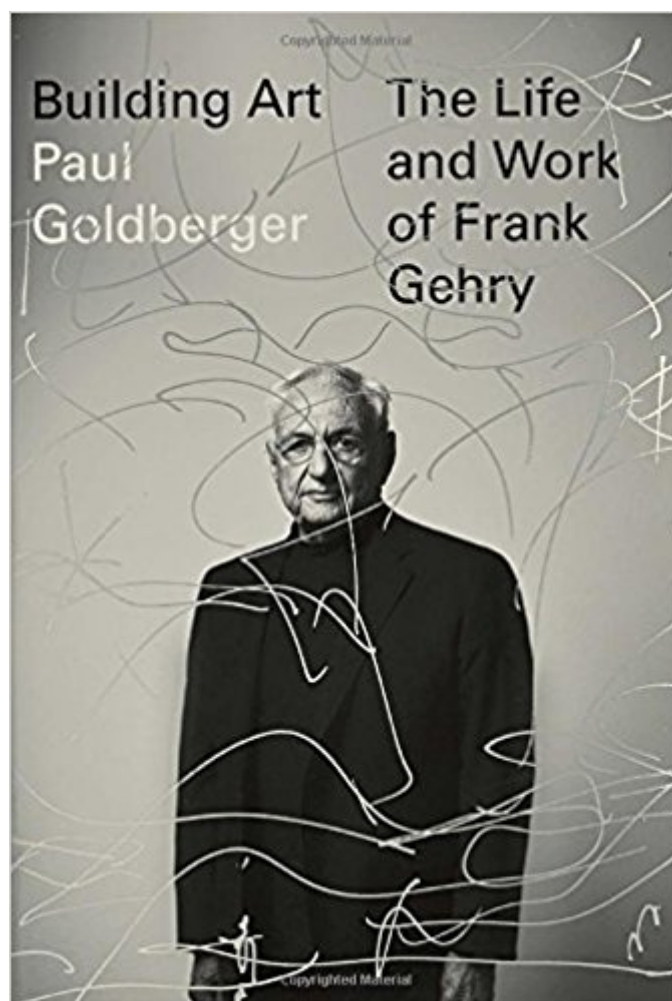


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# Building Art: The Life And Work Of Frank Gehry



## Synopsis

From Pulitzer Prize-winning architectural critic Paul Goldberger: an engaging, nuanced exploration of the life and work of Frank Gehry, undoubtedly the most famous architect of our time. This first full-fledged critical biography presents and evaluates the work of a man who has almost single-handedly transformed contemporary architecture in his innovative use of materials, design, and form, and who is among the very few architects in history to be both respected by critics as a creative, cutting-edge force and embraced by the general public as a popular figure. *Building Art* shows the full range of Gehry's work, from early houses constructed of plywood and chain-link fencing to lamps made in the shape of fish to the triumphant success of such late projects as the spectacular art museum of glass in Paris. It tells the story behind Gehry's own house, which upset his neighbors and excited the world with its mix of the traditional and the extraordinary, and recounts how Gehry came to design the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, his remarkable structure of swirling titanium that changed a declining city into a destination spot. *Building Art* also explains Gehry's sixteen-year quest to complete Walt Disney Concert Hall, the beautiful, acoustically brilliant home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Although Gehry's architecture has been written about widely, the story of his life has never been told in full detail. Here we come to know his Jewish immigrant family, his working-class Toronto childhood, his hours spent playing with blocks on his grandmother's kitchen floor, his move to Los Angeles when he was still a teenager, and how he came, unexpectedly, to end up in architecture school. Most important, *Building Art* presents and evaluates Gehry's lifetime of work in conjunction with his entire life story, including his time in the army and at Harvard, his long relationship with his psychiatrist and the impact it had on his work, and his two marriages and four children. It analyzes his carefully crafted persona, in which a casual, amiable "aw, shucks" surface masks a driving and intense ambition. And it explores his relationship to Los Angeles and how its position as home to outsider artists gave him the freedom in his formative years to make the innovations that characterize his genius. Finally, it discusses his interest in using technology not just to change the way a building looks but to change the way the whole profession of architecture is practiced. At once a sweeping view of a great architect and an intimate look at creative genius, *Building Art* is in many ways the saga of the architectural milieu of the twenty-first century. But most of all it is the compelling story of the man who first comes to mind when we think of the lasting possibilities of buildings as art. *Â*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Goldberger’s big, colorful biography is a tale of moxie and success in the New World . . . an encounter with an architect who is ambitious, cocky and clever—and [a guide who] will present him with a wry and trenchant perspective . . . An informative, startling journey into the inner sanctums of modern architecture’s power structure.”—Nicholas Fox Weber, *The New York Times Book Review* “If you’re interested in Frank Gehry, the creative force who has conjured up everything from the ebullient billows of the Bilbao Guggenheim to the strong lines of our very own Concord Pavilion from 1975, I can’t recommend this expansive survey of his life and work too highly.”—John King, *San Francisco Chronicle* “An enthralling story . . . more gripping than any novel . . . Gives a deep insight into the life of a revolutionary architect and modern architecture. Both architects and lay people who are interested in arts and architecture will benefit from it.”—*The Washington Post Book Review* “Excellent, comprehensive [and] undeniably fascinating . . . Mirroring the rise of contemporary architecture, Gehry emerges from the constraints of mid-century modernism, grapples with questions of urban development and human scale . . . To a remarkable extent, he seems to have found a language of his own, which he can finally and fully articulate.”—James Tarmy, *Bloomberg Business* “Fascinating . . . Agilely balances the disparate subjects of art and biography. Goldberger’s critical assessments of Gehry’s designs are insightful and often riveting, but he does not neglect the prosaic details of the man’s personal life.”—Doug Childers, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* “A big biography . . . penetrating . . . revealing”—Susan Stamberg, *NPR* “A critically fluent, socially and psychologically acute, and well-constructed

