

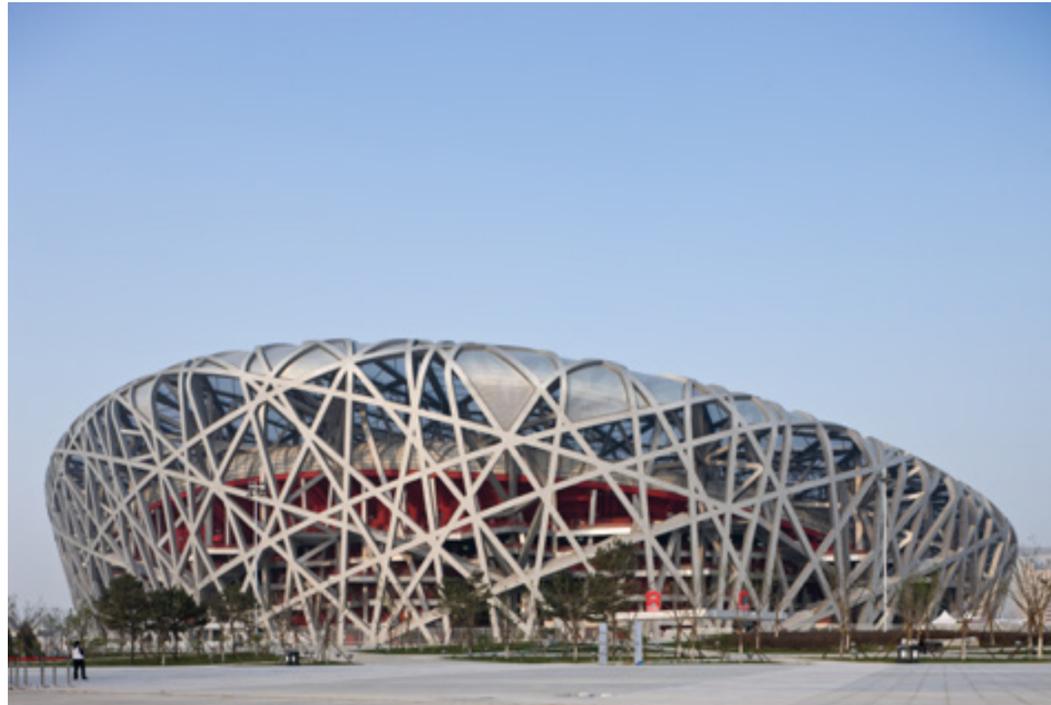
O N E

PARK DRIVE



CANARY WHARF
RESIDENTIAL

Herzog & de Meuron has helped define contemporary architecture all around the world — *Deyan Sudjic talks to Jacques Herzog about the studio's approach to building its first residential tower in London*



National Stadium, Beijing

Beijing's National Stadium, big enough to seat 90,000 people, is China's most recognisable modern landmark. It might appear to have little in common with the intimacy of the Parrish Art Museum folded discreetly into a green meadow in the Hamptons, but both were designed by the studio that Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron set up in Basel almost 40 years ago. Building the stadium was a demonstration that the new China had moved beyond the obvious symbols of power and prestige to a subtler kind of messaging about itself. It was not replicating something that had been done already, it was a piece of architecture like no other. Beijing's stadium is an agile steel and concrete landmark; the Parrish has a simple timber-frame structure that gives it the feel of a sun-filled country barn, in which the architecture allows the art to speak for itself.

Herzog & de Meuron's architecture has been enormously influential and yet is uncategorisable. Miuccia Prada's flagship store in Omotesandō in Tokyo, a signal box dropped into the tangle of railway tracks weaving into Basel's central station, a winery in Napa Valley and the firm's first residential tower in London at Canary Wharf are all examples of its work. Each one is different, and yet they all reflect Herzog & de Meuron's creative curiosity.

For Herzog & de Meuron, if the architect is to make a fresh contribution, he needs to empty his mind of preconceptions and understand the essence of the project. There is no such thing as an architect without an ego, but Herzog & de Meuron makes a point of sublimating the urge to make its own mark when it builds by expressing it through exploring the essences of how a building will be used, the material from which it will be made, and the context of which it will form part. The results are sometimes startling in the willingness of the architect to push an idea to its limits, and sometimes disarming in their deceptively simple directness.

"I never tried to use the client to follow my own ambition" says Herzog. "Architecture only works if you can achieve the client's needs. This is where the architect is different from the artist. The artist is alone literally with a blank canvas. But the architect is not alone. The art of architecture is exactly not to work against the client."

Herzog & de Meuron's Signal Box in Basel is wrapped entirely in copper. The main element of the Dominus winery is a gabion wall, made of the caged rock normally used for constructing dams and retaining walls, which stretches across the Napa Valley like a Roman aqueduct. Prada's store is an extruded glass crystal, braced by a steel mesh that gives it the appearance of a beehive or a honeycomb. It uses four types of glass: some pieces bubble outward, some are sucked in as if the building is breathing. When Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron came to design the extension to Tate Modern, their first idea was a pyramid, faced in glass fragments. But they changed their minds. In a London dominated by a wave of glass office buildings, the Tate should declare itself distinctively different, and so they opted for brick. Social preoccupations are as important to them as material qualities. Beijing's National Stadium is designed as a place for people to gather and share an experience. As Herzog puts it:

"We wanted to get away from the usual technocratic stadiums, with their architecture dominated by structural spans and digital screens, to make the crowd part of the architecture, and to be aware of itself."

