

Why glass towers are bad for city life – and what we need instead

Ted Talk by Justin Davidson

Cities are full of roughness and shadow, texture and colour. You can still find architectural surfaces of great individuality and character. These are just ordinary places expression the ordinary splendour of cities and the reason they're like that is that the need for shelter is so **bound up** with the human desire for beauty. Their rough surfaces give us a touchable city, streets that you can read by running your fingers over brick and stone. But that's getting hard to do, because cities are becoming **smooth**. New downtowns **sprout** towers that are almost always made of concrete and steel and covered in glass. Buildings like these are intended to enrich owners and tenants, but not necessarily the lives of the rest of us, those of us who navigate the spaces between the buildings.

Exteriors of buildings give texture to our lives, because buildings create the spaces around them, and those spaces can draw people in or push them away. Public spaces **thrive** or fail for many different reasons. Some recent plazas succeed because they combine old and new, rough and smooth, neutral and bright colours, and because they don't rely excessively on glass. On the other hand, the good news is that architects and developers have begun to discover the joys of texture without backing away from modernity. Some find innovative uses for old materials like brick and **terra-cotta**. But the truth is that these are mostly one-offs, boutique projects, not easily reproduced at a global scale.

Buildings can be like people. Their faces **broadcast** their experience. And that's an important point, because when glass ages, you just replace it, and the building looks pretty much the same way it did before until eventually is demolished. When a city defaults to glass as it grows, it becomes a hall of mirrors, disquieting and cold. Architects can use glass in equally **lyrical** and inventive ways so it can become like all other materials that have the ability to absorb infusions of history and memory, and project it into the present. So rather than encase all that variety and diversity in buildings of crushing **sameness**, we should have an architecture that honours the full range of the urban experience.

Opinion

I really like glass towers, they look modern and I just consider them as beautiful. But something is truth, and it's that I really enjoy the architecture from the past, at least the one I can find at the midtown in Bogotá when I'm walking there. I feel that everything there has a meaning, and the way they were built is because of something specific, and I think it is amazing.

In this way, I could say that I agree with the speaker. There is no identity in glass towers, they reflect the people but not their history, their behaviour, they don't keep their culture or their identity. Glass towers are beautiful but is more beautiful a building where people can find themselves. I think that it is possible to have harmony between modern and old architectural materials, so contrast also can describe the citizens and their history. Because is the history, the thing that give us meaning.

New words

Inner	Disdain	Jerry-build
Cuisine	Facade	