



Gehry's work in Los Angeles has long translated the stageset-like artificiality of the media capital into built form. The Disney Concert Hall (1988-2003) is the most prominent commission yet built in his home town.

## Beginnings in Los Angeles Hymn to Artificiality

In the 1980s, an era in which many architects were preoccupied with neoclassical Post-Modernism, Frank Gehry suddenly surfaced on the international architectural stage. His buildings draw inspiration from the artificiality of Los Angeles.

They are imbued with a sense of inclusiveness and a serious yet laid-back approach to site, program and form. By consequently pursuing an architecture firmly rooted in art, Gehry offers an exciting alternative to the superficial historicism prevailing at the time.

While the 1980s projects of his Los Angeleno contemporaries, such as Charles Moore, seem wistful, almost comical, Gehry's works strive to achieve a profound synthesis of architecture and art. This is an architect who rejects the orthogonal monotony of Late-Modernism. At the same time he is engaged in a dead serious search for a new architecture far removed from historical allusions. The key to the poetic nature of the early work lays in Gehry's uncanny ability to translate the superficiality of Los Angeles into an architecture that transcends and stands above it as a poetic hymn to artificiality.

Claes Oldenburg und Coosje van Bruggen, Chiat / Day Building, Los Angeles, 1991



Claes Oldenburg, Tool Gate Vitra Design Museum, Weil/Rhein, 1989



Frank O. Gehry, A Rose for Lilly Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, 2003



Anish Kapoor, Cloud Gate Millennium Park, Chicago, 2004



In times where appearance is often deemed more important than content, many buildings seem comprised of scarcely more than interchangeable skin. Gehry reverses this tendency by allowing the inner life of his buildings to generate their outer form. Revealed structural elements – tilting wood beams, exposed sheet rock, corrugated sheet metal and chain link – form the palette of materials for the early works. These are often composed as collage-like scenarios constructed in everyday “cheapskate” materials, an approach to architecture Gehry developed in collaboration with artists with whom he maintains long-standing friendships. By the mid-1960s Gehry increasingly distanced himself from an architectural establishment bounded by the dogmatic confines of “form follows function” ideology. He found inspiration in lively dialogue with artists who commissioned him with small projects. The Danziger Studio-House in Hollywood (1964-65) and the Davis Studio-Residence in Malibu offered creative freedom to experiment with new forms far removed from the constraints of Formalism.

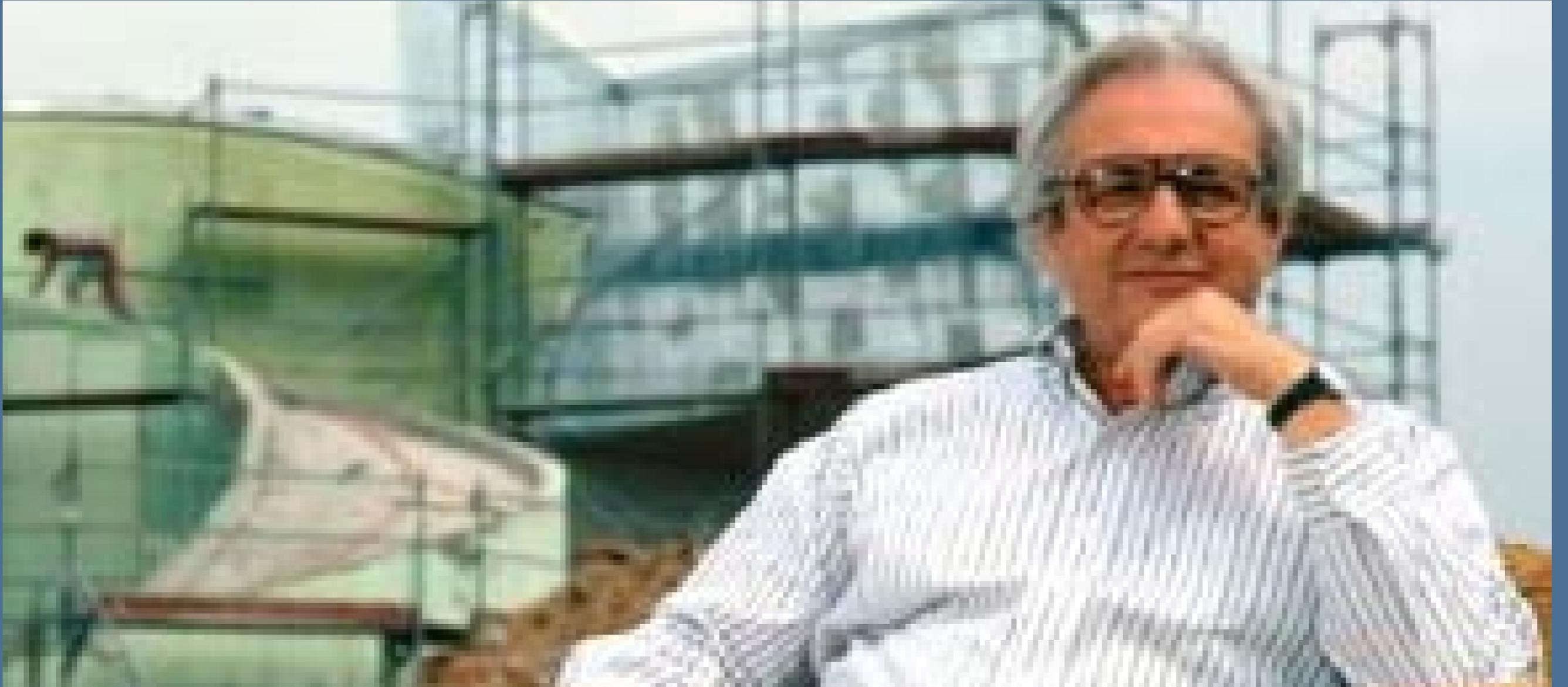
During his studies at the University of Southern California (1949-54) the young architect, born in Toronto in 1929, went by his given name, Frank Owen Goldberg. At completion of studies in 1954 he changed his name to Gehry. In the first years working in the profession at Victor Gruen Associates in Los Angeles (1953-55/1957-61) he completed his training in the

