The Visionaries

Frank Gehry
In 1997, when Frank Gehry unveiled his very funky curving titanium museum in a backwater city in northern Spain ("Bil-where?"), few would have predicted the impact the building would have on both architecture and tourism. Ten years later, the so-called "Bilbao Effect"—the idea that a mid-tier city can boost tourism by hiring big-name architects to give it a design makeover—has been applied in destinations from Milwaukee and Minneapolis to Newcastle, England, and Abu Dhabi.

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The results have been mixed, but there's no question that sensational new architecture gets some people excited enough to get on a plane. So to mark the Guggenheim's tenth anniversary, we took a closer look at the skyline-altering projects that Gehry and his razzle-dazzle colleagues have created, as well as what they've got on the drawing board. From Herzog & de Meuron's Olympic Stadium in Beijing to Thom Mayne's otherworldly Phare Tower in Paris (which will be taller than the Eiffel Tower), we haven't seen a bigger boom in massive public projects since Ancient Rome. Which gives you new reasons to visit both the cities you've never thought of as interesting and those you claim to know like the back of your hand. Just think of Bilbao's Guggenheim as the shining example.

The vision: Architecture that's disjointed and exuberantly expressive, often clad in gleaming titanium

Claim to fame: The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is the benchmark of Canada-born Frank Gehry's career. In 1997, this jaw-dropping structure transformed an unknown industrial Spanish town that had fallen on hard times into an internationally recognizable destination. The Guggenheim Bilbao's colossal, titanium-clad dimensions grace the Nervión's riverbank like an ocean liner from a futurist's sketchbook, reflecting the building's graceful contours in the muddy water below. Inside, it's difficult to spot a right angle in the echoing exhibition halls, as if it were sculptured from putty rather than concrete and steel. Ten years later, this extraordinary edifice has lost none of its wow factor and remains (as the famous architecture critic Paul Goldberger dubbed it) the first great building of the 21st century. It was one of the first of a series of knockout new projects to appear all over the city, from Norman Foster's metro stations to Santiago Calatrava's Campo Volantin footbridge.

On the horizon: New World Symphony hall, Miami Beach

Miami Beach's indigenous Art Deco and gelato-colored buildings are as big a tourist attraction as its beaches and nightlife (well, for some). Now several starchitects are adding their signature to the city, including Gehry himself. His proposed concert hall for the New World Symphony aims to repeat the positive clamor created with his Walt Disney Concert Hall in L.A., a gleaming DeCon (that's deconstructivist in archispeak) landmark with fantastic acoustics. The Miami project—pegged for completion in 2010—is more structured than his L.A concert hall: A series of unevenly stacked stainless-steel cubes are arranged underneath a white concrete frame, playing off Miami Beach's Deco heritage.

Norman Foster
The vision: High-tech, skyline-transforming structures of glass and steel but with an elegant, humanist touch

Claim to fame: Reichstag dome, Berlin

Built in 1999, British architect Sir Norman Foster's Reichstag dome is one of the most successful fusions of traditional and modern architecture of all time, and, for many, stands as a symbol of modern Germany. Shortly after reunification, the Bundestag (German parliament) awarded Foster the symbolic commission of renovating the Reichstag building, the

seat of the original parliament that dates back to the Holy Roman Empire. In 1933, the building was partly destroyed in a fire, which Hitler blamed on terrorists from the opposition Communist party, consequently winning the elections for the Nazis. Given this emotional weight, Foster's challenge was to open the Reichstag to the hearts and minds of the public. He designed a transparent dome to give visitors panoptic views of Berlin's cityscape, as well as a look down into the parliamentary chambers through a central mirrored cone that reflects natural light below. This connection to both the city and its seat of government, as well as the powerful visual impact of the dome itself, has proved a great success, making the Reichstag one of Berlin's prime attractions.

On the horizon: Terminal 3, Beijing Airport

When visitors fly into Beijing for the 29th Olympiad in 2008, they might not want to leave the airport. Few architects would take on such a Herculean project as this and then promise to deliver it within four years, but Foster has the confidence that comes with creating, among others, Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok airport. The scale and drama of the airport more than matches the Chinese government's ambitions for the Olympics. To get an idea of its sheer size, consider these numbers: Two miles long, 292 check-in desks, 179 elevators, 98 moving sidewalks, and 55 million passengers per year by 2020. Like Chek Lap Kok, Foster has managed to merge technology with beautiful design. From below its soaring salamander-shaped roof has ample views to the outside, and interior details that evoke traditional Chinese symbols and colors (the skylights change from red to yellow as you progress through the building).
Diller Scofidio + Renfro

The vision: Unorthodox, sometimes revolutionary projects, often more like art installations than buildings

Claim to fame: Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

In 2006, the hipper-than-thou New York–based architecture practice Diller Scofidio + Renfro—that's husband-and-wife team Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio plus Charles Renfro—unveiled Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art and made a splash in a city not known for its love of contemporary architecture. This place relies on some visual tricks to make an impact: The first-floor gallery, for instance, seems to hang over the surrounding waterfront, and from some angles looks like it's dangerously close to toppling over. A curved steel ribbon runs from the upstairs gallery to the downstairs public space and shoots though the glass lobby, giving the impression that it is the structure's sole support. This building's success has a lot to do with the way it connects to its surroundings, such as the bleacher-style seating and the fantastic window in the auditorium that both face the water.

