

100 YEARS  
100 BUILDINGS





100 YEARS  
100 BUILDINGS

JOHN HILL

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is an experiment of sorts. It presents one hundred buildings completed in the past hundred years—one building per year from 1916 to 2015. From the moment I decided to tackle the year-by-year format, the goal was to create a list of one hundred must-see buildings that truly spanned one hundred years, that didn't cluster in particular times. I knew the task would be difficult, but I also knew it would result in a balanced list of well-known icons, some lesser-known gems, and much in between.

Selecting only one great building per calendar year—based on date of completion, opening, inauguration, or some other criterion—means this book isn't simply a “100 best of” compilation of buildings; after all, the best buildings in that period theoretically could fall on a handful of dates. Therefore, this book uses the unique year-by-year format to accomplish a few things: it follows the ebbs and flows of style, technology, material, and other trends over the past hundred years; it aligns the buildings with contemporaneous events within and beyond architecture; and it calls attention to the myriad particular ways of designing buildings.

## **TRENDS**

In history books, architecture is taught as a succession of styles. Although I cannot deny the role of style in making sense of architecture, that particular perspective is not this book's overriding concern. Often labeled well after the fact by historians and critics, style is secondary to the creation of architecture. Regardless, I'll admit architecture has moved through a number of styles in the last hundred years, most generally from Modernism between the World Wars, to postmodernism as a reaction to it in the 1970s, to the Deconstructivist label generated by the Museum of Modern Art in the late 1980s, to what could now be called, for lack of a better term, Pluralism. These large umbrella styles can be further broken down into smaller stylistic subsets, such as Expressionism, International Style, Brutalism, Critical Regionalism, High-Tech, Blobitecture, Parametricism, and so forth. Rather than focusing on the way buildings have been shaped stylistically over time by presenting at least one building from each stylistic strand, I hone in on how architects utilize context, technology, material, and even concept to shape space and therefore affect experience.

## **EVENTS**

In terms of events outside of architecture, the past hundred years have been a series of crises of varying degrees: the two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, the energy crisis, the rise of neoliberalism, the fall of Communism, 9/11, globalization, and global warming, to name just a few from my admittedly Western perspective. Although the buildings in this book do not address all of these and other crises, the relationship between architecture and external events is obvious, yet worth stating explicitly: architecture is part of the world and is therefore affected by it, in turn impacting things outside of it.

Aside from world-changing events, architecture is ultimately at the service of society, so the role of architecture relative to it over the past century is evident in the types of buildings presented. Religious buildings are clustered toward the 1920s, for example, while museums are found in abundance closer to the present, indicating a shift in cultural values, among other external factors.

## **WAYS OF DESIGNING**

Although the above two considerations might point to it, *100 Years, 100 Buildings* is not a history of architecture over the past hundred years. By focusing on individual buildings, this book functions like one hundred miniature case studies or, more accurately, introductions to one hundred buildings that encourage people to visit them, calling attention to the nuances of each project, the details of their creation, and the unique aspects of each design. Every building can be regarded relative to style, technique, or contextual event(s), but the circumstances of their creation are unique, and those circumstances are what this book is all about.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

How then was the selection of buildings made? While the selection expresses my personal tastes, preferences, and values about what makes great architecture—and certain shortcomings, which will be explained below—there are three fairly objective criteria that were implemented in making the one-building-per-year selection:

First, the buildings are, well, buildings. This book defines architecture as the creation of spaces for human occupation. Therefore the focus is on spaces for living, working, learning, traveling, playing, and even grieving, but the selection also acknowledges the creation of urban space, or how a building fits into its context. This criterion eliminates projects that are, for example, landscapes, bridges, monuments or follies, even as the characteristics of these and other types of design may be present in the book, such as in buildings with strong landscape components or even a house that bridges a river.

Second, the buildings are extant. Architectural highlights from the years 1916 to 2015 could easily include never-built projects and buildings that were demolished or built as temporary structures. But I want this book to be an impetus for people to visit the buildings, to see them in context and sense the spaces as fully as possible. To do so, the buildings must be standing.