comprehensive biography, the first of the 'most famous architect in the world.' . . . With avid precision and invaluable insight, Goldberger charts the complicated, punishing battles Gehry waged to construct his ambitious, dreamworld buildings, from private homes to Guggenheim, Bilbao, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Facebook headquarters, and beyond. The result is an involving work of significant architectural history and a discerning and affecting portrait of a daring and original master builder."--Donna Seaman, Booklist "A riveting storyteller and accomplished reporter . . . [Paul Goldberger] offers a comprehensive look at not only the stories behind Frank Gehry's acclaimed buildings but also the experiences and influences that shaped his life and work. His book is full of little-known facts about the Pritzker Prize-winner that will surprise the most knowledgeable Gehry-philes."--Architectural Digest "Terrifically readable . . . satisfying detail on Gehry's career path and hugely complex personality."--Christopher Hawthorne, Los Angeles Times "[Goldberger] paints the architect as a down-to-earth sort who designs eminently functional buildings that respond to their surroundings, exhibit continuity with the past, and embrace Earthlings despite looking like crashed spaceships. He contextualizes Gehry's work with smart discussions of trends in modernism and the Los Angeles art scene that inspired such trends, and offers his usual shrewd, evocative insights."--Publishers Weekly "This is a proper biography, being as much about the personal life of Gehry as it is about his buildings. It reads well, mostly avoiding archi-speak and technicalities, preferring the clarity of plain English."--Architectural Record "Goldberger interrogates the peculiar psyche and restless contradictions of the man to shed light on the motivations behind the architecture."--Samuel Medina, Metropolis "Wonderfully detailed . . . gregariously fascinating . . . invaluable . . . All future biographies will be indebted to Goldberger's groundbreaking, affectionate work."--Steve Donoghue, Open Letters Monthly "Richly researched, intelligent, and graceful."--Kirkus Reviews

PAUL GOLDBERGER, Æ Æ a contributing editor at Vanity Fair, spent fifteen years as the architecture critic for The New Yorker and began his career at The New York Times, where he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished criticism for his writing on architecture. He is the author of many books, most recently *Why Architecture Matters*, *Building Up and Tearing Down: Reflections on the Age of Architecture*, and *Up From Zero*. He teaches at The New School and lectures widely around the country on architecture, design, historic preservation, and cities. He and his wife, Susan Solomon, live in New York City.

Frank Gehry is today's most famous American architect, now comparable to that other Frank --

Frank Lloyd Wright. So it is high time there was an authoritative Gehry chronicle. As a biography the new Goldberger book is as important and insightful about an architect's motivations and evolving frame of mind as *Le Corbusier: A Life*, by Nicholas Fox Weber. The author takes us from Gehry's difficult childhood in Toronto in the 1930s, through the move to Los Angeles in 1947, architecture school at USC, a stint in the army, city planning at Harvard, work for shopping mall designer Victor Gruen, time in Paris and then back to LA where he launched his practice in 1962. There he found friendship with, and inspiration from, a circle of up-and-coming modern painters who incorporated ordinary found objects in their work. Subsequent chapters cover the building of his and second wife Berta's famous cyclone fence house in Santa Monica, his fish sculptures and cardboard furniture, the commissions for Bilbao and Disney, the range of New York work, the Dwight Eisenhower Memorial in Washington D. C., and the Louis Vuitton Museum in Paris, which opened last year. The author is adept at drawing Gehry out and getting at the thinking, and the contexts and stories, behind the designs. In a way Goldberger acts as kind of architectural therapist, helping Gehry unravel and make sense of a lifetime of anxiety about his own work and, in effect, complementing the actual psychotherapy Gehry received from his friend the psychologist Milton Wexler. So I guess you could say that this book is the architect's ultimate "psychiatry couch session."

