

FRANK GEHRY



Biography:

Frank Gehry is an architect whose work blurs the line between art and architecture. His buildings are very sculptural yet functional. His work has been critically acclaimed. He has won multiple awards recognizing his contributions to the field of architecture. He is also quite famous for an architect and has been referred to as a “starchitect”.

Frank Gehry was born Frank Owen Goldberg on February 28, 1929 in Toronto, Ontario. His parents were Polish Jews. His grandfather owned a hardware store and Frank would spend his Saturday mornings exploring the hardware store. As a child he was creative and would spend time with his grandmother building little cities out of scraps of wood. She would keep sacks full of wood scraps for them to play with. He also spent a lot of time drawing. His mother took him to art museums and concerts. His father thought he was a dreamer who wasn't going to amount to anything. His mother thought he was reticent to do things but she pushed him.

In 1947, he moved to California and got a job driving a delivery truck while he attended the Los Angeles City College. He tried radio announcing and chemical engineering. He wasn't very good at either so after thinking about what had made him happy as a child he decided to try some architecture classes. One of his early architectural professors told him he should not be an architect. He was devastated but didn't give up. He graduated from USC in 1954. He spent some time away from the field of architecture in numerous jobs including serving in the United States Army. He studied city planning at Harvard Graduate School of Design for a year and left before he finished the program.

In 1952, he married Anita Snyder. He claims Anita told him to change his name from Frank Goldberg to Frank Gehry. In 1966 he and Snyder divorced. He later married Berta Aguilera. He had two daughters from his first marriage and two sons from his second marriage.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Gehry would hang out with artists in Los Angeles. The California “funk” art movement of the time featured the use of inexpensive found objects and non-traditional media. He would attend artist parties and was very involved in the art world.

Like a lot of Canadian's Gehry is a big hockey fan and even has a hockey league in his office. In 2004, he designed the trophy for the World Cup of Hockey. He later designed a hockey rink in Los Angeles. Gehry has dual citizenship in the United States and Canada.

Frank Gehry's Buildings:

He practiced architecture for a while before he began to really implement his idea of deconstructive art into architecture. Deconstructivism structures do not reflect the idea that form follows function. Deconstructive structures go beyond current conventions of structural definition. His style often seems unfinished or messy. One of the reasons he is considered an artist architect is because he takes risks. Gehry says he is looking for ways to express feeling in 3d objects.

Frank Gehry: *"Life is chaotic, dangerous and surprising. Buildings should reflect that."*

His first remarkable project was his own home in Santa Monica. It was a bungalow, purchased because it was affordable, comfortable, and had a nice garden. He realized he needed to do something to the house so he decided to leave the house intact and built a new house around it in 1978. The house became a house within a house. For example one wall in his kitchen is the outside wall of the original house. Some of the flooring in the house is asphalt from the old driveway. It is said that he was shaving one morning in his bathroom and wanted more light so he took a hammer to the wall to create an opening. He was told the house was haunted so he decided it was haunted by the ghosts of cubism. His house has crooked windows and chain link that define spaces.

Frank Gehry practices architecture in Los Angeles, California his first practice was established in 1962. His partnership, Gehry Partners, LLP, was formed in 2001 and supports a staff of over 120 people. Every project Gehry Partners undertakes is designed and directed by Frank Gehry. At the beginning of each project Gehry develops quick sketches of the building. The sketches that Gehry produces for each project have a 3dimensional quality.

Frank Gehry: *"I love the shaping I can do when I'm sketching. And it never... occurred to me that I would do it in a building."*

Frank Gehry: *"I know I draw without taking my pen off the page. I just keep going, and that my drawings I think of them as scribbles. I don't think they mean anything to anybody except to me, and then at the end of the day, the end of the project they wheel out these little drawings and they're ... close to what the finished building is and it's the drawing.."*

After sketches are developed, the staff then makes many models at different scales that get refined and altered; sometimes by pulling pieces off and reattaching different pieces onto the model. The models are not pristine objects, they are messy working pieces that are used to understand scale and context of the building. Models are scanned into a sophisticated computer and made into construction drawings. The firm uses a sophisticated 3d computer modeling program, originally created for the aerospace industry, to document their designs and make them possible to build.

Frank Gehry: *"I think my best skill as an architect is the achievement of hand-to-eye coordination; I am able to transfer a sketch into a model into the building".*

His abstract drawings become finished buildings of titanium and glass, concrete and steel, wood and stone. His buildings are often cited among the most important works of contemporary architecture. Some of his more famous buildings are the:

- Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis (1993)
- Dancing House in Prague (1994)
- Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1997)
- Experience The Music Project, Seattle (1999)
- Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (2003)
- Stata Center, MIT, Massachusetts (2004)

He is currently designing a memorial for Dwight D. Eisenhower to be located on Independence Avenue in Washington, D.C.

Tips for talking about Frank Gehry:

1. Have the kids identify the materials on the buildings (brick, metal, and glass). The metal can reflect its surroundings. Brick helps portions of the buildings blend into the surroundings. The materials also contrast with the surroundings.
2. Look for shapes in the buildings (angles, triangles, rectangles, and curves).
3. On using your imagination, if you have ever stared at clouds and imagined what they might be (elephants, trains, or flying pigs), many of Gehry's buildings remind people of other things. The Rasin building reminds people of two dancers Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers. When designing the Weisman building, Gehry was inspired by the sails of a sailboat.
4. Not everybody loves Frank Gehry some complain that the buildings do not belong in their surroundings, are designed without accounting for the local climate, and waste structural resources. You might ask the older kids-- why anyone would design a building that some people might hate?

Works Cited:

Learn more about Frank Gehry at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Gehry and at http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Frank_Gehry.html.

The Visuals:

4 Posters:

1. Architect's picture, Inspirations, his house, and Card Board Furniture
2. Design Process: Stata Center, MIT, Massachusetts
3. Sketches and Buildings
Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis
Rasin Building (Dancing House) in Prague
4. Sketches and Buildings
Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain
Experience The Music Project, Seattle
Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles

Books:

Tour of Frank Gehry Architecture & Other L.A. Buildings by Laura Massino Smith
Building Stata by Nancy E. Joyce with commentary by Frank O. Gehry
Frank O. Gehry: The Architect's Studio

Frank Gehry Project

Objective: This project is to create a Frank Gehry inspired sketch of a museum building that conveys a three-dimensional feel from a single drawn line.

Supplies:

Black markers- thin line

Light colored construction paper

Instructions:

1. Have the kids imagine that they have been chosen to design a museum for their favorite collection (art, toy, cars, baseball cards, stuffed animals, stamps, a favorite movie, etc...). What do they want it to look like on the outside? What special features would it have? Where will the entrance be? How will it be different than other buildings?
2. Then have them sketch it on the construction paper. Ask them to keep drawing without lifting the marker off the page. Multiple lines will help add depth to the sketch.