



2019 Canada's Walk of Fame Inductee  
**FRANK GEHRY**  
Science, Technology and Innovation

# BRILLIANCE BUILDER

A renowned architect shares visionary  
creations with the world

*by Suzanne Alyssa Andrew*

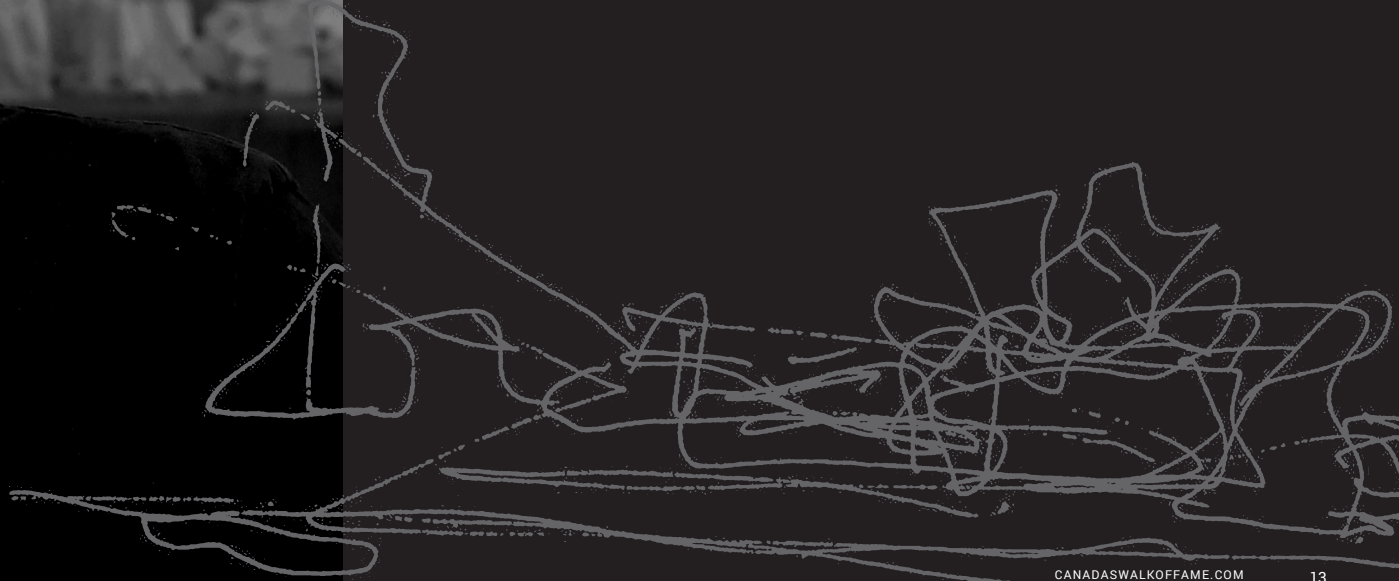


Photo credit: Alexandra Cabri

Frank Gehry is a visionary Canadian-American architect whose unique building designs inspire wonder, curiosity and delight around the world. Decorated with awards and accolades throughout his career, there is, however, no better testament to his success and influence than his oeuvre itself. The great modernist architect Philip Johnson called Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao "the greatest building of our time." Gehry's iconic works also include the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the Dancing House in Prague and the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) renovation in Toronto.

Gehry was born in Toronto in 1929, and fondly remembers visiting the AGO when he was eight years old: "That was my first museum experience, and I've never forgotten," he says. "My work has a Canadian influence. I still feel close to my Canadian roots, and I would love to do more work there."

His upbringing in Toronto is, in fact, what shaped his work. As a child, he and his grandmother made models out of materials and scraps from his grandfather's hardware store. "I think that my grandmother making cities and buildings with me allowed me to understand that even as an adult you could play, and there was such a thing as creative play that opened your mind to the future," he says.

It also instilled in him an enduring interest in unconventional building materials and hands-on creating. After studying at the University of Southern California School of Architecture, Gehry attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design, but the latter program was focused on city planning and he wanted to practice architecture. He dropped out, moved back to California and started working at Victor Gruen Associates. In 1961 he spent a year in Paris working with architect André Remondet.

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He established his own architecture firm, Gehry Partners, in Los Angeles in 1962, and captured worldwide attention when he redesigned his own home in 1978 in Santa Monica. The design turned his bungalow into a sculpture, using everyday materials like plywood, corrugated metal and chain link.

He also drew inspiration from art: "From the very first I started hanging out with the L.A. artists and I felt very comfortable in that world," he says. "I think architecture is an art." That was contrary to what most people thought about architecture at the time, however. "So they looked at the remodelling of my house as weird, whereas within the context of what was going on with Rauschenberg and John Chamberlain, et cetera, it was not weird."

Although you can look at Gehry's buildings through the years and see certain characteristics of his style, each creation is different, purpose-designed for each specific site and context. While he's careful about budgets and technology as well as the humane issues of shelter and communal use of buildings, he always asserts creative freedom and play. "I'm not beholden to any one visual language," he says. "I'm always open to and ready for the adventure, the new change."

Over the course of Gehry's career, technology leapt ahead, taking the industry from drafting tables with T-squares to computer visualization, which Gehry says enabled him to explore architecture in a new way. He also continually works outside of architecture, most notably in furniture, art exhibition and stage design. His latest such project is the set design for a jazz opera, which he describes as "the ultimate bit of ephemeral work" due to the improvisational nature of the music. "We explore ideas and we fall into solutions almost by chance, certainly informed chance, but there's a great feeling of freedom in that creative process."

Gehry teaches architecture as a professor at Columbia, Yale and the University of Southern California, and impresses on his students—and also the young architects he's worked with over the years at his firm—that the most interesting work is their own. He usually starts a class by asking graduate students to write their signatures and showing the class how different the signatures are when placed side by side: "Each signature belongs to a person, and if you allow that to happen in your work, that intuition, that feeling, without overthinking it, you might find the creative process."

Gehry returns to Canada frequently and still has family here, so his induction feels important to him. "It's nice to be honoured by the country you were born in and still have feelings about," he says.