It is this curiosity and rigour that has made Herzog & de Meuron's practice one of the world's leading architectural voices. It has grown to 400 people without losing its sense of experimentation. And while the firm now has a presence in London, Hamburg, Hong Kong and New York, it is still based in Basel; small in size, but culturally a world city that has had an important impact on contemporary art, and now on architecture. Herzog & de Meuron has projects throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas. Each of them, cultural or commercial, large or small, is treated with the same weight and significance.

"Every current project has its own agenda" says Herzog. "The team that works on a project on a daily basis have their own rhythm, a steady flow, whereas for Pierre and I, we are on something more like a fever curve, with different phases, needs and timescales. Sometimes the team needs to be inspired, or chased, and the project shaken, or shaped. Some projects are more or less hot, more or less urgent. As an architect, you want them all to achieve the maximum of what you believe their potential can be. From that point of view even very small projects can have a very large potential, and sometimes very large projects have smaller potential."



Tate Modern Extension, London



Prada Epicenter store, Tokyo



56 Leonard Street, New York



VitraHaus, Weil am Rhein

Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron are clear that architecture is not art, but they have worked closely over the years with many artists, notably with Ai Weiwei on Beijing's National Stadium. They created a temporary pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery together. And it was Ai Weiwei who brought one of Herzog & de Meuron's key unbuilt projects to the studio, a commission to design a film school in Qingdao. The design was based on the idea of stacking varied functional elements – studio, lecture theatre, screening room, workshop – to create a building in which the components remained visible, like a pile of books of varying size, rather than trying to hide them all in a single anonymous box. It was an architectural idea strong enough to soften the studio's usual reluctance to repeat itself. It offered Herzog & de Meuron some clues for the commission to design a residential tower at One Park Drive.

“Everybody is somehow bound to a pattern. There is always a potential danger of a trap, of being literally trapped by things that are relatively fresh. You want to exploit it, and bring it on board.”

“When you look back at what you have done, it's true that even for us, who are known for always changing styles, we don't give a preference to a particular material or to a form. Nevertheless, there are groups of projects, like families that can be seen together, like the Qingdao Film Academy. That was when we developed the idea of stacking, breaking down the programme into prismatic boxes then stacking them in unlikely and unexpected ways to produce a pile of forms, in a way that had never been seen before. That produced a number of projects: VitraHaus (the showroom for the furniture company in Weil am Rhein) and even 56 Leonard Street, our residential tower in New York.”

The idea of allowing stacks of individual apartments to become clearly visible on the outside of a building – Herzog calls it “to be imprinted” – is one of the key architectural features of the One Park Drive tower. At the level of the city, it will help to shape the identity of one of the largest remaining vacant sites in London’s Docklands. As an individual building, it brings fresh thinking to the organisation of tall buildings.

“Residential high-rises are conventionally characterised by the negative qualities of sameness and too much repetition. One Park Drive has three distinct zones offering different types of accommodation, that are clearly expressed, offering a sense of individuality in a larger development.”

Canary Wharf, with a working population of 120,000 and global clout as a financial centre, is as big as many towns but is only 30 years old. It was developed as a modern alternative to London’s oldest financial centre around the Bank of England. As the site has filled up with a cluster of office towers and public spaces, the character of the area has gradually transformed. Once regarded as a self-contained business district, it has become increasingly porous, becoming an active part of the city. Guided by a leadership team that has been with the project since the first development, Canary Wharf has grown in scale and variety. The public spaces, the shops, the bars and restaurants, and the public art and performance programmes bring life to the area.





And now the development has started to grow eastward, where it will eventually see the building of 3,300 new homes, a school, a doctors' surgery, parks and a newly created landscaped waterside walk. To design this new area, Canary Wharf Group is working with a range of architects who are new to the project, including Herzog & de Meuron. The key to the design is first in providing a good place to live for a variety of different people. Herzog & de Meuron devised a range of apartment types of different sizes and character. The architectural identity of the tower comes from reflecting what is going on inside the building, the different apartment types, and the individual units. This architectural expression gives the building a symbolic role. It marks the transition between the original office towers to the west and the new residential area on the north-east side of the development. Herzog says:

"It is clearly made for people to stay and use, it has a lot of terraces, the facade is very porous. It is not glass in the foreground. It's like an inhabited rock. It is also different in material quality from the glass and steel that the majority of buildings in Canary Wharf use, it uses a kind of terracotta, that has a white finish, it feels good to touch. We use a lot of wood that feels nice. It has a circular plan, different from every other tower in the area, which are all orthogonal. What makes it interesting sculpturally is that it has a mix of different apartment sizes. We used that mix as an opportunity to express it in the facade. Small apartments produce a different imprint on the facade than larger or medium sizes. It gives the building the light, the scale and the grain and the profile. We wanted the building to be looking all around, not part of a fixed pattern. It does not really participate in any given vista, it potentially has interesting views all around."

One Park Drive has been designed to work both in the existing context, and also that of the future. At first it will be a freestanding landmark. Eventually it will form part of a pattern of streets and parks, as the urban qualities of the area mature. It will also create a richly varied interior world, offering high-ceilinged loft spaces in which to sit and watch the ripples on the surface of the water of the dock from which it rises, and at higher levels to stand on a terrace and see as far as the horizon – looking east as far as the Essex marshes, and west to the City of London's skyline.

It's a model for what life in the city can be.