then common vein with minute perfection in design as the highest priority. But the proving ground of his first large commission, the Steeves House (1958-59), convinced him that this perfection in design and craftsmanship could not be attained in the economic reality of 1950s Los Angeles. “My artist friends, people like Jasper Johns, Bob Rauschenberg, Ed Kienholz and Claes Oldenburg, were working with very inexpensive materials – broken wood and paper – and they were making beauty. These were not superficial details. They were direct. It raised the question of what was beautiful. I chose to use the craft available, and to work with the craftsmen and make a virtue out of their limitations.”

Gehry’s architecture increasingly focuses on the definition of enigmatic forms founded in the art of sculpture. At the same time, the work transcends the limitations of art and successfully addresses the pragmatic nature of architecture as the art form that must also meet practical needs. The intense dialogue with artists leads to ever more refined sculptural compositions that achieve architectural significance without becoming rigid or monumental.

In 1984, while commenting on the 1964 Danziger House, he said he “was also interested in the idea of connection, of putting pieces together, in a way very similar to what I am still doing. I guess we only have one idea in our lives.”

Above: Artworks underscore the respective architectural intention of each project.



At the construction site of the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany.



Above: The Chiat Building's (1985-91) entrance is marked with a sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Right: The whimsical nature of the early works gave way to a more serious Gehry from the large commissions of the 1990's on, but the light, relaxed quality in his work remained, as evidenced here in the suspended ceiling of the Disney Concert Hall (1988-2003).

