

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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HOMES | 20 ODD QUESTIONS

Frank Gehry

A sit-down with the artist of architecture

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Architect Frank Gehry in New York by Gehry at 8 Spruce St., his new residential tower in Manhattan. FRANCOIS DISCHINGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Pritzker Prize-winning architect Frank Gehry has designed some of the world's most impressive buildings, including the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany. Now 82 and making only the slightest concession to his age—he walks with a cane—Mr. Gehry has just opened New York by Gehry at 8 Spruce St., the largest apartment building in the Western Hemisphere and Mr. Gehry's first major residential project in New York City. He gave us a peek into the 76-story building, and talked about what wakes him up at night, why he doesn't sketch much anymore and designing for Lady Gaga.

The best advice I've received is to be yourself. The best artists do that. People look over their shoulders too much. I tell kids that come to Yale, where I've taught every other year since 1978,

to find your own way because then you're the only expert. Some people might not like what you do, but still, you're the only expert.

One of my greatest influences is the Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The first time I saw his sculpture of Saint Teresa [in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome] was in 1960. You can only see it during Mass and in order to see the little chapel it's in, you have to get to the front pew and lean forward. I don't know how to do the crossing myself very well. The young priest was howling with laughter when he saw me in the front row, trying to kneel when everyone else kneels, but doing it wrong.

I've always been fascinated with folds. All artists through the ages have spent time on the fold. Michelangelo had stacks of drawings of fabric. At 8 Spruce, we're using Bernini's folds to inspire the façade. I look for ways to express feeling in a building without using historic decoration.



View of 8 Spruce St. DBOX

A project that got away was the trellis I tried to build for Norton Simon. It emulated the movement of an Indian dancing figure in his private collection. I wanted it to look like a pile of wood had been lifted in the air by the wind. I got two layers built and was getting ready to do the third when he called me and said, "I'm going to stop this. This is going to be your unfinished symphony."

I used to sketch—that's the way I thought out loud. Then they made a book of my sketches and I got self-conscious, so now I don't do it much. I've got to do that more.

I love music. I flew to Milan the other night to hear Daniel Barenboim play Schubert and it was so beautiful, even though La Scala's acoustics aren't that great. I don't listen to music when I work, but I do go to a lot of concerts.

A conductor I love is "the Dude," Gustavo Dudamel, because he's come to our building [the Walt Disney Concert Hall]. I also love Esa-Pekka Salonen and Pierre Boulez. When I first saw Boulez conduct it was the famous "rug concert." He had the seats removed from Philharmonic Hall and put rugs out. I sat on the rugs and watched him conduct. He keeps his arms within this very small space. I'd never seen somebody express passion so simply. Conductors usually wave and move so much, but this guy had it all inside.



Interior of an apartment in New York by Gehry at 8 Spruce St. FRANCOIS DISCHINGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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dy Gaga, commissioned by Francesco Vezzoli, was made out of leather and was floppy so it didn't work. She never saw it. I was thinking of sending it to her but she probably gets all kind of junk.

A well-designed home has to be very comfortable. I can't stand the aesthetes, the minimal thing. I can't live that way. My home has to be filled with stuff—mostly paintings, sculpture, my fish lamps, cardboard furniture, lots of books. I couldn't live in the Farnsworth House.

I don't collect objects, but I do collect art. My favorite artists are Ken Price, Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, Ed Moses and John Baldessari.

I'd always wanted to design tabletop items, but I never had a venue. When I started working with Tiffany, it was to do tabletop but I got brought into the jewelry because whenever I'd go to their offices, they'd let me watch the craftsmen. It was seduction by workmanship. I just made 30 one-of-a-kind bone-china cuff bracelets.



Tiffany bracelet designed by Mr. Gehry GEHRY PARTNERS, LLP

My hobby is sailing. I have a Beneteau First 44.7 sailboat that I keep in Marina del Rey. I just day sail. It relaxes me like nothing else. When you're sailing, things change every second so you've got to be on your toes. I love that.

Ice hockey was an inspiration for the Hat Trick Chair I designed for Knoll. I own a team called the Fog, and we play in the Over-30 League. I played a bit growing up and I loved playing with my boys.

I can't keep up with my wife, who reads two books a week, but I'm reading "Listen to This," by Alex Ross. And I'm reading "The Snowball: Warren Buffett and the Business of Life," which is long, so I put it down and read other things in between.

If I think of my greatest achievement, it's like a love affair: You're always excited about the building you're working on. So right now it's 8 Spruce St., but next month it will be something else.

The next building I'm working on is the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi. They're pouring the foundations right now.

At any given moment, I'm working on 20 projects, in stages ranging from conceptual to construction.

I can't retire. I'm 82. It's too young.

—Edited from an interview by Jackie Cooperman

