

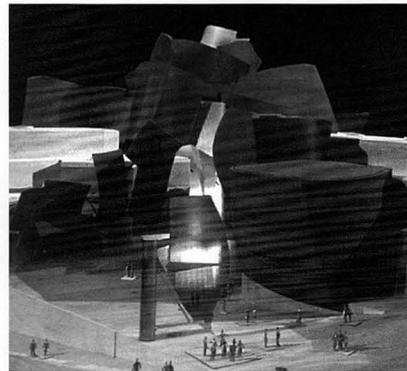
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Frank O. Gehry

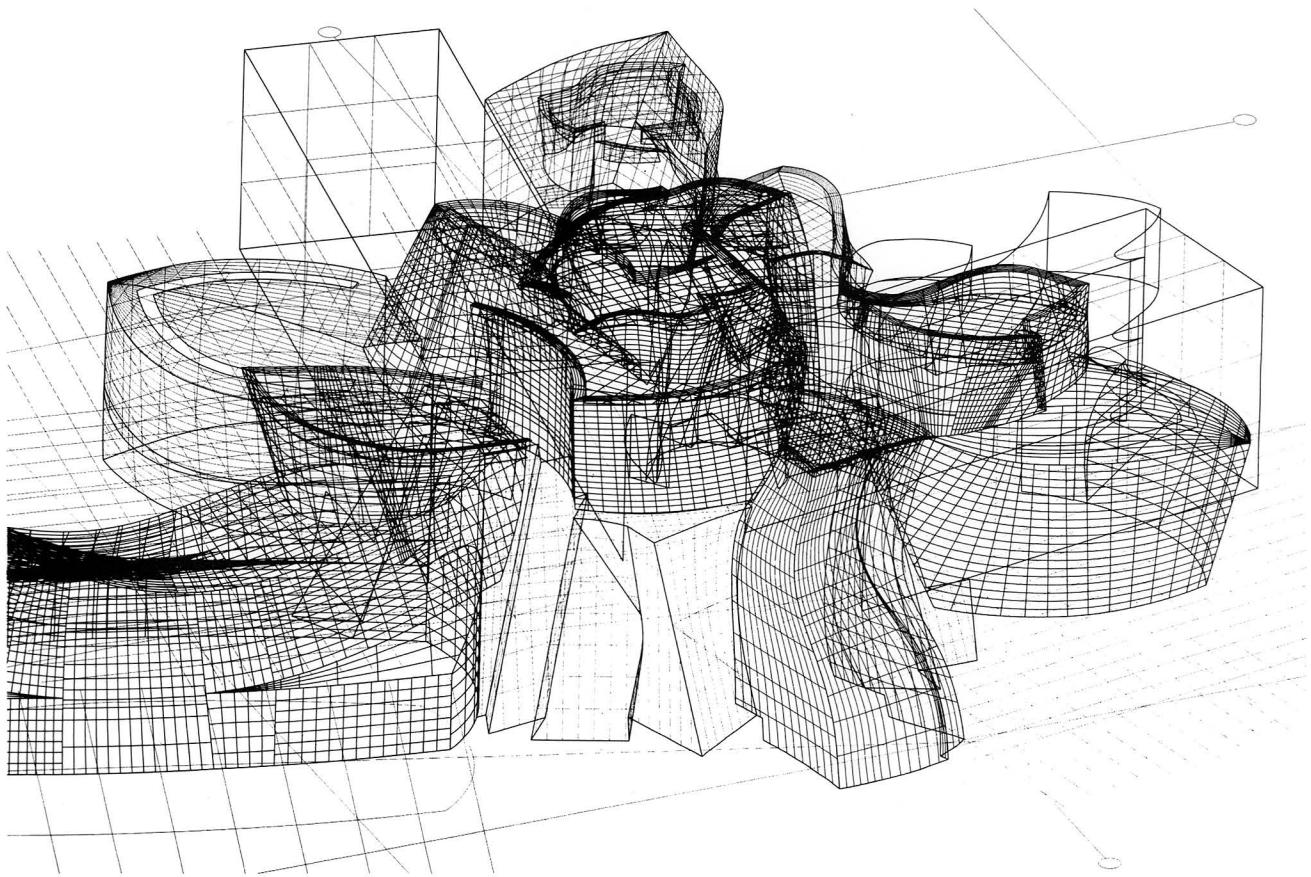
The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, scheduled to be completed in 1997, is the result of a unique collaboration between the Basque County Administration, which finances and owns the project, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which will operate the Museum and provide the core art collection. The Museum represents the first step in the redevelopment of the former trade and warehouse district along the south bank of the Nervion River. Directly accessible from the business and historic districts of the city, the Museum marks the center of a cultural triangle formed by the Museo de Bellas Artes, the University, and the Old Town Hall. The Puente de la Salve Bridge, which connects the 19th-century city center with outlying areas, passes over the site at its eastern edge, lending to the Museum the significance of being a gateway to the city.

