

# STAR CHITE

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Around the world, renowned architects—often touted as “starchitects”—are creating iconic civic buildings as they increasingly receive commissions for concert halls, museums, libraries, and other public facilities. Dubbed the “Bilbao effect” by the media, the linking of architects with notable buildings and urban spaces was part of citybuilding long before Frank O. Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was built in Spain. The decadelong period of “design with a capital D” has captured the public’s imagination—and has resulted in a major transformation of both public and private sector development.

The tapping of big-name architects challenges the traditional way selections have been made in the public sector, where specialists in particular building types or hometown favorites once controlled the market. Even the power of the individual developer, once patrons at their own discretion, is being called into question in public, highly charged debates about design, such as that over the World Trade Center site in New York City. The battle for competitive advantage among cities, which coincides with a growing public understanding of the power of architecture to promote community goals, has inverted the traditional hierarchy of politics, program, and design.

Bilbao’s transformation from an unglamorous Basque port to an international destination, for example, is more than the byproduct of the attention-getting design of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by Gehry. It stems from a strategy on the part of the area’s regional government to remake the image—and thereby the future—of Bilbao. These plans aligned with those







# CTURE

Cities are using high-image architecture to give form to a new generation's concepts of identity and civic order—and sense of economic stability.

of Thomas Krens, director of New York City's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, who saw the opportunity to build a global franchise for the museum, which has been a patron of leading-edge architecture ever since Frank Lloyd Wright first designed the striking spiral building on Fifth Avenue back in the late 50s.

In Spain, Gehry's titanium sculpture of a building has succeeded in attracting tourists—more than 5 million of them since it opened in 1997. The *Financial Times* reports that the museumgoer numbers translate into about \$500 million in related economic activity and about \$100 million in new tax revenue. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao became “the first symbol and main project that can move all the other projects and decisions to create a convincing vision of the country that we are,” according to Jon Azua, a director of the consulting firm Arthur D. Little in Bilbao.

Bilbao's success forced a number of other cities to reevaluate the role of architecture in their economic development programs. Like Bilbao, these cities needed a coalition of stakeholders who understood the long-term nature of the strategy. Beyond the immediate economic issues lie the political and social realities. Architectural curiosities—and the tourist dollars they generate—are not enough to create sustainability. Public architecture, at its best, contributes to concepts of civic order and quality of life that promote long-term investments. But it takes more than that to make cities successful—to make them places where highly productive people want to live and work.

© BEN WOOD/CORBIS (GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO)/FRANK O. GEHRY





increased role for design in U.S. cities as they maneuver for advantage?

■ Federal, state, and local governments have reasserted their role as patrons, leading the way in many cities with improved selection processes for civic buildings such as courthouses.

■ Private institutions, including cultural organizations, colleges, and universities, are among the most influential clients of brand-name design, with the number of new projects and major expansions at an all-time high.

■ Investment builders, whose architectural decisions are often moderated by the financial markets, are cautious players, with a few notable exceptions. The current public awareness of star-quality architecture is creating a change in demand.

■ Corporations, such as IBM and AT&T, which were among the strongest advocates for design during the 1970s and 1980s, have seen their role transformed from that of local citizen to transnational actor. That shift has removed them from the civic discourse in communities where they no longer own real estate assets.

Within the federal government, the General Services Administration (GSA) Design Excellence Program represents a major shift in the way the agency selects architects and the kind of buildings it gets in return. By moving away from a difficult bureaucratic process to one that focuses on architects' design portfolios, the GSA has been involved in the creation of civic buildings by some of the most recognized architects in the country—Richard Meier, Henry Cobb, and Rafael Viñoly—and has encouraged the participation of a new generation of younger, smaller, and more experimental firms. "If a building looks cheap and shoddy, without any respect for that community, it is going to send a message," maintains GSA chief architect Ed Feiner. In less than a decade, Feiner and his team breathed new life into the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture by actually *producing* facilities that "reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the federal government," as the principles specify. New buildings are now meeting the GSA goal of being "both an individual expression of design excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America's designers and artists can leave to later generations."

