

## **Architecture: A Reflection of its Time and Place**

Armand Jhala and Steve Wood, Montgomery Bell Academy

“Architecture is life; or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore it is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today or ever will be lived.” – Frank Lloyd Wright

Every action has a purpose. The concept has been in function for thousands of years, and we continue to see its effects firsthand. China is working on a new tallest building in the world: the Sky City – a building nearly 2,200 feet tall. In all actuality, nobody needs a building that tall; however, the beauty of architecture extends much farther than just aesthetics. Architecture not only represents the record of emotion for the past, but also functions as a chronicle of current society and its goal for a more sustainable future.

Architecture of the past is a true indicator of the builder’s emotion at the time of construction. The ability to build structures literally spans back thousands of years. Even though the structures were necessities, they were also built to create certain emotions. Egyptian civilization garnered quite a reputation for building colossal structures. The main example would be the Great Pyramids. The gargantuan size of the tombs was impractical, but it sustained the lasting importance of the great rulers housed within the them. Another great civilization, the Romans, borrowed the Egyptian techniques. The leaders crafted the architecture to express their message and emotion. Structures erected during this era were truly unprecedented in their scope; Nero, for example, built the Colosseum originally so he could emphasize his power over the Roman populace, as well as establish a clear hierarchy in Roman society—literally by creating a class divided seating section in the amphitheatre. Other powerful works include the homage to the gods in the architectural miracle that is the Roman Pantheon, or the sheer size of the Circus Maximus. Furthermore, the emotion of architecture was seen in full swing during the Renaissance. Great buildings such as the Baptistery of St. John and St. Peter’s Basilica were established to augment the importance of religion, another important evocation. No matter what time period, architecture is always created with an emotional purpose.

Like architecture of the past, contemporary architecture embodies societal attitudes and displays important aspects of modern society. The current trend toward globalization, for example, has put a greater emphasis on education. In Alexandria, Egypt, where once stood the Library of Alexandria, UNESCO has built a new library, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. This library utilizes modern design in its angled glass roof and curved walls, making it more appealing to the studious crowd. Similarly, the University of Sydney in Australia recently built the Faculty of Law building, employing curves and sharp angles, large glass windows, and spacious rooms. Another facet of modern architecture is its use in asserting global relevance and power. China, which in the last few decades experienced major industrialization and economic growth, now boasts an array of large contemporary buildings. Beijing houses the National Centre for the Performing Arts, a glass, egg-shaped building surrounded by water. The Shanghai skyline is marked by two incredibly tall skyscrapers, the Shanghai World Financial Center, and the soon-to-be Shanghai Tower. Likewise, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, displays the world’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, a powerful symbol of the nation’s new wealth.

Beyond the aesthetics and symbolism in modern architecture, society has an important tangible goal for its buildings: sustainability. Given the importance of issues like

global warming and fossil fuel depletion, architecture is forced now to conserve energy. The conservation and sustainability goal has a firm footing and grows stronger with time. At our school, Montgomery Bell Academy of Nashville, Tennessee, the new buildings use geothermal energy to power heating and cooling. Furthermore, the new Nashville Music City Center uses solar power, collects rainwater, and has a 4 acre grass roof. Likewise, the aforementioned Sky City to be built in Changsha, China is projected to consume just one fifth the energy used by a typical skyscraper.

The broad array of architecture through the ages projects powerful, emotional messages. Civilizations past used architecture to appeal to the emotions of their constituents, while our current, global civilization uses architecture to portray power, wealth, grandeur, and global relevance, again appealing to the emotions of viewers. As society advances, contemporary architecture combines these elements with the need for energy conservation and sustainability, lending to an entirely new architectural experience. Given the emotional implications, it is clear that architecture's scope spans the past, present, and future.