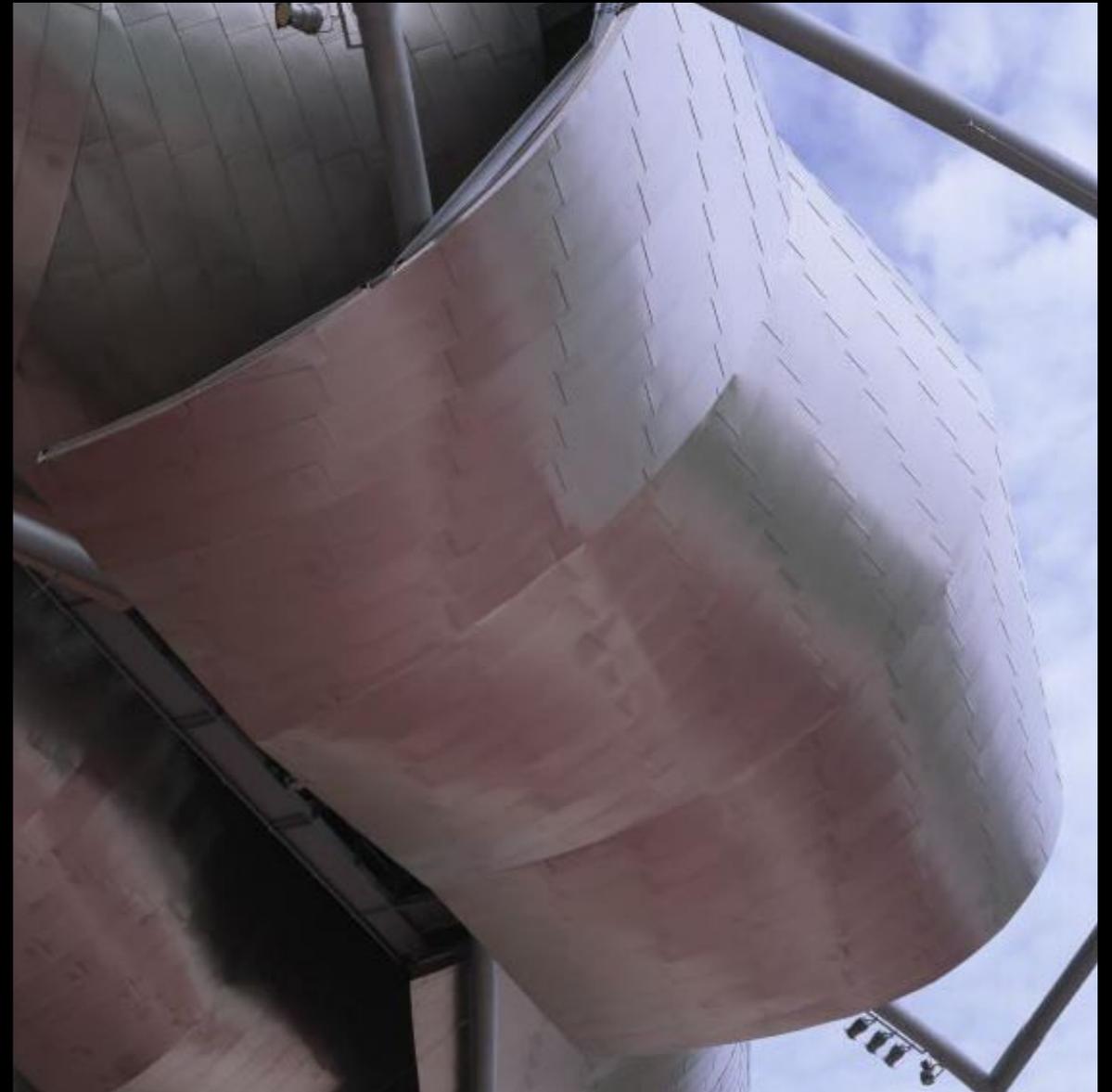




Over the years Gehry has continuously refined and perfected his understanding of his buildings as sculptural compositions that can elevate his architecture fulfill more than mere functional requirements.

Above: Edgemar Project, Los Angeles, 1984-1988

Right: Millennium Park, Chicago, 1998-2004





Gehry promoting his Bentwood furniture series manufactured by Knoll International.

## The "Bilbao Effect" The Trajectory to Global Architect

Meanwhile, recognized not only as an architect with extensive building experience but also as an eminent architectural scholar, Gehry taught at the best architectural schools in the United States. Rice University, Cooper Union, Harvard, Yale, UCLA, and MIT offered him the possibility to develop his thoughts on an academic platform together with gifted students. In 1988 his work opened the epochal "Deconstructivist Architecture" Exhibition in the New York Museum of Modern Art. From this point forward Gehry is at the center of a group of architects – Coop, Himmelblau, Eisenman, Hadid, Koolhaas, Libeskind and Tschumi – who will work worldwide on the prestigious commissions of the 1990s.

1989, the year marking the fall of the Iron Curtain and hailing a new start for oppressed societies across Eastern Europe, also brought a milestone in Frank Gehry's career. The architect won both the competition for Los Angeles' new Philharmonic Hall, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and was awarded the Pritzker Prize, architecture's most coveted award.

Gehry's Japanese premiere, the Fishdance Restaurant in Kobe, marked his explosive breakthrough onto the international scene in 1987. His first building in Europe, the Vitra Design Museum (1987-89), followed soon

Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1991-1997



Nationale Nederlanden Building, Prague, 1992-1996



Pariser Platz 3, Berlin, 1994-1999



Der Neue Zollhof, Düsseldorf, 1994-2001



thereafter. The direction for the important buildings of the 1990s, often built outside the United States, becomes clear. Regions that profited from the democratic transformation in Europe – Barcelona, Prague, and Berlin – provide the stage for some of Gehry's most creative work. Cities worldwide increasingly discover the potential of "landmark" architecture to redefine their images. Gehry sets the standard for this phenomenon with his Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1994-97).

The Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles – completed in 2003 after execution of 30-thousand drawings and 16 years of planning and building – culminated this phase with a truly exceptional building. As the major work in his hometown, it is especially convincing due to its acceptance by the demanding musicians and concertgoers who deem its acoustics as near perfect. This approval serves as a confirmation of Gehry's design process, where the concert hall space is developed with dozens of models and the rest of the building then organized to huddle around this grand space.

Even though his projects continuously increase in size Gehry takes the time to design buildings for charitable organizations. For the Ronald McDonald House and Maggie's Cancer Center the architect charged no fees for his services. In both Gehry created cheerful yet dignified places of caring where architecture plays a special part in healing.

Above: Gehry's major commissions in the 90's are increasingly located abroad.

In 1989, in his Pritzker acceptance speech, Gehry described his vision of architecture's unique role within the arts. "I am obsessed with architecture. It is true. I am restless, trying to find myself as an architect, and how best to contribute in this world filled with contradiction, disparity, and inequality, even passion and opportunity. It is a world in which our values and priorities are constantly being challenged. It is simplistic to expect a single right answer. Architecture is a small piece of this human equation, but for those of us who practice it, we believe in its potential to make a difference, to enlighten and to enrich the human experience, to penetrate the barriers of misunderstanding and provide a beautiful context for life's drama."

A non-compromising dedication to architecture as art, combined with the laid-back Californian way of life, characterizes all of Gehry's work. As an obsessive perfectionist he is engaged in a demanding investigation of ways to unite expressive form and utilitarian function. And today his search for the essence of architecture as an expression of the paradoxes of our time continues with the same dedication and ceaseless conviction. The result? Buildings that prove "better is possible".



Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, 1988-2003



Achieving urban renewal through "signature" buildings is a trend that Gehry instigated in the 90s with buildings such as the Neuer Zollhof complex on the banks of the Rhine river in Düsseldorf, Germany (1994–2001, above) and the Vila Olimpica on Barcelona's Mediterranean beachfront built just prior to the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain (1991, right)





Two more key buildings that established Gehry as the perhaps most eminent global architect in the 1990's.  
Above: Pariser Platz 3 in Berlin, Germany (1994-99)  
Right: Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1991-97)





## Bentwood Furniture

Knoll International  
1989-1992





## Hat Trick

By the end of the 1970's Gehry had already been begun design of a new kind of lightweight wood furniture with the intention of overcoming the conventional separation between support elements and the actual seating surface that has characterized almost all chair designs throughout time.