State governments also have taken the opportunity to reassess the value of design to the public understanding of the government's

role in the lives of citizens and their communities. Louisiana's State Capitol Complex in Baton Rouge provides one example. In 1996, after years of mismanagement during which the state offices were moved from buildings on the Capitol grounds to leased space in substandard, low-rise buildings offsite, the state office of administration under commissioner Mark Drennan embarked on a master planning project designed to bring the dispersed state offices back home to a campus. A series of new office buildings were then designed by a number of the state's leading architects for what is now called Capitol Park. "The Capitol Park project catalyzed redevelopment in the entire city," notes Drennan. "We brought people back to downtown Baton Rouge and set the stage for other projects, including the planetarium, an expansion of the convention center, and the arts block that will house Louisiana State University's museum and a new theater."

City governments have a dual role in the sponsorship of serious design: they are clients for local civic buildings, from fire and police stations to city halls and public libraries, and they are guardians of the public realm through planning and zoning.

"There is an increased awareness and desire for improved public space as a result of global travel and competition," points out Sherida Paulsen, former chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission in New York City and currently a principal at New York City-based Pisanella Klein Stolzman Berg Architects. "City agencies are now prepared to demand higher-quality design from developers and others who come seeking concessions. The exchange is in the public's best interest: it results in a better-quality environment," adds Paulsen, who oversaw the approval of several important and potentially controversial design commissions during her tenure at the landmarks commission, including the Renzo Piano expansion of the Morgan Library and the Sir Norman Foster addition to the Hearst Tower. This trend is taking place in major cities across the country as local planning authorities make way for the bold new designs of the starchitects and other new designers who are intent on creating the landmarks of the future.

Perhaps the most visible agents of change in the world of brand-name architecture are the private cultural institutions. Currently, more than two dozen major art institutions, as well as a number of smaller ones, are in some stage of planning or building new facilities. The current museum building boom will have raised more



Morgan Library expansion, New York City  
(Renzo Piano)



BEVER BLUNDER BELLE

World Trade Center site, New York City (Daniel Libeskind)



DAVID HAMILTON



than \$3 billion in capital funds, mostly from private donors, before all the projects are complete, according to a 2001 *Newsweek* report. A number of headliner projects, including the proposed Gehry Guggenheim museum on the waterfront in downtown Manhattan and Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas's addition to New York City's Whitney Museum, have been shelved in the present economic downturn. Still, there are enough avant-garde architectural projects in the works to change the cultural life of nearly every major city in the United States in the next few years.

Colleges and universities also are avid patrons of the starchitects. As competition for students increases, the pressure is on administrators to enhance or create distinctive campus identities. In the case of urban campuses, the identity of the school often intersects that of the city. Today, that intersection is increasingly clear with the building boom at institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, which has major projects by Gehry, Stephen Holl, and Fumihiko Maki underway, and at Rice University in Houston, where Michael Graves, Cesar Pelli, and Robert A.M. Stern have recently created projects.

For the most part, private institutions are making these architectural investments based on their own needs and desires. Nevertheless their agendas are inextricably linked to those of their locale. Whether or not they play an explicit role in the economic development strategy of the city, their presence—particularly in new, highly distinctive structures—changes the public perception of the city and the reality of civic space.

The development community, once the leading creator of skylines, has been a less influential player in the present market for architectural statements. The distinctive large-scale, high-rise office buildings that fueled development in the late 1980s and early 1990s are not the engines of the current economy. Residential development, still strong in many markets, has generated a less adventurous

**Cities large and small have recognized the selling points of design, and it is now clearly part of their civic, cultural, and economic agenda. In smaller communities, the addition of an architectural icon can help put a place on the map, so to speak.**

ous architecture than that being proposed by private institutions, even in sophisticated locations like New York City, San Francisco, Boston, and even Miami.

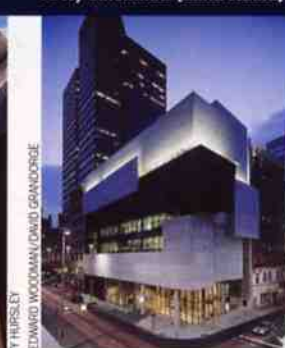
While developers continue to bring new buildings to the market, they tend to prefer architectural firms with strong experience in the particular building type over the daring, commercially untested starchitectural firms that may be the cultural favorites. The ongoing battle surrounding the World Trade Center site provides an example of the developer's dilemma.

In response to unprecedented public pressure, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which is composed of the multiple parties that control the site, including developer Larry Silverstein, organized an international design competition.

