



FRANK GEHRY

MASTER ARCHITECT



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FRANK GEHRY



Frank Gehry was born Ephraim Owen Goldberg in Toronto, Canada. He moved with his family to Los Angeles as a teenager in 1947 and later became a U.S. citizen. His father changed the family's name to Gehry when the family immigrated. Ephraim adopted the first name Frank in his 20s; and has signed his name Frank O. Gehry since.

Uncertain of his career direction, he drove a delivery truck to support himself in his teenaged years while taking a variety of courses at Los Angeles City College. He took his first architecture courses on a hunch, and became enthralled with

the possibilities of the art, although at first he found himself hampered by his relative lack of skill as a draftsman. Sympathetic teachers and an early encounter with modernist architect Raphael Soriano confirmed his career choice. He won scholarships to the University of Southern California and graduated in 1954 with a degree in architecture.

Los Angeles was in the middle of a post-war housing boom and the work of pioneering modernists like Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler were an exciting part of the city's architectural scene. Gehry went to work full-time for the notable Los Angeles firm of Victor Gruen Associates, where he had apprenticed as a student, but his work at Gruen was soon interrupted by compulsory military service.

After serving for a year in the United States Army, Gehry entered the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he studied city planning, but he returned to Los Angeles without completing a graduate degree.

He briefly joined the firm of Pereira and Luckman before returning to Victor Gruen. Gruen Associates were highly successful practitioners of the severe utilitarian style of the period, but Gehry was restless. (continued)

1927

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

1962

Gehry Partners, LLP founded in Santa Monica

1977

Named recipient of the *Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize* in Architecture

1989

Awarded the *Prizker Architecture Prize*. Designs Vitra Designs Museum in Weil-am-Rhein, Germany.

1994

First recipient of the *Dorothy and Lillian Gish Award* for lifetime contribution to the arts.

1997

Created Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Bilbao, Spain.

He took his wife and two children to Paris, where he spent a year working in the office of the French architect Andre Remondet and studied firsthand the work of the pioneer modernist Le Corbusier.

Gehry and his family returned to Los Angeles in 1962, and he established his own firm, Gehry Associates, now known as Gehry Partners, LLP. For a number of years, he continued to work in the established International Style, initiated by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, but he was increasingly drawn to the avant-garde arts scene growing up around the beach communities of Venice and Santa Monica. He spent more of his time in the company of sculptors and painters like Ed Kienholz, Bob Irwin, Ed Moses and Ed Ruscha, who were finding new uses for the overlooked by-products of industrial civilization. Frank Gehry began to look for an opportunity to express a more personal vision in his own work.

He had his first brush with national attention when some furniture he had built from industrial corrugated cardboard experienced a sudden popularity. The line of furniture, called Easy Edges, was featured in national magazine spreads, and the Los Angeles architect experienced an unexpected notoriety. Although Gehry built imaginative houses for a number of artist friends, including Ruscha, in the 1970s, for most of the decade his larger works were distinguished but relatively conventional buildings such as the Rouse Company headquarters in Columbia, Maryland, and the Santa Monica Place shopping mall. Gehry found a creative outlet in rebuilding his own

home, converting what he called “a dumb little house with charm” into a showplace for a radically new style of domestic building. He took common, unlovely elements of American homebuilding, such as chain link fencing, corrugated aluminum and unfinished plywood, and used them as flamboyant expressive elements, while stripping the interior walls of the house to reveal the structural elements.

“Liquid architecture. It’s like jazz - you improvise, you work together, you play off each other, you make something, they make something.”

-Frank Gehry

His Santa Monica neighbors were scandalized, but Gehry’s house attracted serious critical attention and he began to employ more imaginative elements in his commercial work. A number of his works in this period featured the unusual decorative motif of a Formica fish, and he designed a number of lamps and other objects in the form of snakes and fishes.

By the mid ‘80s, his work had attracted international attention and he was commissioned to build the Vitra furniture factory in Basel, Switzerland, as well as the Vitra Design Museum in Weil-am-Rhein, Germany. These projects established him as a major presence on the international architecture scene. His buildings displayed a penchant for whimsy and playfulness previously unknown in architecture.