And Gehry was still concerned with the notion of creating something meaningful, elegant, and creative using everyday materials commonly used for other functions, as the wooden slats of apple crates that Gehry remembered seeing while growing up in his native Canada before moving to Southern California to study architecture at the University of Southern California in the 1950's.

After thinking about the potentials for such a new, revolutionary chair design for several years, the Knoll International Furniture Company set up a workshop right next to Gehry's Santa Monica studio in 1989, allowing him to intensely work on the innovative design with skilled woodworkers on a day-do-day, hands-on basis and turn his visionary ideas into the reality of the popular Bentwood furniture series that has been successfully manufactured by Knoll International since 1992.

Attempting to create a simple yet innovative chair in wood and go beyond the conventional understanding of chairs with separate legs, seats, and backs, Gehry said he didn't want to just "hang another coat on four legs and a seat".



Drawing inspiration from traditional wicker furniture and the wooden apple crates he had played on in childhood, Gehry designed a furniture collection that he humorously named after terms common in ice hockey. Wafer-thin strips of laminated wood were ingeniously bent, woven, and curled into fluid, featherweight, yet extremely sturdy forms.

It was a groundbreaking idea that met with immediate accolades from both Knoll customers and the professional community. The Museum of Modern Art in New York – always at the vanguard of the design and architectural discussion – displayed production samples in a museum window show before the chairs were even released to the public.

The furniture is constructed of hard white maple veneers in 2 inch wide strips that are laminated with high-bonding glue. All wood grains run in the same direction for resilience. Thermo-set assembly glue provides structural rigidity without the need for metal connectors, while allowing for ergonomic movement and flexibility. The backs of all chairs flex for added comfort.

The underside of each piece is embossed with Gehry's signature and the date of the chair's production.



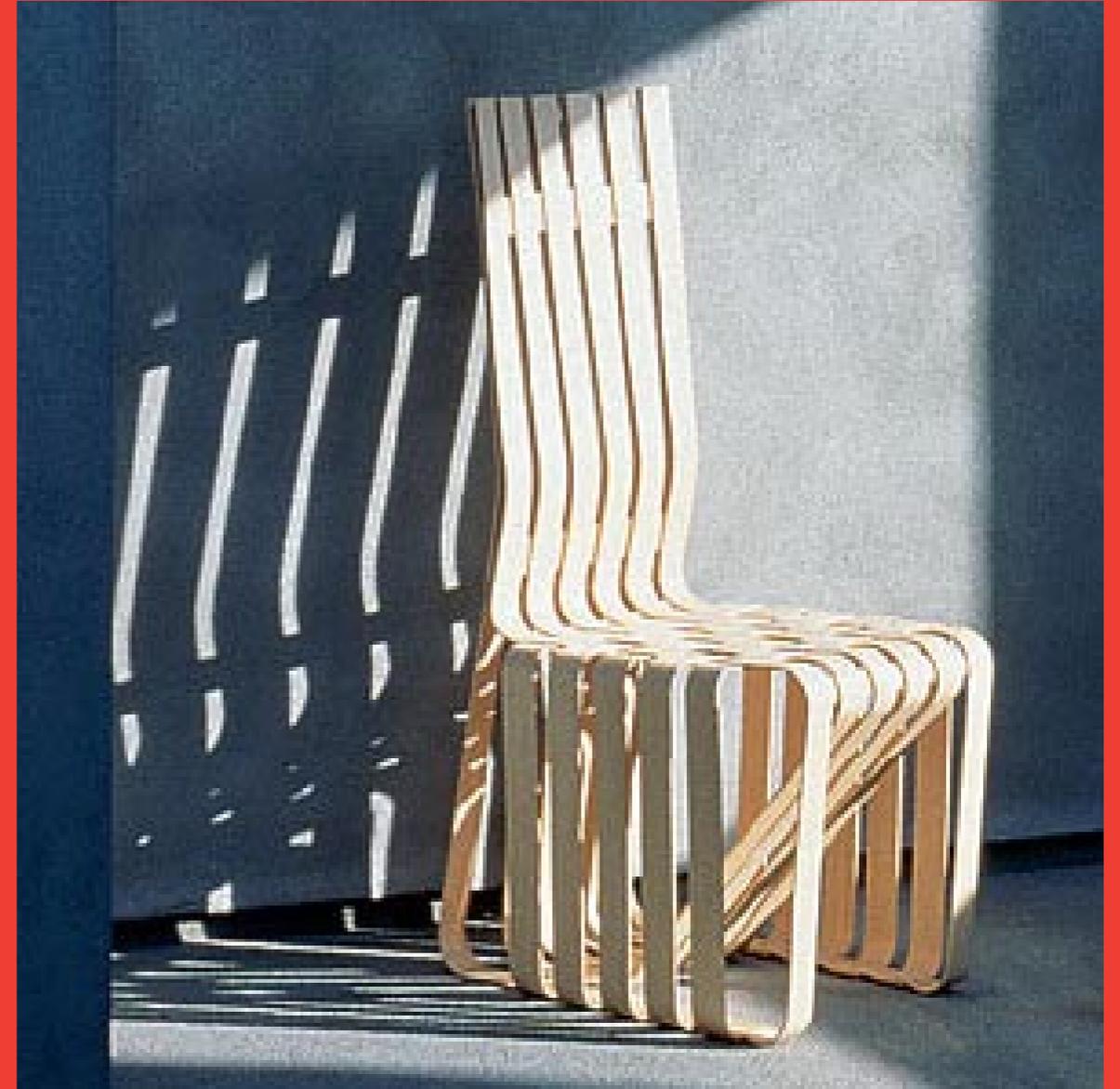
The furniture manufacturer Knoll International outfitted a wood shop near Gehry's California offices to provide him the relaxed atmosphere conducive to the creative design process.

