Rise of the new titans

Urban landscapes around the world are changing daily with the emergence of new and architecturally exciting buildings. Some simply blend into their environments while others stand out and go on to become landmarks. According to the Almanac of Architecture & Design 2009, these are some of the world's top new architectural wonders.

TEXT & COMPILATION **R YUNG**

House of Convexities
Location Barcelona, Spain
Designer Antonino Cardillo

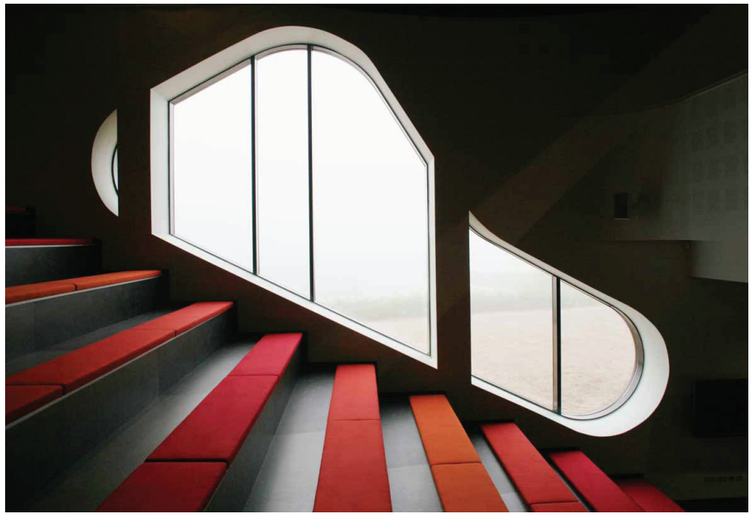
Inspired by the Flamenco dance, this sophisticated piece of architecture flaunts its elegant twists and curves to give the impression of being in perpetual motion. And no small part is played by the way the interior light changes throughout the day as the shifting sun filters in through the window's blades. At every succeeding instant, the building's different elements – the curve of the walls, the arc of the roof, the straight lines of the windows – all enter into different relations with each other according to what the lights dictate.

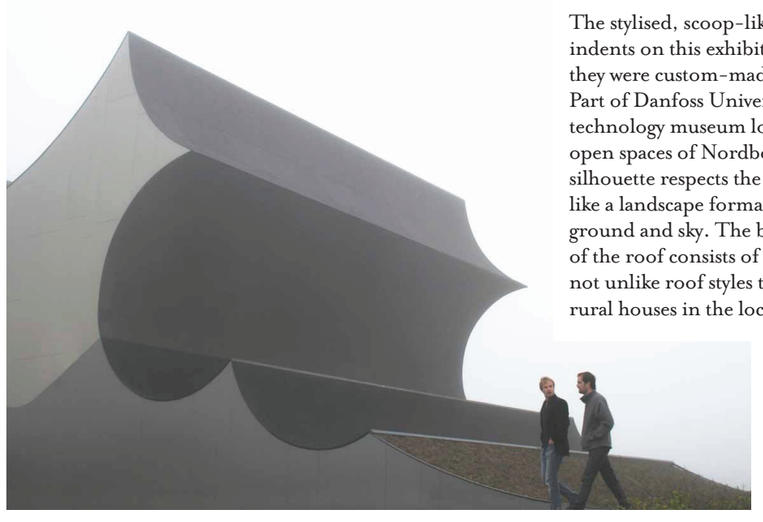
California Academy of Sciences
Location San Francisco, California, USA
Designer Renzo Piano Building Workshop

With an undulating green roof as its most immediate eye-catching feature, this building was designed as a model of sustainability and thus, boasts many environmental features. Among them is a 'living' roof: The plants at the top of the structure help to keep the building cool and prevent excess run-off water. The three domes – which 'push' up through the roof – house the Planetarium Dome, the Rainforest Biosphere, and the entrance to the Steinhart Aquarium. These elements represent the Academy: Space, Earth and Ocean.

Cumulus building, Danfoss Universe
Location Nordborg, Denmark
Designer J Mayer H Architects

The stylised, scoop-like curves of the indents on this exhibition hall look like they were custom-made to support clouds. Part of Danfoss Universe, a science and technology museum located in the wide-open spaces of Nordborg, its unique silhouette respects the setting by looking like a landscape formation between ground and sky. The building material of the roof consists of bitumen tar sheets not unlike roof styles that can be found on rural houses in the local region.





Skirkanich Hall, University of Pennsylvannia
Location Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA **Designer** Todd Williams Billie Tsien Architects

Jutting out and over the surrounding architecture, this newest addition to the University of Pennsylvania campus is an audacious break with tradition. Most of the other buildings within the campus have standardized four-square, red brick facades but the Skirkanich Hall boldly sports a front of green brick paired with slanting glass plates.

Clyne Castle Houses
Location Swansea, UK **Designer** Holder Mathias Architects

When deciding on a concept, the developers chose against merely mimicking the venerable Clyne Castle itself. They wanted to create buildings that enhance and complement their surroundings, as opposed to just blending in. The almost futuristic severity of the Houses' shapes is thus meant to set up a visual dialogue between the contemporary and the historic. The dominance of the windows, meanwhile, serves as a design element but also maximises the views of both the castle and Swansea bay.

Yale University Sculpture Building and Gallery
Location New Haven, Connecticut **Designer** KieranTimberlake

With a green philosophy as the driving force behind its design, even the decorative aspects have an eco-friendly function – the Sculpture Building's interlacing beams and girders are really a part of a sophisticated system of insulation: The eloquent weave pattern of its exterior shades the interior from the worst of the sun's heat while still allowing light to flood through. The Gallery, meanwhile, is clad in reclaimed wood in order to mimic the appearance of the historic houses along its street.

Kalmar Museum of Art
Location Kalmar, Sweden **Designer**
Tham & Videgård Hansson Arkitekter

This striking black cube is situated in the City Park of the renaissance town of Kalmar and houses the city's collection of modern art. Its minimalist aesthetic might appear at first glance to be forbiddingly stark, but the austerity is disrupted by unexpected variations in the widths and lengths of the wooden panels. The syncopated distribution of the large glazed windows also adds to its array of subtle surprises.

Xeros Residence
Location Phoenix, Arizona, USA **Designer** Blank Studio

Xeros is the Greek word for 'dry', making it a befitting moniker for this housing structure that was designed to engage closely with its location – the desert landscape of Phoenix, Arizona. For one, none of the windows in the entire building face the west, in order to shield the interior from the harsh afternoon sun. The more exposed sides, to the south and east, are shaded by an external layer of woven wire mesh. This unconventional building material is paired with the equally unexpected (and eye-catching) panelling of rusted corrugated-steel.