The Clear Path to Safety.

Barcelona Towers Take on the Red Zone

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It's hard to miss the dynamic red metal and glassy façade of the Hotel Porta Fira Barcelona, designed collaboratively by architectural firms Toyo Ito AA and b720 Fermín Vázquez Arquitectos. The hotel also received the 2010 Emporis

Photo by Adrià Goula

Skyscraper Award 2010, which is presented annually to building at least 100 meters tall completed within the award year. Architects explain that the project was created to respond to the immediate environment and serve as a gateway to the cities of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and Barcelona from El Prat International Airport.

The Porta Fira contorts stands more than 370 feet tall, and has 28 floors.

"The biggest challenge of the skyscraper is its organic design. The façade of red aluminum tubes form continuous lines enclosing the complex geometry of the building, which twists and increases in size as it rises," states architect Fermín Vázquez.

The project features lacquered aluminum window profiles with a thermal break as well as double-glazing for solar control. The glass was supplied and fabricated by Arnfo Duglass. The buildings also play a highly symbolic role as they pay tribute to the historical Venetian towers that stand at the entrance to the exhibition centre located near Plaza España in Barcelona.

According to b720 Fermín Vázquez Arquitectos, the hotel tower was designed with an organic form and appears to change as one moves around it. The façade is divided into two skins; the inner skin is a sealed envelope based on a light curtainwall with aluminum and glass panels for acoustic, thermal and sealing requirements. The exterior façade acts as a second skin that provides texture and accommodates the tower's variable geometry. The skin is made of independent aluminum tubes, the ends of which are attached to ball-and-socket joints that allow for the desired torsion. Architects explain that it's the relationship between the ball-and-socket joints, the aluminum tubes, and the supporting structure is what allows the façade's entire surface "to gradually and continuously adapt, expressing rotation, movement and growth

as the tower rises upwards."

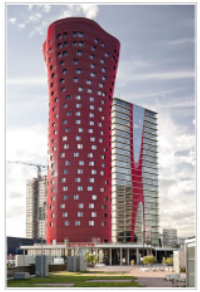

Photo by Adrià Goula

Also part of the complex, the office building has an orthogonal form and was designed to complement and respond "to the perceived twisting and movement of the hotel building." According to architects, at first glance the office "appears to be a pure volume with a glass curtainwall set back slightly with respect to the floor slab. However, the red vertical core of the building, situated on the edge of the ground plan, is organic in form and reflects the structure of the hotel tower."

The two towers are also linked by a shared atrium and a large base joins the towers and amplifies the impact of their structure.

In winning the Emporis Award, the Hotel Porta Fira was selected from more than 300 competing skyscrapers around the world. The jury "valued the building's aesthetics and integration into its urban environment over humankind's fascination with building the tallest structure.

The second place winner was the Burj Khalifa towers, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The Tour CMA CGM, near the harbor of Marseilles, took third place.

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