

Design is a skill, the more it is practiced the more complex the outcomes

One of my mentors, a well known local architect said to me, that he told all his clients that he would do for them the best thing he had ever done. But that his next design would be better.

This is the fundamental of someone who is a brilliant designer. Each of us can design. We all design when we consciously modify our built environment. But to be brilliant means one is forever seeking to do what one does with more skill.

Architects are trained to perfect this skill of thinking how the things that make the built environment should be configured, and that includes information on things as diverse as damp proof coursing, the regulations and the esoteric philosophies of the post-modern world. This is the quality of design. We do it again and again and each time we learn and become better at implementing our knowledge.

A considerable body of research suggests that producing architecture is a *skill*, like playing a musical instrument or playing cricket. Would anyone think they could represent Australia playing test cricket if they have never trained for it?

An architect's training is long and hard work. It takes three years to just get to a basic level of knowledge regarding building construction methods and having some design

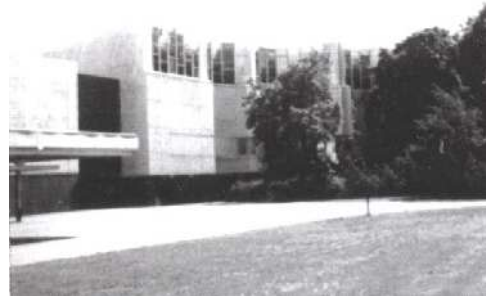


ability. It takes another two to be able to proficiently deal with complex designs. Over those five years chances are there have been many weeks with less than 15 hours sleep, and your friends outside architecture school don't see that much of you. And less than half make it. You have to literally immerse yourself into design. It takes a further 3-5 years in an office to gain the practical experience that will allow one to sort out documentation and legal issues and contracts enough to sit an exam where it's impossible to get all the answers right and to pass a gruelling interview by a panel. And once one has passed the exam, one still needs a compulsory 20 hours a year of further education. The tough process breeds a certain kind of skill. A world recognised skill. My students at Newcastle come from Germany, Scandinavia, the USA and Asia.

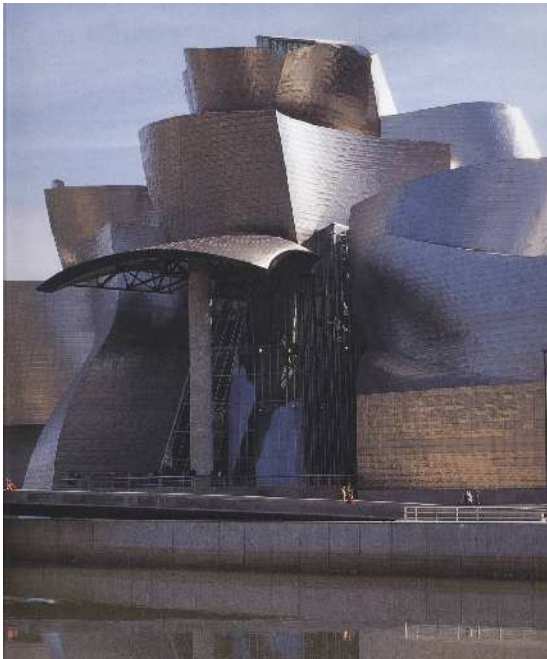
All great designers produce buildings of increasing brilliance as their career progresses. I have seen the early work of the internationally famous architect from the USA, Frank Lloyd Wright, and almost missed it. It was good quality but it was not extraordinary. (see photo above). His last work, the Guggenheim museum, was a consummate piece of design, but he was 80 to do it.



Also the internationally renowned, Alvar Aalto, in Yvaskyula in Finland. His early house design (to the left) is brilliant, but nothing like the wonder of his civic centre in Helsinki (Very durable but have had to replace the cladding stone after 40 yrs!).



One of my favourites as a student was the USA architect Frank Gehry. He was then just famous for his crazy extension to his house, and now have you seen the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao? That's titanium cladding – the Spanish know how to celebrate form, but what was the budget?



Gehry: the Guggenheim museum Bilbao Right: Gehry in the 1990's his first effort his house extension. (top J. Wines- side L. Peel)



This is designed by Joern Utzon. A church in Bagsvaerd. 1976. His most famous work, of course, the Opera house, still in difficulties when he designed this building. Don't judge by its looks to the street, this is inside the most beautiful Lutheran church.