The global design community rallied to produce a wide array of concepts that challenged the stakeholders to reconsider the potency of the site as a metaphor for memorializing the events of September 11, 2001, and for the future of New York City. The choice of Daniel Libeskind and his patriotic imagery, including a 1,776-foot tower based on the form of the Statue of Liberty, seemed to signal a brave, new direction for redevelopment of the site. It was not long, however, before the realities of constructing high-rise office towers with reliably buildable and marketable plans brought David Childs, partner and lead designer at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), to the team. Silverstein was already working with Childs on a renovation of the twin towers at the time of the disaster and soon afterward hired SOM to design a new tower for 7 World Trade Center, which also was destroyed on 9/11.

Childs and his team, known more for political savvy than for cutting-edge design, have been successful in delivering polished buildings in New York City's difficult building environment. Many in the design community, as well as in the community at large, have expressed concern that the iconic design that won the competition will be watered down by SOM's involvement. Adding to the mix will be Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, best known in the United





States for design of the addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum, who has been selected to design the site's transportation center.

While examples of blue-chip developers hiring star architects are scarce, one of the most successful at leveraging big-name design is Rob Maguire, principal of Los Angeles-based Maguire Properties. Maguire has engaged a number of well-regarded designers, including Cobb and Richard Keating, for towers that helped define the L.A. skyline. He also has worked with less likely design partners, employing noted Mexican architect Ricardo Legorretta on several projects, and recently teaming with Gehry on a master plan for a new mixed-use development at Playa Vista on the west side of Los Angeles.

"The teaming of talented peers—architects, landscape architects, and even artists—generates excitement and innovation," points out Tim Walker, senior vice president of marketing at Maguire Properties, who has worked closely with Rob Maguire on design issues for years. "It leads to better design, and better design gives us an edge in the marketplace. We are consciously raising the design bar in the cities where we build."

While architecturally distinctive central office campuses and signature office towers have largely been replaced by dispersed call centers, distribution centers, and smaller regional offices, often in low-image, leased facilities, there is an emergent design model in structures occupied by pharmaceutical, biotech, and related technology companies. With strong competition for an educated workforce, these companies are tending to locate in capital-intensive industry clusters (see "Tech Valley," page 99, October) and are working with developers to create build-to-suit facilities that encourage sustainable design as a modest gesture to civic responsibility. These companies are not necessarily seeking iconic buildings, but rather an environment that offers a mix of architecture, cultural and social activities, and access to public transit.

An example of this trend is Kendall Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where local developer Lyme Properties is creating an urban, mixed-use community that incorporates biotech labs and office space with restaurants, retail space, a four-star hotel, and a performing arts facility. The first structure, an office building for Vertex Pharmaceuticals designed by Los Angeles architect Stephen

## Tale of Two Cities Times Two

New civic projects in four cities provide examples of the power of architecture on a grand scale to help change the image a community puts forth and the way it views itself.

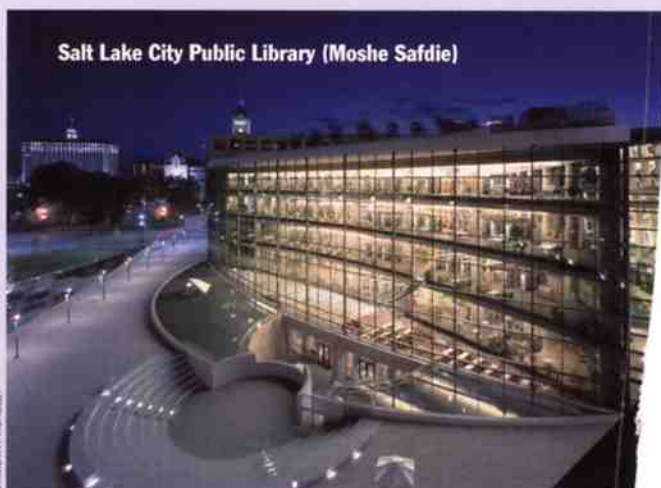
**The Kimmel Center.** Designed by Rafael Viñoly, the Kimmel Center, the new home of Philadelphia's famed orchestra on the city's Avenue of the Arts, offers an apt architectural metaphor for the City of Brotherly Love. The vast glass barrel vault that covers nearly a city block speaks of diversity and inclusiveness: the lobby forms a large covered public plaza that even nonconcert-goers can enjoy. The transparency opens the building interior to the street, breaking down the sense of elitism that classical music can evoke and revealing the diversity of the program inside. Under the canopy, the distinct forms of the 2,500-seat Veri-

zon Hall and the 650-seat Perelman Theater become complementary neighbors.