On the horizon: The High Line, New York

It'll be interesting to see how New Yorkers take to Diller Scofidio + Renfro's proposed "slow space," the High Line. (Though going by initial reaction, which includes celebrity endorsement and glamour-event fund-raising, it'll probably be like ducks to water.) Together with the cutting-edge landscape architects Field Operations, the team plans to convert a rusted elevated railway track along Manhattan's West Side (next to the Meatpacking District) into an urban park. The mile-and-a-half-long track will have gardens and promenades, with views of the Hudson River and Manhattan's famous skyline, and it will provide a traffic-free route between the Jacob J. Javits Convention Center and the Meatpacking District. The final design is still a work in progress, but preliminary renditions include glass-enclosed balconies hanging from underneath the old tracks, and stretches of flowerbeds that create the illusion of wide-open space in the concrete canyons of Manhattan.

Renzo Piano

The vision: Lyrical melding of architecture, craftsmanship, and technology—and a particularly imaginative use of light

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Claim to fame: Auditorium Parco della Musica, Rome

One would think that a building dubbed Gli Scarafaggi (the cockroaches) might be off-putting, but Renzo Piano's 2002 Parco della Musica in northern Rome has proved to be one of the city's more successful forays into modern architecture. This is the local hero's most high-profile project in his homeland, winning over a city renowned for its skepticism of contemporary architecture (Romans, after all, prefer their buildings secondhand) with his abundant use of local materials (red brick walls, travertine floors) and popular incorporation of an outdoor Roman theater. By the way, its nickname arises from the complex's beetle-shaped trio of auditoriums as opposed to any unwelcome visitors in the balcony seats.

On the horizon: Shard London Bridge, London

Before Piano's ambitious Shard of glass skyscraper can finally begin construction on the south bank of the Thames at the end of 2007, some tricky demolition work is required to rid the space of the current occupant, the eyesore known as Southwark Towers. In its place, at 1,004 feet high, the elegant, needlelike Shard will be the tallest building in Britain and will likely be the most influential of the new skyscrapers appearing on the city's skyline due to its size and unusual shape. Piano has proposed a vertical city of offices, shops, residences, and a hotel (run by the Shangri-La group in its first European foray). Unlike many of London's new, off-public-limits skyscrapers, Piano plans to engage locals through the Shard's endless amenities located over six floors of mid-level public space, subterranean transport hub, and 24/7 access. We'll need to wait until 2011 to experience it, though.

Jean Nouvel

The vision: Buildings whose facades use glass, light, and color that reflect—and play against—their surroundings

Claim to fame: Torre Agbar, Barcelona

Opened in 2005, French architect Jean Nouvel's Torre Agbar has already achieved iconic status in Barcelona (and that's saying something when you consider the spires of the Sagrada Familia). Locals refer to it as either "the cigar" or, cheekily, "the suppository," and it's endlessly compared to Norman Foster's Swiss Re—or "gherkin"—high-rise in London. In this architecture-savvy city (even the guy who shines your shoes knows who Foster is), the Agbar encapsulates the ambitious expansion plans around its northern periphery, now the new business and high-end residential hub Diagonal Mar. Visit at night, when the Agbar's facade glows with ripples of blue, red, and pink light, thanks to illuminated slats that reflect on the structure's aluminum skin, creating a magical, modernist beacon.

