It really is a remarkable experience, and it's only once you're inside the spectator area that you finally realize you're in a sports stadium.