Third, the buildings are, to some degree, public. This criterion is important given the above emphasis on actually visiting buildings, yet it does not mean that all of the buildings are public institutions. Rather, each building selected is publicly accessible and/or makes a significant contribution to the public realm. Given the large span of time covered, this book then incorporates single-family residences from the early part of the twentieth century—what now are considered “house museums”—along with museums and other public institutions closer to the present.

Even with these three means of narrowing down buildings for consideration, the final selection was a highly subjective undertaking based on my experiences as an architect and writer about architecture. I’ll be the first to admit the selection embodies some of the usual shortcomings that plague architectural publishing, namely a Western geographic leaning (forty-five buildings are in Europe, thirty in North America, eleven in South America, ten in Asia, three in Australia, and only one building in Africa), a preference for “name” architects, and a shortage of women architects. Much change has happened in the past one hundred years, but the attention given to buildings outside of the strongholds of Europe and the United States, to young and in many cases collaborative practices all over the world, and to the diversification of the male-dominated (white) profession is a fairly recent phenomenon. Evidence can be found, for example, in the six women architects found in the book’s last ten buildings, versus only five (one of them a repeat) from the preceding ninety years!

These deficiencies are inadvertent, the product of a preference for modern architecture (which really began in the West early last century and then spread to all parts of the globe after WWII), a need to include the important icons of a few modern masters alongside lesser-known works, and, as noted, the year-by-year format. In regard to the last, it should be noted that determining when the buildings were completed was a tricky affair at times, given that many dates were surprisingly hard to pin down, with different dates coming from different sources (in some instances, the same source!). Establishing dates required some finessing in terms of nailing down the “correct” date (the reasoning and/or sources for the dates are spelled out in each building’s description), but it also added an element of chance to the selection, such that a great building might have made the cut one particular year but not the year before or after. For these and other reasons, readers will no

doubt find room for disagreement with both what is included as well as with what is omitted; in regard to the latter, up to four runners-up per year are listed as part of a time line of architecture culture at the back of the book, illustrating the difficulties confronted in the process and the plethora of great buildings also worth visiting.

### **THEMES DISCOVERED**

Finally, with the selection being a synthesis of the objective criteria described above, my subjective judgments, and the year-by-year format, the resulting list opens itself up to the discovery of thematic strands. Below are a few of the more evident themes that I discovered, though by far they do not encompass every building in the book or all the possible commonalities among the buildings.

*First-Time Freshness:* With so much importance given to novelty and innovation in modern and contemporary architecture, it's no surprise that many outstanding buildings in these pages were an architect's first built project before they went on to become notable names and go-to architects later in life. Erich Mendelsohn's Einsteinturm (1921), R. M. Schindler's own house (1922), Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 (1967), and Zaha Hadid's Vitra Fire Station (1993) are a few examples of young architects exploring new ideas and forms through their early buildings.

*Building Overseas:* At least since the diaspora of European architects in the 1930s, the profession of architecture has been global, with architects designing buildings for places well beyond their homes. With global telecommunications and air travel having dissolved the usual boundaries of place, this kind of work is more commonplace, witnessed by a few examples: Le Corbusier's Mill Owners' Association Building (1954) in India, Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (1973) in Australia, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997) in Spain, and Rem Koolhaas and OMA's CCTV Headquarters (2012) in China.

*The Importance of Context:* This will be an obvious point for architects, since any building responds to its context in myriad ways, be it climatic, social, political, cultural, or economic. Yet the best buildings manage to find creative and unexpected ways to build upon the history and/or natural features of a place while also creating something that shifts the context in a wholly new direction: Frank Lloyd Wright's decision to build Fallingwater (1938) over a waterfall; Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1958), which led to a revision of New York's zoning code; and James Stirling's Neue Staatsgalerie (1984), which re-created Stuttgart's pedestrian network in miniature.

*Preserving Innovation:* Modern and contemporary architecture tends to favor innovation over preservation, but as buildings of the early- to mid-twentieth century are confronted with the choice of preservation or demolition, preservation

is one means of determining what buildings are valuable historically as well as in the present. Many of the buildings in this book have already been restored, renovated, or added onto in one way or another, thanks to enlightened owners and/or preservation advocates.