POST-STRUCTURALIST

DECONSTRUCTIVISM



Most distinctive of all was his ability to explode familiar geometric volumes and reassemble them in original new forms of unprecedented complexity, a practice the critics dubbed “deconstructivism.” His international reputation was confirmed when he received the 1989 Pritzker Prize, the world’s most prestigious architecture award.

Although he originally completed his design for the proposed Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles in 1989, funding shortages and political infighting delayed construction of the project for many years. The Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, completed in 1990, was to be Gehry’s first monumental work in his own country, a billowing fantasy in brick and stainless steel. Meanwhile, his interest in collaboration with other artists was expressed in the fanciful design for the West Coast headquarters of the advertising firm Chiat Day, in Venice, California. The entrance to the building took the form of a pair of giant binoculars, created by the sculptors Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen.

Although his main project for Los Angeles went unbuilt through the ‘90s, he completed major projects in a number of other countries. His playful side reappeared in the “Dancing House” in the Czech capital, Prague. Comprising two undulating cylinders on a corner facing the river Vltava, the Czechs nicknamed the building “Fred and Ginger.”

Gehry’s most spectacular design to date was that of the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, completed in 1997. Gehry first envisioned its form, like all his works, through a simple freestyle hand sketch, but breakthroughs in computer software had enabled him to build in increasingly eccentric shapes, sweeping irregular curves that were the antithesis of the severely rectilinear International Style.

Traditional modernists criticized the work as arbitrary, or gratuitously eccentric, but distinguished former exponents of the International Style, such as the late Philip Johnson, championed his work, and Gehry became the most visible of an elite cohort of highly publicized “starchitects.” He drew fire again with his design for the Experience Music Project museum in Seattle, but in his adopted home town of Los Angeles, a long-delayed project was reaching fruition.

The year 2004 saw the long-awaited completion of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles. The building opened to great public celebration and immediately became the sprawling city’s landmark building. Although built after his Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the design actually predated it and featured a similar panoply of exploding titanium. The splayed pipes of the hall’s massive pipe organ were likened by some writers to a packet of French fries, but the public response was ecstatic. Gehry’s earlier experience building and renovating concert halls and amphitheaters had paid off in a facility that not only attracted international attention with its striking appearance, but thrilled musicians and listeners with its acoustically brilliant interior.

In the following years, Gehry immersed himself in a number of projects, including the Barclays Center sports arena in Brooklyn, New York, a concert hall for the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, and another branch of the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi. Most ambitious of all is the massive Grand Street project, a plan to entirely remake the thoroughfare leading from Los Angeles City Hall to Disney Hall. When it is completed, a wide swath of downtown Los Angeles will bear the indelible stamp of its adopted son, Frank Gehry, and his restless imagination. In 2010, Vanity Fair magazine polled 52 of the world’s best-known architects and architectural critics, asking them to name the most significant works of architecture of the last 30 years. By an overwhelming margin they placed Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao at the top of the list.

1997
BASQUE
COUNTRY,
SPAIN

THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO

Once a decaying industrial city, Bilbao took on new verve with this stunning composition for a Guggenheim museum on a former derelict industrial site. Gehry's creation drew 1.3 million visitors to northern Spain in its first year. It also spawned countless imitators worldwide, all of whom sought to emulate its popularity,

aply dubbed the "Bilbao effect." Seen in this light, this design achieved immediate cult status and will be remembered as one of the 1990s most influential and impressive buildings.

Where run-down factories once created an urban wasteland blighting the old town, the Guggenheim now mirrors the heavens in its sculptural metal forms. The museum hereby creates a spectacular futuristic contrast, but it also reacts sensitively to the historic urban surroundings of the adjacent old port town. The building skillfully culminates Calle Ip-paraguire street in an urban plaza that steps down 16 meters to integrate with the waters of the Nervion River before they flow into the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

From the urban plaza at the end of the street a grand urban stairway leads downward to the main entrance from which the central atrium is accessed. This central space accesses a total of 19 diverse exhibition halls containing 11,000 square meters of exhibition space. Upon arrival in the atrium the visitor's eye wanders inexplicably upward to the twisting skylight to discover the source of the warm natural light that makes the atrium space feel so inviting and gracious.

