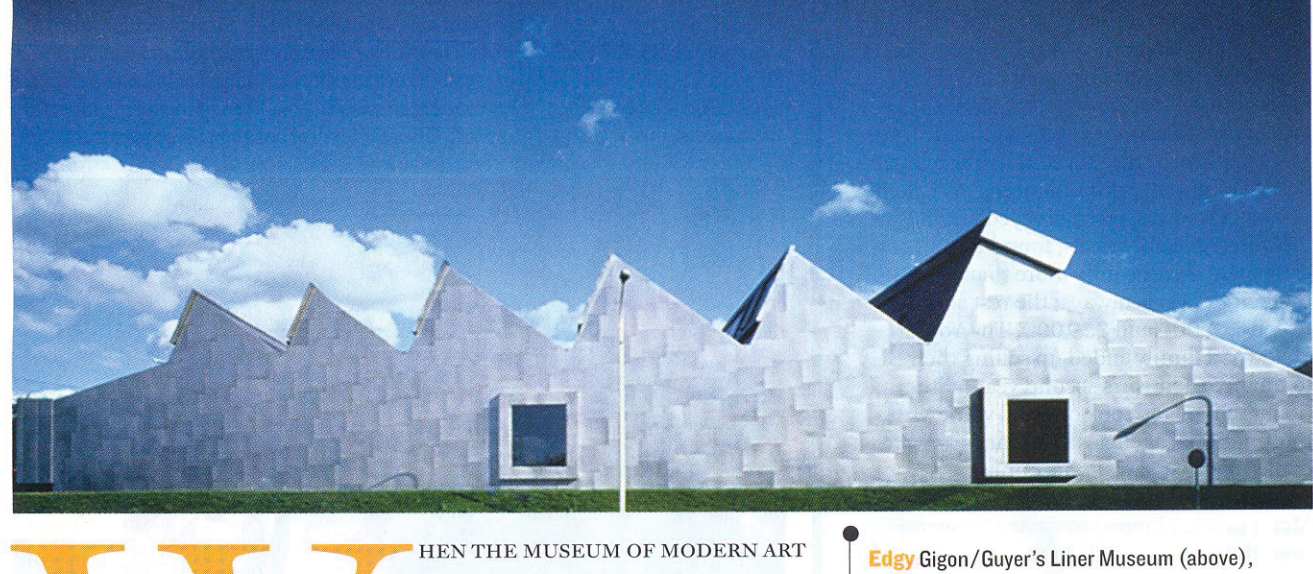


THE STAR SYSTEM SPURRED INSATIABLE GLOBAL DEMAND FOR SERIOUS ARCHITECTURE. ONLY THE NEXT GENERATION CAN SATISFY IT NOW.

BY CATHLEEN MCGUIGAN

# Building Recognition



**Edgy** Gigon/Guyer's Liner Museum (above), Valleacerón Chapel by Sancho-Madrdeijos

**W**HEN THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART in New York opened "On-Site: New Architecture in Spain" earlier this year, it showcased Spain as the hotbed of cool design. But besides the cutting-edge projects on display by the usual suspects—Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Herzog & de Meuron, Jean Nouvel—the exhibition carried a subtle subtext. Bang up against the schemes of the avant-garde old guard were dozens of provocative designs by up-and-coming Spaniards you've barely heard of.

Take the Woermann complex by Abalos & Herreros (with Casariego/Guerra) in the Canary Islands—an amazing tower with a cantilever at the bottom and a tilt at the top. Or Sancho-Madrdeijos's starkly beautiful Valleacerón Chapel, a 21st-century take on Le Corbusier's Ronchamp. Upstarts from elsewhere in Europe were on view as well—architects like the arty Berliner Jürgen Mayer H., whose plan to cover

an ancient Roman site in Seville with a canopy of gigantic mushroom shapes looks like something Lewis Carroll dreamed up with Salvador Dali. Or Foreign Office Architects of London, whose stunning design for a theater on the Spanish coast—a stone monolith that swoops up from the pavement—seems to defy gravity. The fresh sense of surprise and energy from the next generation is clearly giving the ruling class of global architects a run for their money.

Not that the era of "starchitects" is exactly over. Gehry, 77, is as busy as ever—he just unveiled plans for a \$750 million residential and commercial complex in Los Angeles—and is also branching into jewelry and other design objects. His contemporary the Brazilian modernist Paulo Mendes da Rocha just won the Pritzker prize. Nouvel has two major buildings—the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris—opening the same week in June. And architects like Norman Foster—who probably has the biggest "star"

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**Elegant eclecticism** Adjaye's Nobel Peace Center in Oslo

firm in the world—still bring unrivaled expertise to global projects (sidebar). But there are hints of a backlash. The Wall Street Journal has reported market resistance to some of the high-priced designer apartment towers so beloved by U.S. developers in the last few years. And some trustees of cultural institutions are fretting over the complexities and costs of working with big-ticket—and big-ego—architects. "A real shift has occurred in the client base," says one design consultant. "People are saying, 'We don't want to build what everyone else has.' They like being first, being edgy. And the blue-chip architects are no longer edgy." The climate for serious architecture that these stars helped create is now fueling the desire for the next hot thing.

