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On the Far Shores of Invention

By [NICOLAI OUROUSSOFF](#)

SOME of us are overfond of complaining about the big money that drives new architecture today. The theoretical designs that once served as a critical commentary on the professional mainstream have all but dried up. Architects who once flaunted their radical credentials now work almost exclusively for giant corporations and nouveau-riche clients. But take heart. There is evidence that serious architecture is still being made, some of it even in New York. Here are a few highlights of the coming season; the best of them reflect the spirit of inventiveness that has distinguished great architecture since the first primitive shed.

The decision by the Museum of Arts and Design to renovate [Edward Durell Stone](#)'s building at 2 Columbus Circle in Manhattan set off a furious preservation battle. Described as a "die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops" by the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable when it opened in 1964, the original building was derided as the height of tackiness but later celebrated as a bridge to postmodernism. A redesign by Allied Works Architecture of Seattle that opens to the public on Sept. 27 is intended to create a new home with adequate exhibition space for the museum's collections and to lend the building a more contemporary flair. Now, after the long angry debate, the public will be able to judge.

[Renzo Piano](#) seems to be building everywhere these days, and some argue that the steep rise in the number of commissions he accepts has coincided with a decline in the quality of his work. But his California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, which opens Sept. 27, is likely to remind us why this cultivated architect remains a darling of the art world. Enveloped within the lushness of Golden Gate Park, the building's razor-thin roof, supported on delicate steel columns, is carpeted with a lush garden. It promises to be an enchanting counterpoint to Herzog & de Meuron's M. H. de Young Museum, which opened nearby in 2005.

"Tulou: Affordable Housing for China," a show opening on Oct. 3 at the [Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum](#) in Manhattan, focuses on a low-income housing prototype designed by Urbanus of Shenzhen, one of China's most talented young architecture firms. Inspired by the traditional fortified compounds found in the mountains of southwestern China, the cylindrical housing complexes would be inserted into odd leftover lots that are a byproduct of the country's frantic urban growth. The aim, the architects say, is to instill a sense of community among the poor migrant workers who are the most neglected segment of Chinese society.

For many Modernists glass was not only an expression of the coming machine age but also a mystical substance that would cleanse society of physical, psychological and moral impurities. "Toplight: Roof Transparencies From 1760 to 1960," opening on Oct. 23 at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, revisits some of the most triumphant expressions of that dream, including the 19th-century shopping arcades in Paris, Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in London and James Stirling's Faculty of History

building at [Cambridge University](#).

[Steven Holl](#)'s Linked Hybrid residential towers in Beijing, connected by an irregular pattern of enclosed bridges, are conceived as an antidote to the soulless gated communities that are choking the life out of many Asian cities. Enclosing bars, cafes, viewing decks and a swimming pool, the glass bridges will function as an elevated urban street. The towers, which are to be completed later this year, frame enormous portals at ground level, allowing the surrounding city to flow through the site. The result is a richly embroidered three-dimensional city that reflects Beijing's diversity and reconfirms China's place at the forefront of architectural experimentation.

[Frank Gehry](#)'s Art Gallery of Ontario, to open on Nov. 14, is his first building in Toronto, the city of his birth. Mr. Gehry remodeled the museum's interior, polishing up the old galleries and adding new galleries for contemporary art in the back. But he saved the fireworks for the facade: a blocklong curvaceous glass screen supported on steel trusses.

At 91 [I. M. Pei](#) rarely takes on major commissions anymore, preferring to pass them on to his firm's younger partners. But the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar, which opens on Nov. 22, seems to have been too great a temptation to resist: a cultural monument on its own island in the Arabian Gulf. Mr. Pei has created a composition of imposing geometric forms that enclose a light-filled interior. With its soaring interior dome, the museum is also a thoughtful balance of Eastern and Western traditions, and as such reaches back to a time when the two were intimately intertwined.