Ten of the exhibition halls are composed of orthogonally organized galleries housed in limestone-clad building wings. These regularly shaped building wings form an urban plinth for the explosion of organic forms that characterize the upper galleries. Sheathed in shiny titanium panels, the sculptural forms of these exhibition



spaces stand in marked contrast to the orthogonal plinth. In spite of their expressive, organic forms of these galleries serve well as flexible spaces for temporary exhibitions.

With the Bilbao Guggenheim Gehry deservedly emerged internationally as the world's most eminent architect of the 1990s. His unswerving dedication to the architecture as an expressive art form founded in modern art and sculpture, especially in the work of Gehry's artist friends such as Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenburg, came into exuberant fruition with this seminal work that not only creates dynamic spaces for viewing art but also at the same time executes a grand urban repair of a struggling city that has since, largely as a result of this successful building, seen a veritable renaissance – a phenomenon that has been further developed by countless cities with memorable "landmark" buildings that all emulate this predecessor.

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO



After his Guggenheim Museum turned the small Spanish town of Bilbao into an artistic world capital, Canadian-born architect Frank Gehry went on to transform the Art Gallery of Ontario in the city of Toronto.

His first-ever Canadian structure is an homage to his hometown. In fact, the young Gehry's first exposure to art and architecture was inside this very building. In modernizing it, he has made extensive use of his favourite materials. There's glass, to bring in as much light as possible, and titanium panels to create organic, moving forms. These objectives were already evident in his previous projects, like the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles



and the Richard B. Fisher Center at Bard College in New York State. With 50 percent more space to play with, AGO curators have re-organized the museum collections thematically, from African art to the Group of Seven, by way of contemporary art and photography.

Despite the seemingly disconnected nature of Gehry's additions, the gallery is now fully unified with a harmonious flow. Overall, the new transformation added 97,000 square feet of space, increasing the available gallery space by 50%. As such, the gallery remains one of North America's largest museums, now boasting a total of 583,000 square feet of space.