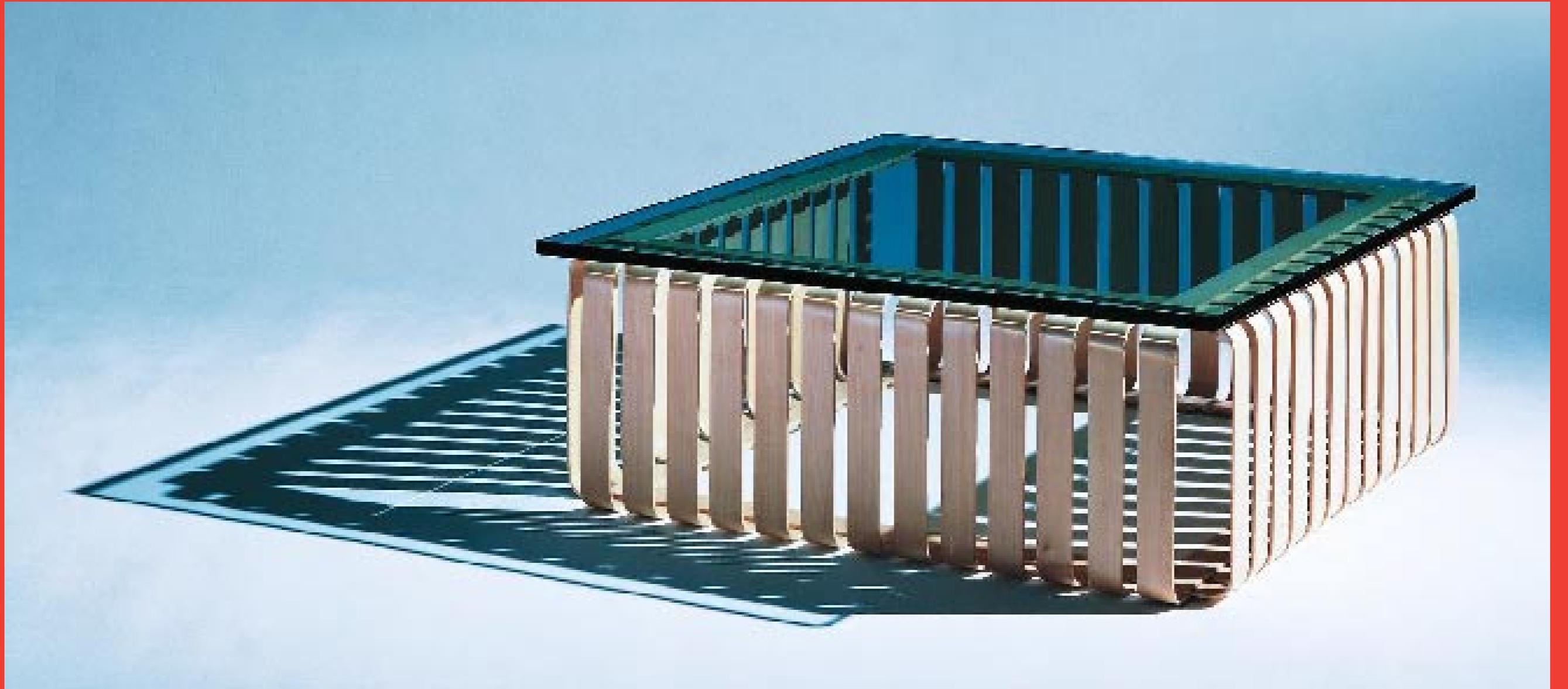


Drawing inspiration from the apple crates he had played on in childhood, Gehry employs laminated maple strips to create the Bentwood furniture series.



Gehry sought to overcome the conventional separation between support elements and the actual seating surface.







The furniture is suited to both office and home use.







## Stata Center

Cambridge, Massachusetts  
2000-2004





## Robots at a Party

Built to accommodate some of the world's most noted scientists, Gehry's design celebrates the "joy of invention" while inspiring its denizens to even higher achievement. The building's manifold forms – the architect describes it as looking like "a bunch of drunken robots got together to celebrate" – delineate a vast 730-thousand square foot complex containing offices, laboratories, lecture halls, a fitness center, kitchens, a child care center, a below-ground parking garage, an outdoor amphitheater and a cafe.

A survey of MIT students in 1998 showed that they missed communal spaces for interaction. This inspired Gehry to incorporate a two-lane "student street" that meanders through the interior of the complex, connecting a number of spacious common areas. These areas are modulated with bright splashes of red, yellow and blue and receive light from a range of skylights, imbuing each with an individual quality – all in an effort to "lure the orangutans out of their trees" so the students can interrelate, hopefully allowing synergy to occur.

The verticality of the grand interior communal areas contrasts with the individual office spaces – intimate zones where scientists can retreat and concentrate. These spaces are just right, according to resident scientist Tim Berners-Lee – credited with inventing the World Wide Web, because the windows can be opened to let fresh air in.