A public plaza located at the entrance of the Museum encourages pedestrian traffic between the Museum and the Museo de Bellas Artes, and between the Old City and the River Front. Public facilities, including a 300 seat auditorium, a restaurant, and retail spaces, are each accessible from the main public plaza as well as from within the Museum itself. This dual access enables the spaces to operate independently from the Museum, making them an integral part of the urban life of Bilbao.

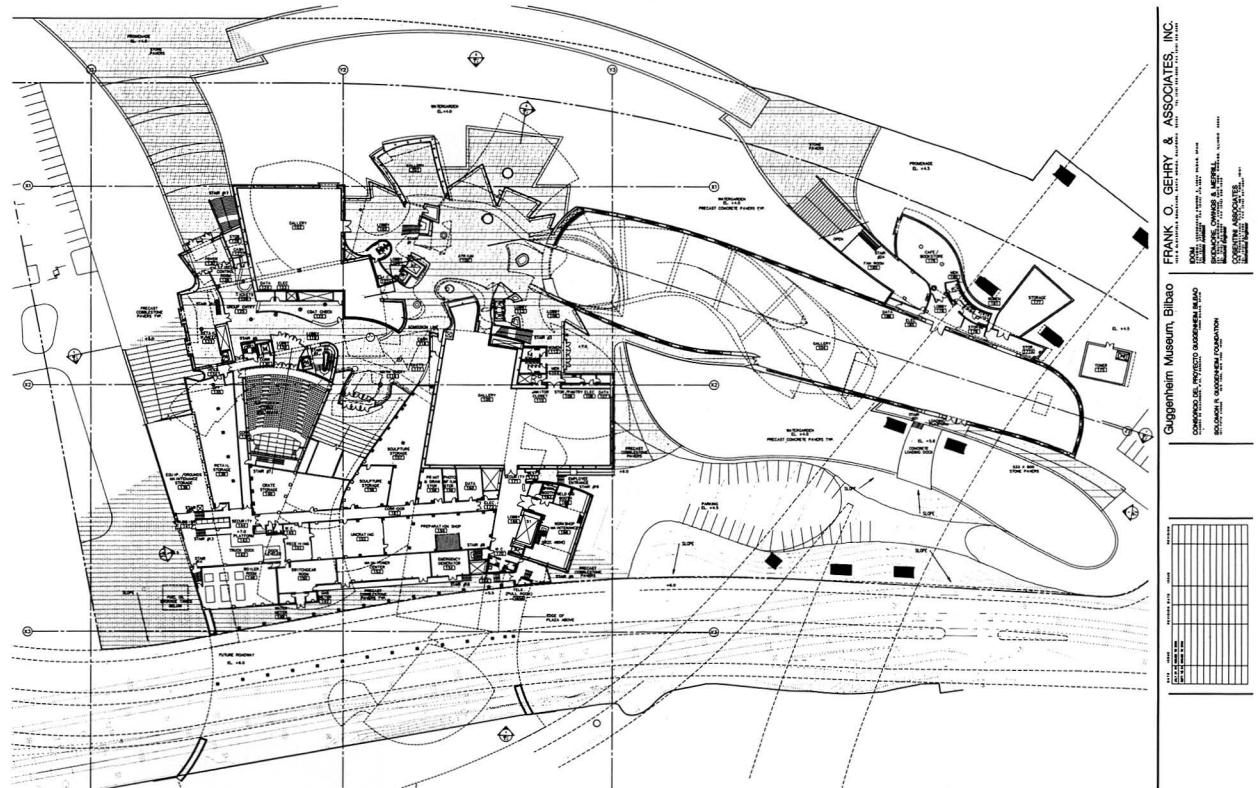
The main entrance to the Museum is through a large central atrium, where a system of curvilinear bridges, glass elevators and stair towers connects the exhibition galleries concentrically on three levels. A sculptural roof form rises from the central atrium, flooding it with light through glazed openings. The unprecedented scale of the central atrium, rising to a height of more the 50 meters above the river, is an invitation to monumental site-specific installations and special Museum events.



