



AHEAD OF THE CURVE

ZAHA HADID

BY ALYSON PITARRE

It's hard to name a category that Zaha Hadid has *not* made her indelible mark upon: architecture, art, yachts, furniture, housewares, jewelry, footwear, swimwear. The list goes on, like the sinuous curves of her futuristic designs. The Guangzhou Opera House in China. The Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. Unique Circle Yachts for Blohm + Voss. The Manta Ray chair. The Iraqi-born, London-bred architect has even designed a handbag for Fendi. Her most recent endeavor, a luxury housewares line for Harrod's, has only further catapulted her name into the aspirational lifestyle category. Her architectural style is so iconic that her buildings are simply called "Hadids."

"However you view her work, Zaha is a visionary," fashion designer Donna Karan wrote for the 2010 Time 100 issue, when Hadid was named on the magazine's "100 Most Influential People" list. "Her style is legendary now and completely original. Whether it's a building or a sofa, you know you're experiencing a unique, individual expression."

Such glowing acclaim has continued to punctuate Hadid's monumental 30-year career, which includes two Stirling Prizes and the Pritzker Prize—architecture's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. How does a visionary like Hadid draw the line (or trace the curve, in her case) from the past to the future? We recently broached the subject with the architect herself.

Your architecture always seems to have an eye toward the future. Where do you find inspiration?

The ideas for my architecture come from observation: of the site, of people in the city. Every design revolves around how people will use the space.

You grew up in one of Baghdad's first Bauhaus-inspired buildings. How did your early experiences with modernism inspire your design today?

In those days, Baghdad was undergoing a modernist influence; Frank Lloyd Wright and Gio Ponti both designed buildings there. As in so many places in the developing world at the time, there was an unbroken belief in progress and a great sense of optimism. My father was a forward-looking man with very cosmopolitan interests. I remember—I think I was about seven years old at the time—he had ordered some new furniture from Beirut, and he took me with him to visit the furniture maker's studio. I still remember standing in that studio, looking at the furniture. The style was very angular and modernist, and for my room there was an asymmetric mirror. I was thrilled by that mirror; it was the start of my love of asymmetry.

We would also travel to Europe every summer, and my father made sure I went to every museum, mosque and cathedral in sight! I remember going to see the Mosque in Cordoba. I was very young, but that space made a tremendous impact on me. It's very dark inside, but then there's the white marble cathedral built in the center; in some ways, it's like the modernist hybrid projects we build today.

Which architects from the past most inspire you today?

I've always thought that Oscar Niemeyer's importance for the architecture of the 20th century can't be overestimated. The fluidity within his work is remarkable; it really encouraged me to pursue my own architecture of seamlessness and fluidity. Sadly, his importance isn't always fully recognized—perhaps because his style has sometimes been misunderstood as ornamental. In fact, Niemeyer's influence on Le Corbusier's development was seminal. It inspired Le Corbusier's most spectacular work.



In the last few years, your firm has expanded beyond architecture to include furniture, jewelry, swimwear lines and a range of other products. Why?

The design projects are simply different facets of the overall creative process. The difference is mainly in the reduced scale and time that it takes to go from idea to object. That reduction provides us with an opportunity to experiment, try new materials, express our ideas and apply our research in different ways.

Where do you see the interaction among fashion, furniture and architecture?

Fashion, furniture, architecture—they are all things that we, as humans, inhabit. Things that envelop our bodies, define our spatial awareness and daily lives on a very fundamental level. In terms of these things as industries or professions, I think there is much more fluidity and crossover now than there was in the past. It isn't a question of competition anymore, but one of collaboration.

To read more about Zaha Hadid's vision for the present and future, visit www.previewinsideout.com/zahahadid.