## Robots at a Party

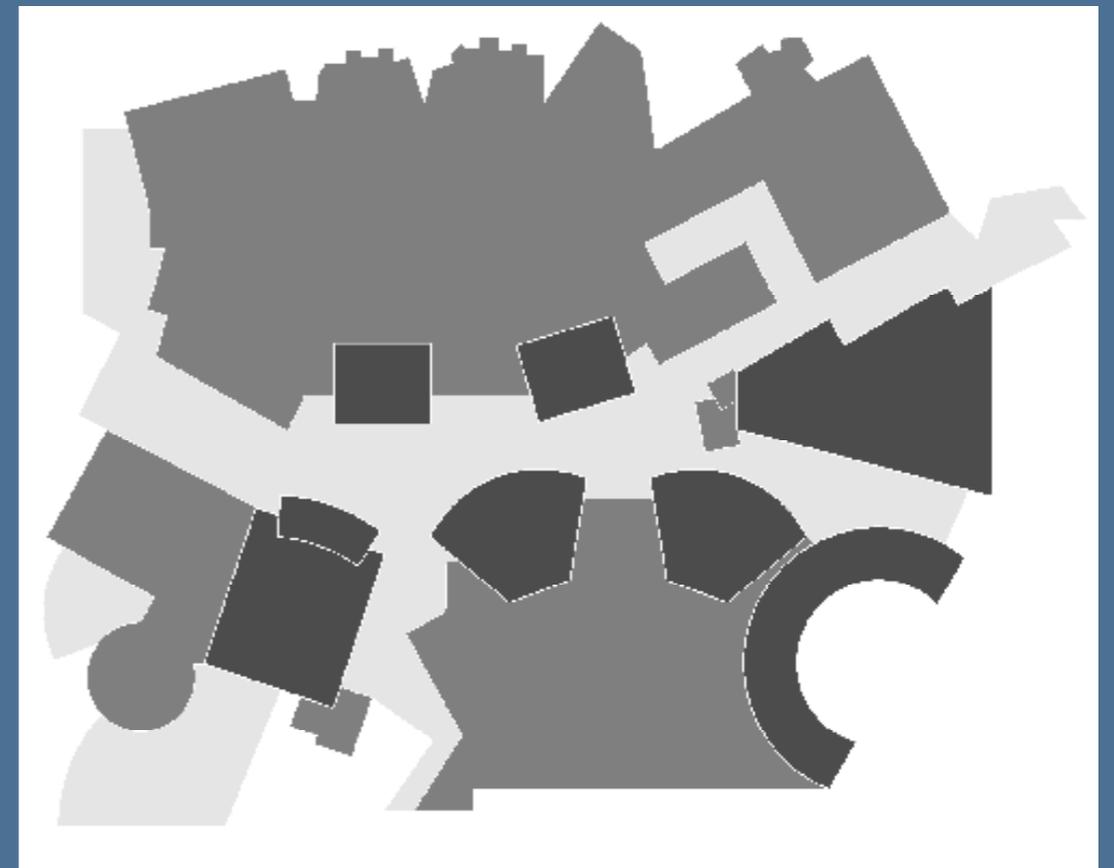
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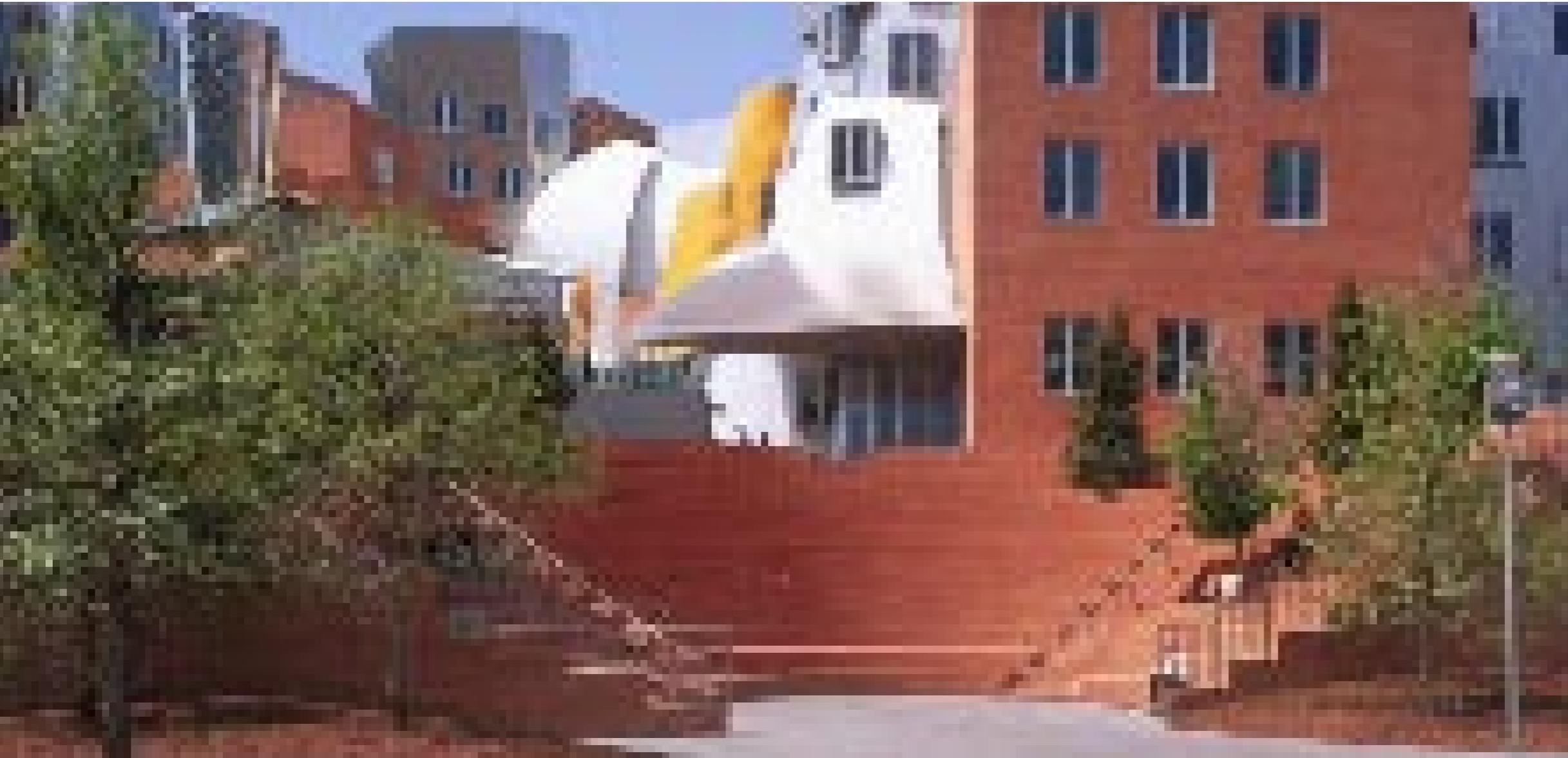
Elevation