The Guggenheim Foundation required gallery spaces to exhibit a permanent collection, a temporary collection, and a collection of selected living artists. In response to this requirement, three distinct types of exhibition space were designed. The galleries for the exhibition of the permanent collection are relatively conservative in design. This collection is housed in two sets of three consecutively-arranged, square galleries, stacked at each of the second and third levels of the Museum. The temporary collection is housed in a more dramatic, elongated rectangular space that extends to the east. This space passes underneath the Puente de la Salve Bridge and terminates in a tower on its far side, integrating the bridge in the overall composition of the



Ground Floor Plan

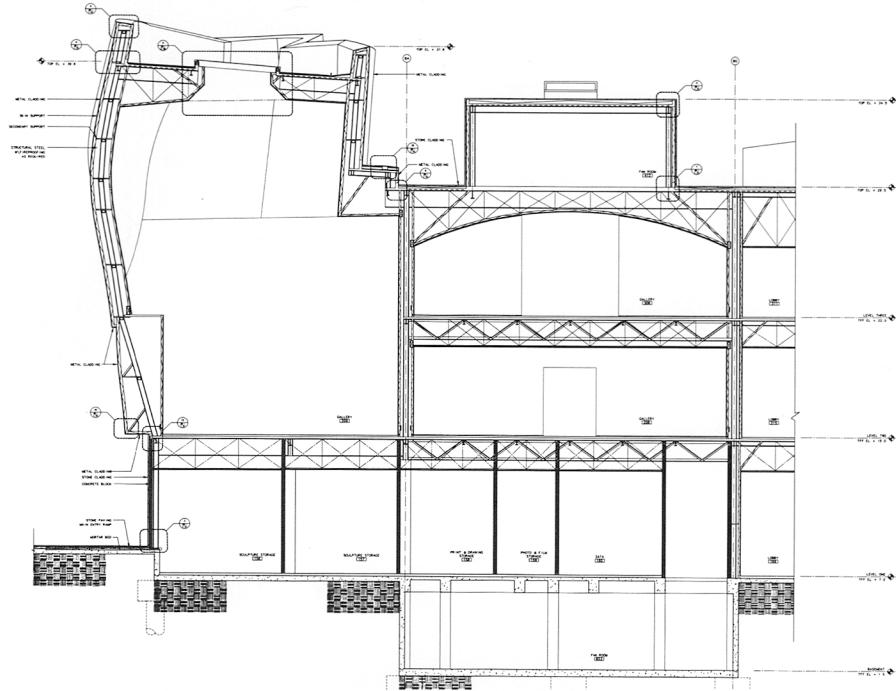
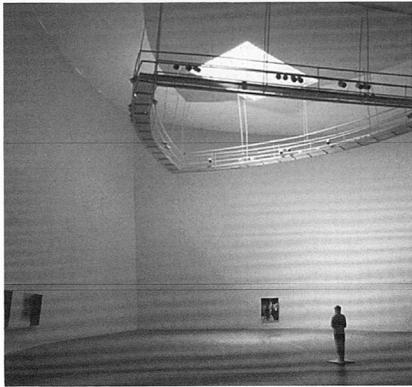


Museum. The interior of the space is entirely free of support columns, providing the Museum with the unique capacity to stage large-scale art installations that would not be feasible for a smaller, more conventional museum. The exhibition of the work of selected living artists is housed in a series of seven distinct galleries, each of unique spatial quality and generous ceiling height. Back-of-house functions, such as loading, art staging, storage, and conservation are housed in the lower level of the Museum.

The major exterior material on the rectangular buildings of the Museum is Spanish limestone, while the more sculpted shapes of the building are clad in titanium panels. The interior walls of the galleries are a smooth finish plaster. Large, glazed curtain walls open to views of the river and surrounding city. Mechanical systems are designed to maintain a strict level of temperature and humidity control. The permanent collection galleries are lit by direct exhibition lights with a flush mounted power system, while the galleries for the temporary collection and for the living artists collection are lit by a theatrical catwalk mounted lighting system. In addition, custom designed wall-wash fixtures create an even illumination of 10 to 20 foot candles at eye level in all of the galleries. Natural light is introduced through skylights with supplemental blackout shades for daylight control.

The design of the Museum is influenced by the scale and the texture of the existing city, and recalls the historic building materials of the River Front, thus demonstrating a thoughtful response to the historic and economic traditions of the area. In addition, the design of the Museum represents a thorough understanding that light and space can be manipulated to shape and to enhance the emotional response of Museum visitors.

Frank O. Gehry & Associates, Inc. provided full architectural services throughout all phases of this large scale project. Model photos courtesy of Joshua White.



Partial Section