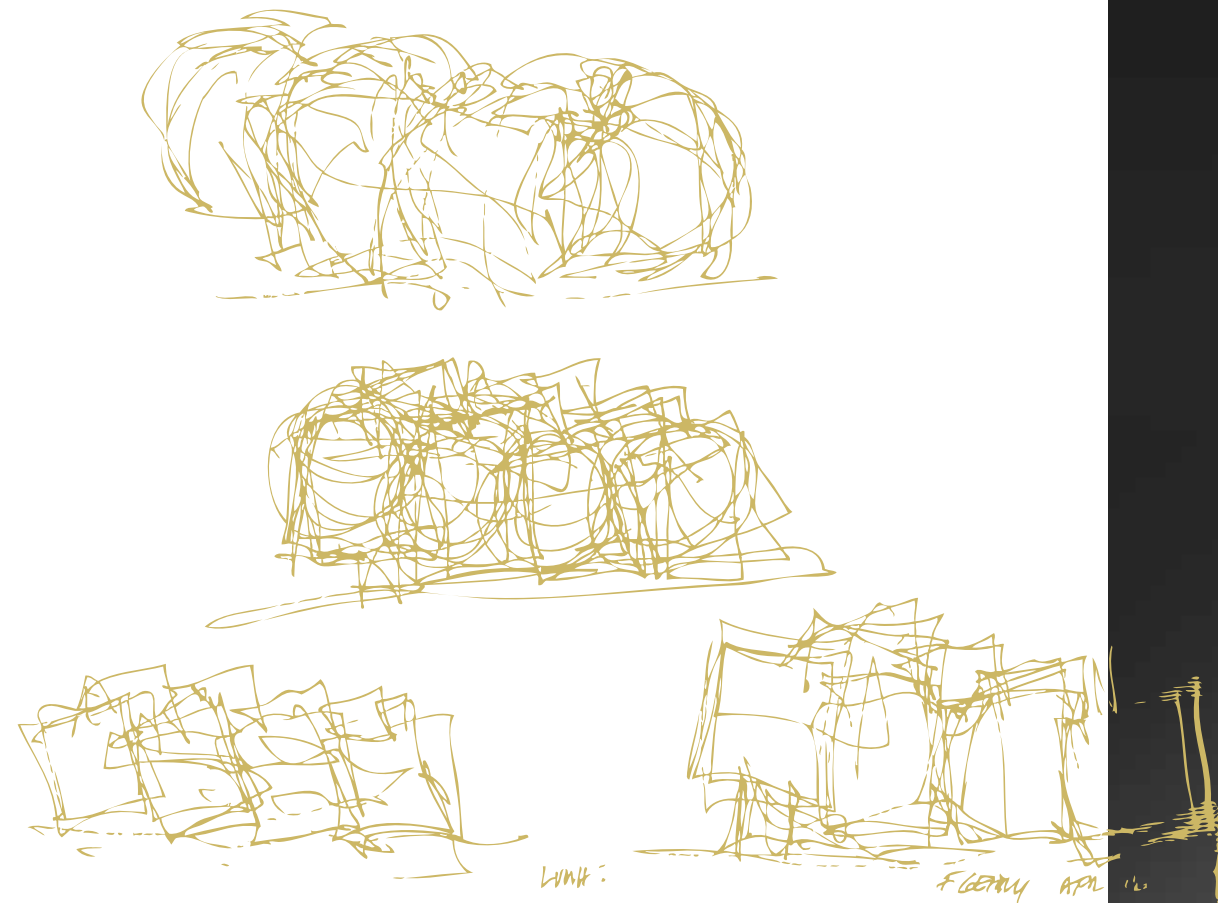
Working with and respecting the history of existing structures in the AGO renovation and expansion presents interesting opportunities. The outcome is a building where the integration of old and new is its feature design strength.

LOUIS VUITTON FOUNDATION FOR CREATION

The dialectical relation of the sketch to the final building is something that has always preoccupied Gehry. In his drawings he cultivates the informe, loose-jointed look that keeps the work open to evolving possibilities, qualities he likes to impart to his architecture as well.

“I am interested in finishing work but I am interested in the work not appearing finished, with every hair in place, every piece of furniture in its spot ready to photographs,” he has said, “I prefer the sketch quality, the tentativeness, the messiness if you will, the appearance of in-progress rather than the presumption of total resolution and finality.”

Began in 2008, the Foundation was inspired by the glass, Grand Palais, and takes the form of sails inflated by wind.



More recently, as his drawings have begun to attract attention, Gehry has tried to narrow the breach between the sketch and the building by making architecture submit to the more impromptu side of his practice:

“I want everything to look like my drawings,” Gehry announced when unveiling the sketches for the Fondation Louis Vuitton, a cultural center to be built in Paris for LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the purveyor of luxury goods.

In this most ethereal of all his models – the metal skins have been shed in favor of glass; space seems to be synonymous with light. Yet although the model has the ephemeral, diaphanous qualities of the sketch, it does not resemble the architect’s drawings for this specific project. Gehry’s manner of working does not lend itself to mimesis.

One could say that the new sheathing adopted for high-end clients and institutions no longer leaves room for the serendipity and punning sense of humor of former years, the California beach comber’s aesthetic. A sleek elegance now characterizes all of Gehry’s exteriors.

In the case of LVMH, the filmy membrane that serves as an exterior no doubt became increasingly refined as the project developed.

WORK IN PROGRESS



COLOPHON & SOURCES

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THE MOST IMPORTANT ARCHITECT OF OUR AGE

- *Vanity Fair*

Gehry's architecture reflects his keen appreciation for the same social forces that have informed the work of outstanding artists through history, including many contemporaries with whom he often collaborates.

His designs, if compared to American music, could best be likened to Jazz, replete with improvisation and a lively unpredictable spirit.

