

# Nothing stands alone

re-Inventing construction



**American architect Thom Mayne sees buildings not as isolated works but as contextual elements. For him, “Re-inventing Construction” means that every building must be considered in connection with its function, its users, its surroundings, and the environment. This multifaceted perspective leads to complex architecture that is typical of Mayne’s work.**

“When I began working as an architect,” recounted 66-year-old Thom Mayne, “there was a division between those who celebrated architecture as an art and those who were part of a budding environmental movement happening mainly at Berkeley and MIT.” However, he admitted, this green movement in architecture had less to do with architecture and more to do with engineering – “and it produced,” laughed the architect, “some quite hideous buildings.”

Mayne’s first large design project was a school in Pasadena, California. The vision of Morphosis, the architecture office founded by Mayne and Michael Rotondi in 1972, was to develop an architecture that transcends traditional formal language. In a way, the school was Mayne’s first environmentally conscious statement: “I wanted everything to be responsive to the changing climate.” After that project Mayne took a different direction. He abandoned the single-mindedness of his original intention, and for the next 20 years explored the breadth of what architecture means to him. He generated new notions of edges, borders, and building envelopes. “It had to do with the relationship between inside and outside, between protected environments and nature.”

**“As a global culture, we seem to be just realizing the vital nature of this process of realignment.”**

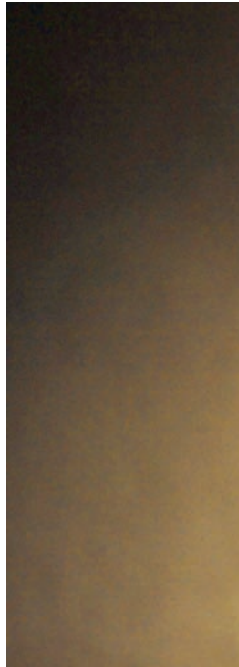
Simultaneously, Mayne dealt with urban design concepts – how buildings react on and with their surroundings – and his architectural works became an interpretation of context. 15 years ago, when Thom Mayne

was commissioned to design a commercial building in Seoul, he again started to deal intensively with the idea of the building skin, with the question of which layers the building should consist of, and how the building should respond to its environment. The project was strapped by financial constraints and regulations. Mayne says that unsatisfactory general conditions have become the greatest problem of architects. “Fortunately, at that time we were already advanced enough with computer technology to deal with far more complex concepts for building skins.” Mayne handled the building as part of the urban fabric and developed its relationship with the environment. Using transparent and translucent materials, he created a building that changes appearance with the time of day and the season of year.

**“Architects deal with many concerns and forces; the relationship with the environment has increasingly become a preoccupation.”**

Morphosis’ design for the Hypo-Bank in Klagenfurt, Austria, furthered this concept, based on dynamics and interaction. “The issue here was not an individual building,” explained Mayne, “but rather a sort of urban ensemble.” Our relationship with the social environment has changed just as our relationship with the natural environment has. Because European architecture is quite different than American architecture, Mayne and his team took home many completely new ideas.

**“I am fighting for architecture to become more responsive, synthesizing multiple forces including social, political, infrastructural, urban, and environmental.”**



Architect with a rebellious spirit and pronounced passion for change: Thom Mayne.



**“Architecture is shifting from a mechanical paradigm to a biological one.”**

“I have been fighting for a long time to see that architecture finally becomes a synthesis of various forces: social, political, infrastructural, urban, environmental,” said Thom Mayne. “Today in architecture we are seeing a paradigm shift away from the mechanical and toward the biological,” said Mayne, by which he meant “fortuitousness, even insignificance in a biblical sense. Random behavior fascinates me.” This fascination is expressed, for example, in multilayer building skins with urban, social, or environmental functions, depending on the need.

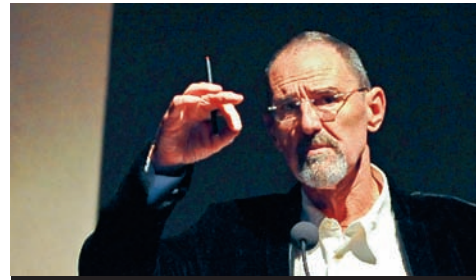
Mayne calls a building by Morphosis in San Francisco “a strategic rather than an architectonic project,” one in which “everything except aesthetics” is important. Taking advantage of the mild San Francisco climate, the indoor ventilation is controlled primarily through open spaces. Regarding social performance, an event base was created, and offices were located strictly according to functional criteria, completely ignoring the management hierarchy. “For once, we have placed function above status,” said Mayne. The indoor climate can be centrally or individually controlled. “I think it’s important that people have control over their own environments,” told Mayne, with amusement: “but this seems to be abnormal in America. People are not used to opening windows anymore. We had to supply window operating instructions.”

**“From the beginning of time, the facade had to do with proportionality. The whole notion of facade is starting to shift – it’s no longer about proportionality, it’s about associationship.”**

The interaction between the micro and macro also inspires Thom Mayne. Phare Tower in Paris, another Morphosis project, will be the workplace for 20,000 people when it is completed in 2012. The 300-meter high-rise is just a few centimeters shorter than the Eiffel Tower, and it will take on a different appearance from every perspective – and thereby accentuate the complexity of the city in which it stands. “That’s typical for us,” said Mayne: “Le Phare too should be not an isolated building but rather part of an urban ensemble, connected with its environment.” No two floors will be alike, a wind generator will be on the roof, and 3,500 different materials will be used for the building skin.

**“There is no such thing as nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sense of the word. We all live in augmented nature.”**

“Today every building must be multifunctional; designing for a single purpose is no longer enough,” told Thom Mayne. “Buildings must convince us nowadays, win us, take us to another place.” That might sound like it goes without saying – but doesn’t, as shown by the Hyatt Foundation’s awarding Mayne the Pritzker Prize in 2005, praising him for his “rebellious spirit and passion for change.”



**Thom Mayne** is Principal of the architectural firm Morphosis, founded in 1972, with offices in Los Angeles and New York, USA. His buildings, typically clad in textured metal or concrete, have been described as seemingly unfinished and in motion. Thom Mayne was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 2005, widely considered the “Nobel Prize of architecture.” His works include the new academic building at Cooper Union in New York; Cahill Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena; Hypo Alpe-Adria Center in Klagenfurt, Austria; Sun Tower in Seoul, South Korea; and the wind-powered office building Tour Phare at La Défense, Paris. Thom Mayne was a Member of the Holcim Awards jury for North America in 2005 and the Global Holcim Awards jury in 2006.