### ***PROGNOSTICATION***

With this last theme of preservation, the more recent buildings in the book could be seen as my candidates for preservation in the future. It's then interesting to hypothetically consider a version of this hundred-buildings-in-hundred-years book in fifty years' time (1966–2065). Would the buildings in the last half still merit inclusion? Only time will tell, and I'll leave it to the rest of this book to argue for the merits of each building, but it's safe to say that in looking forward certain trends will continue while others will fade away. The facts of diversity, brought up earlier, will impact not only who designs buildings but also who commissions the buildings and where they will be built. With a global projection of ten billion people in the year 2065, the social consciousness that has come to the fore in academia and the profession in recent years will (hopefully) increase, to be applied to housing and other buildings for communities not traditionally served by architects. Cultural buildings, the majority in the last quarter of this book, will continue, but in forms that embrace preservation and other sustainable practices rather than the creation of icons. Whatever the who, what, where, and how are in fifty years' time, I predict architecture will still be a spatial practice, the means of elevating our life experiences in ways unimagined—hopefully to the inclusion and benefit of as many people in as many places as possible.

# 1916 HOLLAND HOUSE

Hendrik Petrus Berlage ▶ London, England

The west facade on Bury Street. The building appears solid on approach, due to the narrow street and tightly spaced piers, an effect partially lost since the construction of 30 St. Mary Axe and its plaza across the street.

In addition to its architectural merits, as explained below, the first building selected in *100 Years, 100 Buildings* is exceptional for actually being completed in the midst of the First World War. H. P. Berlage (1856–1934), architect of the great Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam (1903), designed the building for W. H. Müller & Co., a Dutch shipping company that operated a ferry service for freight and passengers between Rotterdam and London starting in the late 1800s. The building’s most recognizable feature, its vertical lines of green glazed terra-cotta bricks, was manufactured in Delft and sent to London on the company’s ships, a voyage aided by Dutch neutrality and the company’s prioritizing the building’s supplies over other shipments. The distinction of the bricks is due in part to their color, a dingy green that fits into London’s gray and smoggy atmosphere, but also to their tight spacing and tapered profile.

Facing both south and west onto Bury Street, the facades give the impression of a solid, striped mass due to the narrow approach of the L-shaped street. With the completion of Norman Foster’s 30 St. Mary Axe in 2004, this effect was obliterated on Holland House’s more prominent west elevation by the construction of a new plaza that opened up a previously unavailable head-on view. The decorated spandrel panels, also in glazed terra-cotta, are now more pronounced, as is Foster’s “Gherkin” reflected in the windows. The oblique appeal of the piers is heightened by the bricks’ profiles, which start blocky right above the black granite base and then taper in successive steps toward the top of the six-story building. This subtle narrowing of the glazed piers gives the impression that they are load-bearing; in reality they conceal Holland House’s other exceptional trait: its steel structure.

Considered the first steel-framed building in Europe, the structure was inspired by the buildings of Louis Sullivan in the United States, which Berlage saw firsthand in 1911. Much as Sullivan and other “Chicago School” architects emphasized the verticality of their steel-frame commercial buildings, Berlage’s Holland House gave London a modern classic rich in detail and texture.



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# 1917 CRYPT OF THE COLÒNIA GÜELL

Antoni Gaudí ▸ Barcelona, Spain

Interior view of the crypt and altar. In addition to the architecture in brick and stone, Antoni Gaudí designed the benches of wood and wrought iron—initially without kneelers, so that worshippers would pray with their knees on the concrete floor.

Architecture is a unique discipline in that many buildings often outlast their creators, surviving them and transforming themselves over time with different owners, renovations, additions, and the like. For Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), his most famous building, the Sagrada Família church in Barcelona, is projected to be complete in 2026, exactly one hundred years after his death. This time frame—144 years from the 1882 groundbreaking—is appropriate for, say, Gothic buildings, but it is exceptional in our modern age. With all the warranted attention given to the church’s structure, design, and construction, Gaudí’s other buildings take on more importance, especially the crypt he built for longtime patron Eusebi Güell—without it, the Sagrada Família would have taken on a completely different form.

