

Pelli and Tange: Architects For Humanity

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Apr 29, 2009



Paul Tange's Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower in Tokyo gives students inspiration for learning with its impressive design and built-in social gathering spaces. (Tange's Gakuen Cocoon Tower © Koji Horiuchi)

NEW YORK—Designing iconic structures around the world is one way to leave your mark. Architects Cesar Pelli and Paul Tange are certainly leaving theirs. Conveying a sense of traditional values and aesthetic, the architects move into the modern era with a solid sense of humanity and flair.

Pelli and Tange spoke at the Japan Society in New York, April 23. The topic was “Form Follows Fancy in New Architecture.”

“Visionary architects have made history and made our lives rich,” Tange said. “We should understand what we have, and what we have destroyed. History, culture, environment—we have destroyed enough.”

Tange has been involved in over 400 projects in more than 30 countries. He received his Masters degree in architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 1985 before joining his father's practice, Kenzo Tange Associates. Tange's father, Kenzo Tange, won the coveted Pritzker Prize for architecture in 1987, and is known for buildings such as the Tokyo's Olympic Arena for the 1964 games.

Pelli, a native of Argentina, is especially enthusiastic about including social space within design.

“Buildings need to belong to the place where they are built, for the people that live there,” he said. “The public spaces are most important.”

Pelli introduced a "winter garden" to his winning bid for the design of the World Financial Center in

downtown Manhattan. “This is, to me, what has given life and a justification for all the World Financial Center building.”



Architects Paul Tange (L) and Cesar Pelli (C) talk with moderator Geeta Mehta at the Japan Society, Thursday 23 April. (Mingguo/The Epoch Times)

The Winter Garden was significantly damaged on Sept. 11, 2001, and has since been repaired.

Urban design within architecture is a concept Pelli also tries to convey to his students. He has been involved in education for much of his career, serving as Dean of the Yale School of Architecture from 1977 to 1984. He has won more than 200 design awards, one of the most significant being the American Institute of Architect's Gold Medal in 1995.

The Old-Fashioned Way

Both Pelli and Tange still use pencils and tracing paper for the basic design—an anomaly in the growing world of technology.

“The pencil still much faster than the computer for basic drawing,” Pelli said. “The pencil is an extension of my brain.”

He said the younger generation head straight to the computer when he asks them to make a sketch. “It's a loss, but I think it's an inevitable loss.”

Tange said so much more can be determined from a pencil drawing. An architect with clarity will draw with defined, weighty strokes, whereas uncertainty will result in lighter, less defined lines, Tange said. “My father told me, 'every single line has to have meaning.'”

Significant Buildings

Pelli's distinct design of the Petronas Towers in Malaysia, completed in 1997, is perhaps his most outstanding contribution yet.



Malaysia gained an icon in 1997 with Cesar Pelli's Petronas Towers. The towers are joined by a

The building won him the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2004. The tower's floor plate design is based on simple Islamic geometric forms of two interlocking squares creating a shape of eight-pointed stars. Upon the eight-pointed stars are eight superimposed semi-circles softening the inner angles.

“I tried to express what I thought were the essences of Malaysia, its richness in culture and its extraordinary vision for the future. The building is rooted in tradition and about Malaysia's aspiration and ambition,” Pelli says on the building's website.

skybridge on the 41st floor, a link that symbolizes a gateway to the future and physically, into the Kuala Lumpur City Centre. (Mingguo/The Epoch Times)

Projects have their own life, Pelli said. “I have to understand them and interpret them. It forces me to refresh myself, to understand.”

Tange's 50-story school in Tokyo won the Emporis Skyscraper of the Year Award in 2008. The Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower stands out in Tokyo's industrial area, not only for its impressive design, but also for the environment it provides the students.

“What's important in a school is not just the classroom, but corridors,” Tange said. Every three floors is a “segmented school yard,” or gathering area for students. “We want to inspire students to come and study there,” Tange said.

He said the cocoon design embodies the idea of nurturing a student through education.

Technology and Form

Technology can make form look exciting, Pelli said, but many recent buildings are negative. “We keep seeing the strange form ... Not just have a building of a crazy shape just for the sake of it. Purely to be noticed, purely to be different.”

He said he hopes the difficult economic times will help bring about a “calmer period” to architecture.

Tange said he likes “crazy buildings” but they have to mean something. “At the end of the day we are creating part of a city, part of the environment.”

Last Updated
Apr 29, 2009