**The Walt Disney Concert Hall.** Los Angeles's Walt Disney Concert Hall, which opened to the public in late October, is "a strange kind of sailing ship floating in a box," according to its architect, Frank O. Gehry. Waves of stainless steel, some 120 feet tall, undulate high above the street. It has much of the sculptural form of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, which was designed in the same period. More glamorous than civic in form, the building, set on a tight urban site, acts as a kind of shiny visual magnet, bringing a focus to the cultural district on Grand Avenue.

**Salt Lake City Public Library.** Responding to a mandate from

Salt Lake City that "a library should be more than a repository of books and computers," architect Moshe Safdie created a building with a curving, climbable wall that invites the city in as it weaves the site together. The iconic wall both defines the glass-







ROMAN VINOZ



BING THOM ARCHITECTS



LARA SWANMER

Erlich, has been completed. Additional buildings designed by Behnisch and Behnisch of Stuttgart, Germany, and Anshen and Allen of Los Angeles, with landscape design by Michael Van Valkenberg of Cambridge, are currently under construction, and a residential tower by CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares of Boston is scheduled to begin construction in early 2004.

Cities large and small have recognized the selling points of design, and it is now clearly part of their civic, cultural, and economic agenda. In the wake of the starchitects, other designers of regional and local reputation are being asked to make major architectural contributions. In smaller communities, the addition of an architectural icon can help put a place on the map, so to speak. Towns with more modest ambitions than those of Bilbao recognize that their cultural institutions can represent a significant part of their identity and fabric.

A number of projects around the country are designed to update and enhance the evolution of the local historic narrative, such as the Moshe Safdie expansion of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Other projects aim to change the cultural

impression of the city, as is the case with Wil Bruder's Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Nevada, a town better known for gambling than the arts. There also are major projects designed by Pritzker Prize winners and American Institute of Architects gold medalists—the profession's top accolades—such as the Gehry-designed Ohr-O'Keefe Museum in Biloxi, Mississippi, as well as projects by some lesser-known architects.

In Boston, there are projects underway at MIT, including the Stata Center by Gehry, a media lab by Maki, and a dormitory by Holl. Foster is involved in the expansion of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Piano is designing a branch of Harvard's art museum, and Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio have been selected for the new Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. In Cincinnati, Zaha Hadid's Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art recently opened, Denver has a new art museum by Libeskind, and in Fort Worth, Tadao Ando has completed the Modern Art Museum and the Amon Carter Museum has a new addition by Philip Johnson. In Dallas, Piano has designed Nasher Sculpture Center. Only blocks apart in Los Angeles are Rafael Moneo's Our Lady of Angels Cath-

enclosed urban room and public piazza and provides a connection to the old library. Like other Safdie projects, the design uses a contemporary formal vocabulary to create a symbolic visual resonance that links the architecture to its location and purpose. "The

library should be a meeting place for a community of readers," says Safdie. Since the building opened earlier this year, its continued popularity among library users has proven him right.

**Seattle Public Library.** A new central library, designed by Rem Koolhaas, is under construction in Seattle. Koolhaas, known for his unusual combinations of material and sometimes provocative architecture, to many may seem to be an unlikely choice for a civic symbol in a city of conservative taste. Koolhaas has said that he enjoys having "the opportunity to work on such a stable symbol of collective life," adding that the building, with its 12-story zigzag form, "has the right, and even the obligation, to be different from the rest and to be exceptional." —N.E. and P.N.

**Seattle Public Library, Seattle, Washington  
(Rem Koolhaas)**



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# Master Builder

When Vancouver, British Columbia, architect Bing Thom started out on his own in the early 1980s, he was fully entrenched in the school of "art as architecture" as promoted by his two mentors, Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki and fellow Canadian architect Arthur Erickson. But because of the era's stagnant economy, Thom found

that, I began to understand the process of what it's like to be on the other side of the table when you hire an architect."

Thom's first project as designer and developer was his own office building, which he worked on from an on-site construction trailer. Doing the work himself helped him to launch his fledgling business, and seeing his sketches come to life, Thom says, made him a smarter and more driven designer.

"What every artist wants, is the ability to control his or her creation to implementation," says Thom. "The only way to do that is to put yourself in the position where you are master of the whole process."

Learning the nuts and bolts of construction also modified his belief in the cause of art as architecture and gave him some historical perspective on the craft of building.