In 1898 industrialist Güell commissioned Gaudí to design a church on his textile estate of Santa Coloma de Cervelló outside Barcelona. Only the crypt was built, but evidence of the church’s design exists in a sketch of the exterior, its tower and central dome resembling a scaled-down Sagrada Família. The similarity came from the wholly original technique Gaudí applied first at Colònia Güell and later at Sagrada Família: buckshot-filled sacks hung on strings to create the catenary curves that, once inverted, approximated the final outlines of the churches. Unlike the Sagrada Família, Gaudí did not build a plaster model of Güell’s church, and the single surviving drawing did not provide enough information for anyone to complete the project once the space was blessed in 1915. By that year Gaudí had begun devoting all of his time to the Sagrada Família, so another architect completed the crypt in 1917.

Tucked next to a hill on the estate, the entrance to the crypt is found through a hall of columns with their tops branching out like the surrounding pine trees. Inside, slanted columns of brick and basalt define the central nave and the U-shaped gallery around it. These columns reveal a subtle hint of the forces that would have been traveling down from the church above; that the church was not built meant structural problems eventually occurred, requiring restoration and a new roof many decades later. Other striking features of the interior include radial brick ribs above the nave and stained glass windows by Gaudí’s longtime collaborator Josep Maria Jujol. Tiny by the standards of Gaudí’s unfinished masterpiece in Barcelona, this crypt is a small space that is as delightful as it is prescient.



# 1918 HALLIDIE BUILDING

Willis Polk ▶ San Francisco, California, United States

Detail of the south facade. The glass wall cantilevered in front of the concrete structure is in striking contrast with its neighbor, which is more representative of the mix of glass and masonry built in early-twentieth-century office buildings.

Even with the rise of the so-called Chicago School in the 1880s and 1890s showcasing the potential of hanging large expanses of glass on steel frames, most early-twentieth-century buildings in US cities were well below 50-percent glass. Such was the case with the classically styled buildings designed by Willis Polk, who was actually associated with the firm of Chicago architect Daniel Burnham for about a decade. The Hallidie Building, then, with its full seven stories of clear glass, is an anomaly, an approach that would not catch on for at least another three decades.

Polk was hired by the University of California, Berkeley, in 1916 to design a building (named for cable car pioneer Andrew Smith Hallidie) on Sutter Street in downtown San Francisco as an investment for the school. Faced with budget limitations and a six-month construction schedule before the building's 1918 opening, he designed a concrete-frame building with an all-glass wall facing the south street for its natural light. The gridded curtain wall is hung one meter (3'3") in front of the columns by an upturned beam at the slab edge, and slender concrete cantilevers supported by tapered brackets. Four bands of ornamental ironwork run horizontally across the base and top of the building, terminating in fire escapes with curved profiles. Colored the university's blue and gold, these frilly edges indicate that Polk was unable to abandon history completely and did not know what to do architecturally with the new technology. Aesthetically the contrast is interesting as it highlights the impressive glass wall like a new painting in an old frame.

Deemed a city landmark in 1971, against the then-owner's wishes, the Hallidie Building underwent restoration in 1975. Yet by the beginning of the next century the facade was dull and deteriorated, and in 2010 it was deemed unsafe by a city building inspector. Preservation architects Page & Turnbull with McGinnis Chen Associates completed a major restoration of the glass walls, ornamental ironwork, and fire escapes in 2013. Looking brand new, and now appropriately home to the San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Architects, among other tenants, the building is a combination of Polk's onetime Modernist expression and twenty-first-century building and preservation technology.



# 1919

## HELSINKI CENTRAL RAILWAY STATION

Eliel Saarinen ▶ Helsinki, Finland

The station's ticket hall and waiting area. Following World War I and the building's use—and abuse—as a military hospital, Saarinen reconfigured the waiting room into its current state of elegance.