Ground Floor



The building's manifold forms - Gehry describes it as looking like "a bunch of drunken robots got together to celebrate" - contain 730-thousand square feet.



The amphitheater continues the interior "student street" outdoors.



The building masses are distributed and contained in individual building elements that are clad with various materials in order to avoid repetition and accommodate human scale.



The buildings form a courtyard within which special building elements such as lecture halls are placed. The shiny metal roof surfaces reflect light into the "student street" on the ground floor..



The courtyard is formed by a veritable "family" of diversely sculpted building elements. Special functions, such as the lecture hall sheathed in yellow metal panels, are emphasized as free-standing objects on the plateau.

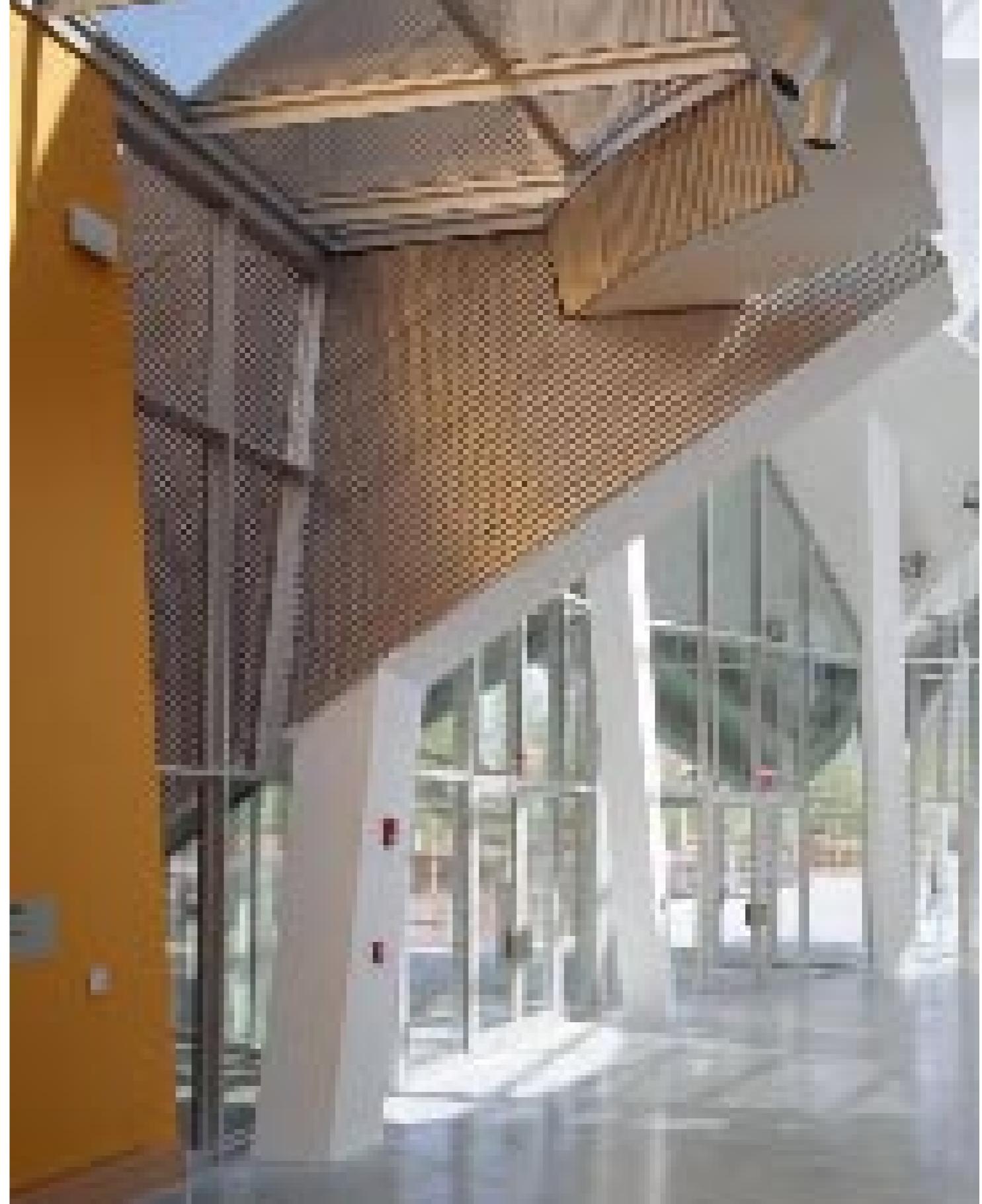




Scientist's offices all have their own windows which can be opened.



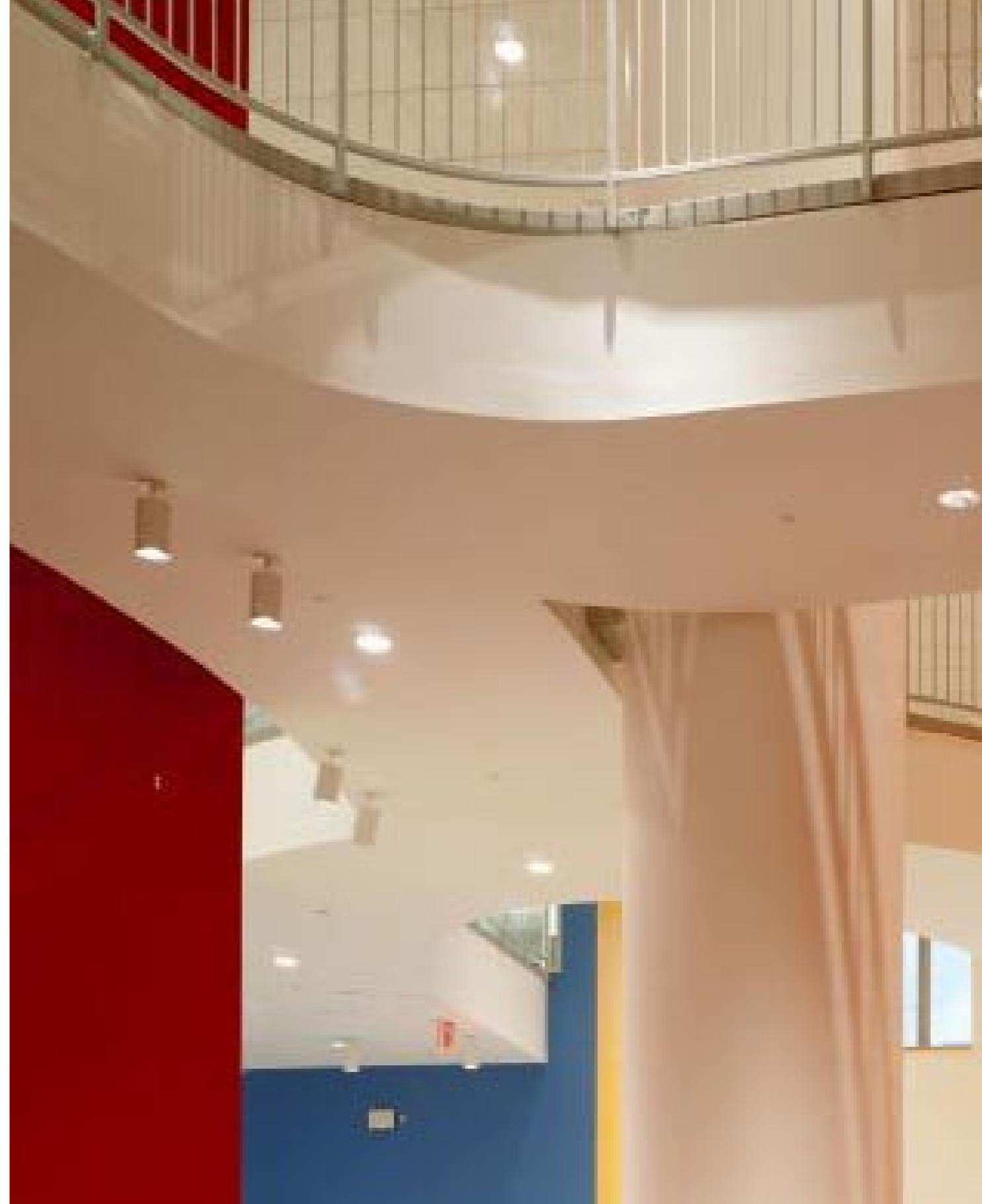
Although the "student street" crosses the wide depth of the building it is light-filled and pleasant. This is assured by various skylights and ample large glazing elements that bring light in from above and from the side.







Bright colors mark the focal points along the "student street".





The generous "student street" is Gehry's effort to "lure the orangutans out of their trees" and into the common areas.





The cafeteria furniture was also designed by Gehry. The wooden benches were designed specifically for this space and the chairs are from the FOG series manufactured by Knoll International.