One theme that's especially strong throughout *Building Art* is the sense of contradiction, both within Gehry's nature and his art. For example, Goldberger writes:

"Frank's work represented emotion as much as intellect and emerged out of intuition far more than theory; like all of his architecture, Bilbao was at once pragmatic and idealistic. He makes the point that Gehry was heavily influenced, in a push-pull sort of way, by the mid-century California modernism of his early milieu. Describing the billowing shapes of Disney Hall, he writes: "The great sails were a symbol of the new, but they were also a way of creating decoration, or giving the building an element that existed solely for visual pleasure. Frank was consciously going against the puritanical strain that had always run through modernist architecture, the belief that a building needed to be honest, pure, and rational—that ornamentation was not just a self-indulgent frill and a useless return to historical copying, but an ethical transgression, a violation of modernist principles. A related theme is Gehry's desire to express movement in architecture, leading to his manipulation of fish shapes and compound curves, which drew inspiration from Japanese carp and Greek sculpture. Expressive movement would

become his way of providing the third ingredient in the classical Vitruvian definition of architecture as *commodity, firmness, and delight*. Goldberger explains: "The architecture of Bilbao would articulate his larger goals more clearly than ever before: he wanted less to shock than to find a fresh and different way of using architecture to produce the sensations of satisfaction, comfort, and pleasure that more traditional buildings did. I have experienced a concert at Disney Hall and there Frank Gehry made not only a new symbol for LA on the outside, but also a space that lifts the audience, reshapes and recombines it with the orchestra, and transports both into a sensual new reality. It's a room that does more than reverberate - it resonates. So does this book.

Really interesting book written by an honest admirer of the subject. Mr. Goldberger provides not only the good aspects of the Gehry person and architect but quite a bit of the bad as well. I would have given the book a 5 except it lacks enough images of the buildings described to lessen the impact the excellent writing could have had.

I read Kindle's eBook version. It has a very few photos. Really? A book about architecture with few photos? I went to bookstore to look at the hardbound version. It has a lot more photos and many are in color. I feel cheated. I'm sure they do this to keep prices down. The problem is, you don't know before you buy the eBook version that it has no or fewer pictures than bound versions. I want this info upfront.

paul goldberger is arguably the most important architectural critic in the united states.his writing for the new york times and the new yorker bear witness to thisfrank gehry is controversial,but arguably the most important living architect in the world.it is a rare confluence of talent that shaped this bookas an architect,i found it to be a gift.in general,i very much appreciated learning more about the cultural and historical context in which gehry s career and personal development took placea great read

This wonderful biography reads like a gripping novel--the narrative builds from page one and the subject, Frank Gehry, is fascinating throughout. Goldberger's writing style is both elegant and accessible and he develops a clear picture of both the excitement around Gehry's creative process and the tensions involved in producing architectural masterpieces. The book is a true "page turner." I loved it and gave

one to everyone I know who enjoys a great book.

I want to start my review by saying that I'm not particularly a fan of Frank Gehry's work, but I certainly find him amazing for his influence on modern architecture and his years of contributions to society. I was anxious to read critic Paul Goldberger's biography of Gehry, "Building Art: The Life and Work of Frank Gehry". The book, which was written with the cooperation of Gehry and his friends and family and clients, is very even handed. It's clear that Goldberger admires Frank Gehry, but his fondness for his subject doesn't blind him to Gehry's lesser points. Frank Gehry, by now in his mid-80's, is still hard at work. A man who is uncompromising in his architectural principles, he is known for his buildings all over the world. As an architect, the Canadian-born Gehry - he changed his last name from "Goldberg" to "Gehry" - began his practice in Los Angeles in the early 1950's. He was sought out to design commercial buildings and public buildings, but he gained worldwide fame with his Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain in the 1990's. Suddenly everyone wanted a Frank Gehry-building, but his type of architecture must go through many levels of approval by both financial and artist groups, and many a design never left the drawing boards in Gehry's Los Angeles office. But he has built grand buildings from Berlin to Paris to Los Angeles to parts of Asia. Paul Goldberger gives as complete a picture of Frank Gehry on a personal level as he does on a professional one. Twice married and the father of four children, Goldberger makes no secret of Gehry's failings as a parent, particularly of the two daughters from his first marriage. Of course, Gehry was building his career, which is often the case. All in all, Paul Goldberger's biography of Frank Gehry is outstanding. Whether you like Gehry's work or not. The only complaint I have about the book, which I read in e-book form, was that it had a lot of typos. I also wish there were more photographs, but by reading it on my iPad, I was able to switch over to Wikipedia when I wanted to see a building whose picture was not included in the book.

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