If at the beginning of the twenty-first century the airport was the most complex building typology in its integration of architecture, engineering, and infrastructure, more than a century earlier the same could be said of the railway terminal. The myriad strands of tracks leading to the station, the dense urban conditions where they were placed, and the desire to create a civic monument combined to make the railway terminal an enormously complicated undertaking. When Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) and his partners Herman Gesellius and Armas Lindgren won the 1904 competition to replace Helsinki's outdated central railway station, critics found the National Romanticist style of their winning design out of touch with the modern aesthetic then developing in other parts of Europe. Saarinen responded with visits to stations in Britain and Germany in the years 1905–1907, by which time he practiced independently and developed a simplified redesign that brought the station's appearance closer to a daring competition entry by Sigurd Frosterus. This fairly abrupt about-face is seen as the beginning of modern architecture in Finland and the second phase of Saarinen's career, which would find fruition in the United States (see 1942).

The station has a monumental presence in central Helsinki thanks to its predominantly stone exterior and its location adjacent to a sizable square. A 160-foot-tall (49 m) clock tower topped by a copper roof faces the square on the east and “turns the corner” toward the entrance on the south. There the arched-window entrance is hard to miss: capped by a barrel-vaulted roof trimmed in copper, it is flanked by two pairs of oversize and stylized figures sculpted by Emil Wikström. While a hodgepodge of associations is evident—particularly the banks of Louis Sullivan and the work of Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Olbrich in Vienna—the exterior has a presence that is unmistakably Nordic, bridging the Finnish vernacular with the modern. The main space inside the entrance echoes the vaulted form, but the flanking halls (one for ticketing/waiting and one a fast-food chain) are more architecturally interesting. Here the curved ceiling—rendered in precast concrete—takes on a shallower profile to give the space some grandeur and elegance in concert with the green-tile piers.

Helsinki Central Railway Station was realized in two phases following the 1904 competition: the administration section (1905–1909) and the station proper (1910–1914). Just as soon as it was completed the station was converted into a Russian military hospital for use during the Great War. It wasn't until 1919—two years after Finland gained independence from Russia—that the building finally opened as a railroad station, which it has remained ever since.



# 1920 HET SCHIP

Michel de Klerk ▶ Amsterdam, Netherlands

Detail of the facade and tower on Hembrugstraat. Michel de Klerk's powerhouse design of brick and tile culminates in the tower that rises from a two-story base on the north end of the triangular block.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, architect Michel de Klerk (1884–1923) designed and realized three projects for workers' housing on the Spaarndammerplantsoen, a small square in Amsterdam's Spaarndammerbuurt district. The first two projects, completed in 1915 and 1918, have long elevations that face the square on its north and south sides, but when it came time to fill out the eastern edge of the site, that commission went to government architects. Nevertheless, in appreciation of De Klerk's previous buildings, the head of the Municipal Housing Department hired him to work with the Eigen Haard Housing Association on a block that tangentially approaches the square on the west. The block's triangular shape, combined with De Klerk's distinctive "Amsterdam School" brickwork, earned the courtyard building its name (translation: "The Ship").

The project called for 102 dwellings, and De Klerk borrowed apartment plans from his two neighboring projects and positioned them along the long Zaanstraat and Oostzaanstraat frontages on the west and east, respectively. An existing school breaks up the Oostzaanstraat side, but in an effort to unify the whole block he added new floors to the school (realized posthumously) with complementary brickwork that overlaps the lower section to signal the entrance. Across the front of the five stories of apartments are orange-brick walls in thick bands divided by lines of tile that alternate between horizontal and vertical coursing. Bulges at the dark brick base indicate entrances, while those at the top floor give the building a meandering profile against the sky.

With much of the triangular block filled with these dwellings, the moments of difference are confined to the narrow tip of the block by Spaarndammerplantsoen and the Hembrugstraat frontage to the north. For the former, De Klerk designed a low post office (now housing the Museum Het Schip, which gives guided tours of the block) with a cylindrical tower set back from a small plaza that overlooks the square across the street. On Hembrugstraat to the north, he continued some of the standard dwellings around the corner from the east and west sides but hinted at the exclamation point mid-block in the bulbous "cigar" corners, an odd detail that is nevertheless playful and endearing. Halfway between these corner bulges is a small court created by angling the plan toward the middle of the block, and a slender tower whose curved sides taper to a point. The tower gives the block some added visibility in the area, but it also gives the block a strong civic presence, reiterated by the meeting hall that De Klerk designed for the courtyard, a public space in his day that was as informal and expressive as the exterior.