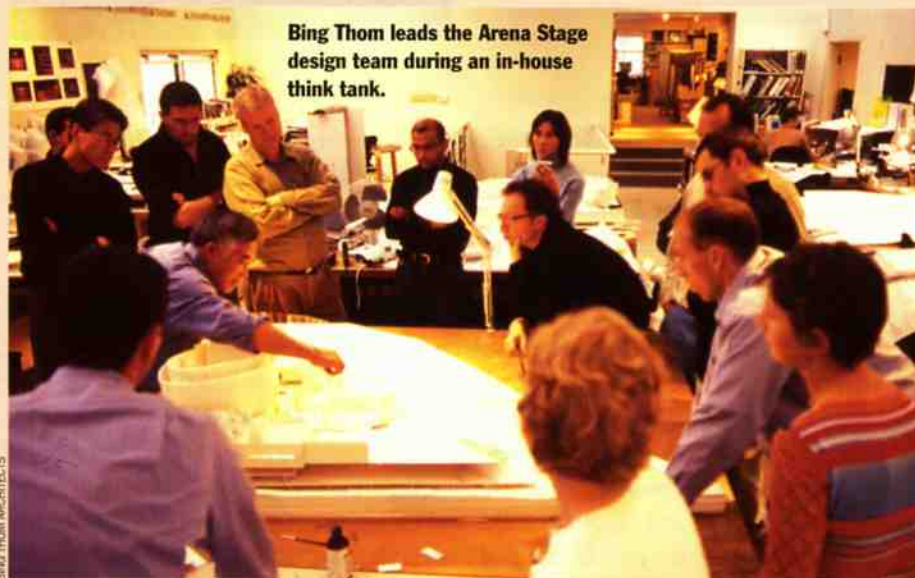
"I started to realize that architecture as a profession is only 150 years old," Thom says. "Before that, there was no such thing as a professional architect. He was a master builder. If you go back to Christopher Wren or Michelangelo or Palladio, all of these people were artists, architects, and builders."

The intimacy with design's practical side has served Thom well during the conceptual phases of projects much larger and more complex than his own office building—the plan for the new city of Dalian in eastern China, for example, or the redevelopment of the Arena Stage theater in Washington, D.C.

"[For Arena Stage], we designed the project from the inside out, first realizing the functional requirements of the building—its artistic requirements," he says. "But we also designed it from the outside in, in terms of understanding the exterior forces that physically impinge on the design. Like breathing in, breathing out—you constantly have to do both."

Though design work absorbs most of his time now, Thom is still drawn sometimes to the relative rough and tumble of the construction process. "I do it occasionally just because it's very important to stay sharp," he says, "You're only good at your craft if you stay up to date with and practice your craft."

**William Brantley**, a freelance writer living in western Massachusetts



himself occupied by the more prosaic concerns of design as well.

"With interest rates at something like 20 percent, there weren't many clients," explains Thom. "So, I started my own construction company and went out looking for properties to develop where I could build my designs. I became the contractor and, through

"I began to realize that with many architects, normally 20 or 30 percent of what they drew got implemented. I was interested in getting 90 percent of what I drew implemented. So I wanted to get myself in the position of understanding the whole process—from the initial idea all the way through the implementation.

dral and Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall. In Washington, D.C., plans are in the works for a Gehry addition to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and Bing Thom is designing a revamped building for the Arena Stage theater.

Miami Beach has Arata Isozaki's Bass Museum and Milwaukee has Calatrava's design for the city's art museum. Philadelphia has Viñoly's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, and Ando has been commissioned to design a museum in the city to display the works of artist/sculptor Alexander Calder. In Pittsburgh, Viñoly is at work on the new convention center, and Jean Nouvel has designed the Carnegie Science Center expansion. San Francisco will soon have Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron's new M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Legorretta's Mexican Museum, and Morphosis's federal complex. Tacoma, Washington, recently added Antoine Predock's art museum to an emerging cultural district that includes the Museum of Glass by Arthur Erickson.

The ascendancy of the starchitects has changed the way both city officials and private citizens perceive and employ architecture—

regardless of the particular goals of the individual stakeholders, be they investors, cultural institutions, or the cities themselves. The reevaluation of civic space confirms what Renaissance patrons understood: architecture, with its scale and potential for symbolism, has always served those powerful enough to commission buildings in the public realm. What is different is that in today's multicultural society where cities are competing in a global marketplace, the architectural messages are as diverse as they are powerful. The bold designs of the architectural superstars are giving form to a new generation's concepts of identity and civic order, and sense of economic stability. Skylines and streetscapes will never be the same. ■

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