So a new generation of architects is moving into the spotlight—not that they necessarily want to be there. What distinguishes many of them from their elders is not only what their designs look like—they tend to avoid a signature style—but how they work. They frequently collaborate and often blur the lines between architecture and landscape, urban planning and art. They collabo-

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**Inventive** Starlight Theater in Illinois by Jeanne Gang (top); Waterstudio's Snel house in Holland

## THE NEW GENERATION FREQUENTLY COLLABORATES AND TENDS TO BLUR THE LINES THAT SEPARATE ARCHITECTURE FROM URBAN PLANNING AND LANDSCAPES.

rate with ease across cultures, too. Just look at Malaysian-born, London-based Chris Lee, who has partnered with fellow architect Kapil Gupta of Mumbai to design an ultra-cool shopping mall in Qatar. Or check out MAD, the team of Chinese-born Yansong Ma and Japanese-born Yosuke Hayano, who are based in Ann Arbor, Michigan—but are working in Guangzhou and Mongolia and just won a big competition in Toronto.

"There's a shift away from the role of the heroic master creator," says Terence Riley, curator of MoMA's Spain show. Many younger architects emphasize the process of investigation and design, rather than committing to an idealized form—a strategy some attribute, ironically, to star Rem Koolhaas and his Rotterdam firm OMA. "This generation are perhaps more flexible and pragmatic," says Rosa-

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lie Geneviro, director of the Architectural League in New York. "They're not worrying so much about the theory and meaning of it all. They have an attitude toward problem solving." For them, the computer is more a quotidian tool than an inspiration, and they naturally absorb environmental or social issues into their work.

In Europe, young architects have benefited from the wealth of government-funded projects, in which designs are often chosen in blind competitions. One such competitive program, European, is open only to architects under 40. The Netherlands has been especially fertile ground for innovative design (in products and fashion, too), with such groundbreaking firms as UN Studio. Look at its gleaming new aluminum-and-glass museum for Mercedes-Benz in Stuttgart—as curvy and sleek as a speeding car. Or check out Waterstudio, a small Dutch firm experimenting with designs for floating houses (did anyone say global warming?). And speaking of surroundings, it could be argued that the Alps have influenced the steadfast work of the Swiss firm Gigon/Guyer, whose designs look deceptively simple until you begin to catch their

powerful solidity and unexpected details.

In London, the young design scene has been heating up alongside the more ballyhooed art world. Besides Foreign Office—the husband-and-wife team first shot to fame with their radical, ramped, multilayered design for the Yokohama ferry terminal in Japan—there's the elegant, eclectic work of David Adjaye. The Tanzanian-born architect has done cool houses for cool people (like actor Ewan McGregor) but has now earned a regular spot on the international designer shortlist, thanks to his stunning transformation of an old Oslo railway station into the Nobel Peace Center, which opened last summer.

**A**DJAYE'S ALSO DESIGNING A project in China—but then, isn't everyone? Chinese architects themselves tend to toil in big government institutes, churning out mediocre plans to feed the country's phenomenal building boom. But in the last few years a small band of young avant-garde designers has begun to emerge. Most studied abroad or worked for foreign firms before taking the radical step of

establishing their own practices in China. These architects tended to start small—designing villas or art galleries—but firms like Urbanus, based in Beijing and Shenzhen, and MADA s.p.a.m. in Shanghai are now working on large-scale projects, and developing a style that's both modern and distinctly Chinese. "What's really interesting is the opportunity not just to build but to contribute to the shaping of contemporary Chinese culture," says Yung Ho Chang, at 50 the godfather of this group and the first to set up his own studio, in 1993. Yung, who shuttles regularly between China and the United States, where he heads the architecture department at MIT, is taking "a position between development and preservation" with a project in Beijing to create a 21st-century multi-unit courtyard house, inspired by those found in the traditional—and rapidly disappearing—hutongs, or alleys, of the city.

In the United States, while young architects don't get the same opportunities to cut their teeth on public projects as their peers in Europe, there are nevertheless signs of a generational shift. The taste for cutting-edge design—promoted largely by all the cultural institutions that hired such international stars

as Hadid, Santiago Calatrava and Tadao Ando—is now spreading to younger avant-garde architects. Some smaller museums see the new generation as more in tune with contemporary collections and with their desired audience. The Grand Rapids Art Museum in Michigan, for example, hired wHY, a California firm founded in 2003 by two young architects, who brought fresh appeal as well as experience (Thai-born partner Kulapat Yantrasast has worked in Ando's Osaka office on a number of museum jobs). And regional architects such as Brad Cloepfil of Portland, Oregon, or Jeanne Gang of Chicago are increasingly tapped for big projects.

The fluency of young architects with new technology and fast-paced global culture—along with a spirit of adventure, of course—is key to their appeal. Critic Aaron Betsky, who heads the Netherlands Architecture Institute, believes that what succeeds today goes beyond pure architecture. "It's project-based thinking," he says. "I don't think anyone is looking so much for the next Frank Gehry as for the next iPod. What is the thing?" Today's inventive young designers are bent on pushing the limits of architecture to find out. ■