On the horizon: Koncerthuset, Copenhagen

Nouvel will once again feature an animated facade in his Koncerthuset, the new concert hall for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, due to be completed in 2009. The casing of this striking 130-by-164-foot cobalt-blue box allows for back projections, giving it the appearance of a floating piece of abstract art against the night sky. Inside, the main auditorium is suspended above the foyer, adding to the weightlessness of the project. And for those concertgoers sick of performances being obscured by freakishly tall audience members in front, the clever terraced seating configuration allows views all the way from the back of the auditorium. The Koncerthuset will be a key feature of the new Ørestad urban development that aims to draw visitors to this suburban swath of modern residences and business parks just south of the city center. The development is bound to make a big impression in this design-mad city, which, surprisingly, has few contemporary buildings of distinction.
Santiago Calatrava

The vision: Innovative bridges and buildings whose graceful, sculptural qualities disguise their rigorous engineering

Claim to fame: Ciutat de les Arts i de les Ciències, Valencia

Much like that other Spanish architect-visionary Antoni Gaudí, Calatrava's buildings are inspired by Mother Nature, but it's his background in engineering that makes his sci-fi creations buildable. Calatrava draws on animal life: He's smitten by the science of bionics, and you'll likely find elements that will remind you of wingspans, fossils, and vertebrae. To experience his bravura vision (some would say blind ambition), take a trip to Calatrava's hometown of Valencia and its Ciutat de les Arts i de les Ciències, completed in 2004. The 87-acre development includes a mammoth Science Museum, a planetarium, and the latest addition, a helmet-shaped concert hall (a convention center is under construction). While it's turned Valencia into a destination for design buffs, drawing tourists from architecturally rich rival city Barcelona, some

question whether Spain's third city has the means to offer a cultural program hefty enough for its gargantuan spaces. Maybe, but we think these buildings alone are as worthy of a visit as the region's famed paella.

SANTIAGO CALATRAVA

On the horizon: The PATH Terminal, NYC

Calatrava's new PATH Terminal at the World Trade Center site will be a major transport hub connecting New York's subway system with trains across the Hudson River. Stakes were high over the emotionally charged project, but the proposal was greeted with applause from both the architecture critics and the city's aesthete elite. It harks back to Calatrava's earlier works, such as Lyon's famed TGV station, which looks like a bird on the point of take-off. But the PATH terminal—set for completion in 2009—takes the concept a step further, with spiky "wings" made of glass and steel that will move, letting natural light and air into the underground terminal on those muggy New York afternoons.Zaha Hadid

The vision: Radically different, even chaotic, designs that emphasize fragmentation and fluidity

Claim to fame: Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati

Until relatively recently, Baghdad-born Zaha Hadid was known for out-there designs—considered better in theory than in practice—that no one actually commissioned. Her breakthrough moment came at the unveiling of Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center in 2003. Although it now appears rather tame compared to her subsequent fluid proposals—that often appear as if they have been made of molten materials—it is a coherent example of her skill. Hadid made the most of the shallow site by placing the galleries vertically, like uneven building blocks, leaving her trademark liquidity for the foyer, in the form of an "urban carpet" of concrete that sweeps seamlessly from the sidewalk and inside to the rear of the building. Hadid aimed to design a building that engages with the community, "hopefully helping to broaden the audience for contemporary art," which is all the more significant when you consider the museum was prosecuted for displaying a Mapplethorpe exhibit back in the '90s.

On the horizon: Opera House, Guangzhou

Hadid's dramatic flourishes lend well to the theater (she designed the set for the Pet Shop Boys' 1999–2000 tour). Her tour de force so far is the Guangzhou Opera House in China, currently under construction and due for completion at the end of 2008. This project shows her ongoing fascination with dunelike formations, a legacy of her frequent trips to the marshlands of Southern Iraq as a young girl. The opera house, which will hold 1,800 audience members, could have landed from another galaxy, with two undulating "boulders" that are bathed in bold colors, evoking the high drama of Chinese opera. This world-class building will not only be a source of pride for one of China's less-familiar metropolises (the "Bilbao Effect" again), it's also a counterblow for Hadid. Twelve years ago her design for an Opera House in Cardiff was famously rejected in an episode that reeked of administrative (and creative) cold feet. Now that her singular vision is taking shape in buildings around the world, her revenge must taste pretty sweet.
Richard Rogers

The vision: Fun functionalism: Structural elements become design features, and buildings are turned inside-out

Claim to fame: Terminal 4, Madrid Airport

British architect Richard Rogers has a particular fondness for Spain, especially the country's willingness to forge ahead with large urban planning and architectonic projects. Little wonder, then, that his firm was behind converting the tatty and antiquated Barajas airport into a pleasurable travel experience (at least if you are flying with the Oneworld group that operates from T4). Opened in 2005, Madrid's Terminal 4 ushered in a new era of airports. Sheltered by a graceful undulating bamboo roof supported by steel "trees," the only dividing spaces inside the terminal are stylish light shafts. Every functional element has been lent a creative hand, from the luggage carousels that could have been lifted from the set of Star Trek to the centurionlike AC units.

On the horizon: Leadenhall Building, London

Rogers is set to become the architect who has most shaped London's financial district with the Leadenhall, an exciting new skyscraper near Saint Paul's Cathedral and located very close to the iconic Lloyd's Building and his other modernist classic, 88 Wood Street. Ever since he completed the Centre Pompidou in Paris (along with Renzo Piano), Rogers has been renowned for placing the inner workings of a building on the outside (the Lloyd's Building, also in London, showed this penchant at its peak). The Leadenhall Building, scheduled for completion in 2011, is an elegant glass-clad structure

sloped to preserve protected views of the famous cathedral. It shows a more restrained hand in "bowelism" (as critics dubbed his trademark exposure of ducts, pipes, and elevators), but does include Rogers' trademark love of bold colors on the industrial-inspired, cladded facade.
Thom Mayne

The vision: Iconoclastic designs that challenge traditional notions of form, function, and organization

Claim to fame: Hypo Alpe-Adria Center, Klagenfurt

L.A.-based architect Thom Mayne was a relatively unknown outsider until he won the Pritzker Prize in 2005. Little wonder, as his architectural solutions often throw up more question marks than neatly packaged responses. A case in point is the Hypo Alpe-Adria Center in southern Austria, dating back to 2002. This retail/office complex on Klagenfurt's periphery is surrounded by nondescript housing estates and farmland. The center, which sits at an alarming angle, aims to integrate the two landscapes, juxtaposing both rural gardens and public walkways inside an imposing hulk of an edifice with an arched roof. But rather than a freestanding oddity, this building works as a socially friendly environment where the suburbs meet the countryside.

On the horizon: Phare Tower, Paris

Paris is not fond of skyscrapers. One hundred and 18 years after it was built, the Eiffel Tower remains the tallest structure in the city. It took a proposal as poetic as Mayne's Phare Tower to finally change the skyline (well, it will in 2012). For many, the Phare (which means "lighthouse" in French) is a sign that Mayne's radical approach is softening: It rises skywards from the soulless landscape of La Défense (a peripheral business district) like a white phoenix. It has also upped the ante of "green" building design: A turbine farm on the roof will supply much of the energy needed for heating and cooling the structure for most of the year, while a movable "skin" can be manipulated to diffuse direct sunlight and optimize access. Eco-credentials aside, the Phare is simply one of the most mesmerizing designs seen so far this century, although its elegant, sensuous curves are more in the spirit of Eiffel than the modern buildings that surround it, such as La Grande Arche de la Défense's hollow cube.
Rem Koolhaas

The vision: Provocative projects in which the conventions of beauty and style take a backseat to ideas and functions

Claim to fame: Prada Epicenter, New York

The merging of a luxe brand with cutting-edge architecture is a seductive equation, as evidenced by the explosion of design-centric stores of late. But the one that kick-started the trend in New York City of stores as design destinations was Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas' store for Prada. Prada's New York Epicenter opened in 2001 in a landmark 19th-century, cast iron building. Koolhaas juxtaposed high-tech gadgetry with organic components; a giant wooden "wave" (which serves as an informal accessory display space) takes center stage, along with mannequins suspended from the ceiling in wire cages. Interactive dressing rooms and the wireless technology staff use to retrieve merchandise further add to the futuristic experience.Herzog & De Mouron

The vision: Stylish modernism, aided by groundbreaking use of exterior materials for a building's "skin"

Claim to fame: The Tate Modern, London

Cutting-edge maestros Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron believe that one of Europe's greatest challenges is to find new uses for its old buildings. In other countries the Tate's original structure, a disused power station, might have been leveled to make room for a new cultural palace. But in 1995 the Tate's board chose the little-known Swiss duo Herzog & de Meuron primarily because their proposal retained most of the original building's main features. The turbine hall was made into a dramatic lobby where large-scale sculpture is shown, while the boiler house became the galleries. They added a double-story glass penthouse that bathes the entire interior in natural light and affords breathtaking views of the Thames' riverscape. When the Tate Modern opened in 2000 it received more than five million visitors in its first 12 months. A year later Herzog & de Meuron won the Pritzker Prize (architecture's "Nobel"), which elevated them to the echelon of starchitects.

On the horizon: Olympic Stadium, Beijing

An Olympic Stadium is the dream commission of any architect. What other project is assured such mass exposure? For the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, Herzog & de Meuron have created an astonishing milestone in stadium design.

Nicknamed the "bird's nest," this immense steel mesh will enclose 91,000 spectators (and the athletes of course), who will be protected from rain and UV rays by a translucent membrane that fills the spaces in the mesh on the roof. Natural ventilation will be enhanced by the fact that all facilities such as shops and restaurants will be freestanding, rather than attached to the main shell. The stadium is just one of several remarkable buildings going up in time for the Games. In addition to the airport, there's also the Olympic Aquatics Centre (dubbed the "water cube"), the Rem Koolhaas Central Chinese Television project, and the National Grand Theater by Paul Andreu.

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