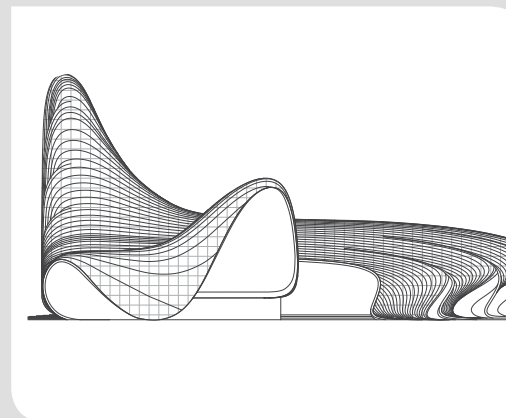


Zaha Hadid is one of the most celebrated architects working today. Among her achievements, she designed the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, Ohio, which was called “the most important American building to be completed since the Cold War” by the New York Times. But Hadid nearly quit architecture in defeat just before her career took off.

Zaha Hadid Architects designed the Haydar Aliyev Center in Azerbaijan with fluid, continuous lines.



EARLY INFLUENCES

Zaha Mohammed Hadid, born on October 31, 1950, in Baghdad, Iraq, was raised in an intellectual family, where education and the understanding of other cultures were paramount. Her parents were both from Mosul, Iraq. Hadid's

father, Mohammed, was a leading liberal Iraqi politician. Her mother, Wajiha, was from a wealthy Mosul family and taught Zaha how to draw.

Hadid attended Catholic school. Though taught by nuns, the students and their religions were quite diverse. Hadid said in an interview with *Newsweek*, “the Muslim and Jewish girls could go out and play when the other girls went to chapel.” When she was 16, she was sent to Switzerland for a year and then to London to study.

Growing up in a region known as the cradle of civilization had an enormous impact on Hadid. Her world was filled with living history, including picnic trips to the ancient city of Samarra in southern Iraq, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet. When Hadid was 11, she was



PERSON TO DISCOVER

fascinated by photos of the Marsh Arabs, inhabitants of the marshes of southern Iraq who live in arched homes constructed of reeds. When her father took her to visit these places, she knew that she wanted to become an architect. She recalled in *The Guardian*, “My father took us to see the Sumerian cities. Then we went by boat, and then on a smaller one made of reeds to visit villages in the marshes. The beauty of the landscape—where sand, water, reeds, birds, buildings, and people all somehow flowed together—has never left me.” The area was in the region of Sumer, where architecture first began in 3000 B.C.

There were other influences on Hadid’s design **aesthetic** as well. She described to the *Sunday Times Magazine* how an architect friend of the family—the son of her father’s best friend—was asked to design Hadid’s aunt’s house. The young man created an architectural model that was stationed in Hadid’s home, and it fascinated her. She recalled, “I was very young, and I was very intrigued by this thing. I might have thought it was a doll’s house. But—my mother had great taste, we got this new furniture—Italian, late fifties, fantastic furniture. I was very intrigued by all this. I was beginning to see things that were different.”

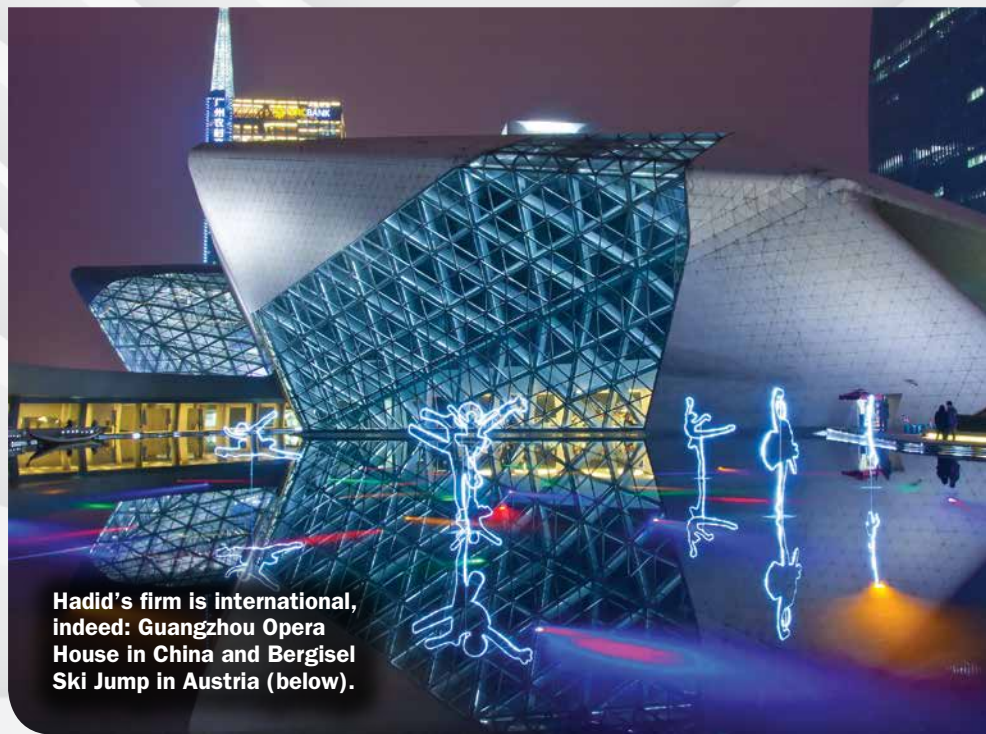
FROM STUDENT TO ARCHITECT

In 1968, Hadid went to college at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, and got a bachelor’s

Aesthetic
A conception of what is beautiful or artistically sound

degree in mathematics. Her family left Iraq after the rise of the dictator Saddam Hussein and the beginning of Iraq’s war with Iran. Hadid moved to London and became a student at the Architectural Association School of Architecture. At the school, students were left on their own to design projects, mentored by teachers who were sometimes world-renowned architects. Hadid sought help from Oscar Niemeyer, a legendary architect from South America and a Pritzker Prize winner. She admired his bold designs, which pushed the limits of shape and incorporated flowing forms of concrete.

After graduation, Hadid joined her teacher Rem Koolhaas at his firm called OMA (Office of Modern Architecture). She opened her own architectural practice in 1980 and



Hadid’s firm is international, indeed: Guangzhou Opera House in China and Bergisel Ski Jump in Austria (below).



taught at the AA School of Architecture. Most of her designs were conceptual, but her first building was built in 1994—the Vitra Fire Station in Germany. The design looks like a bird in flight with its sharply angled planes. The building was well received by critics.

Despite a successful start, Hadid thought about quitting architecture in 1995. Although her design for an ultramodern opera house on Cardiff Bay in the United Kingdom won a competition, the design was ultimately rejected by a panel of

judges who said it was flawed by “uncertainties.” She told the *London Evening Standard*, “It was such a depressing time. I didn’t look very depressed maybe but it was very dire. I made a conscious decision not to stop, but it could have gone the other way.” She thought about becoming a painter or a teacher.

Her design practice took a gigantic leap when Hadid won the competition to design the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati. Her first commission in the United States was also the first American museum designed by

RAW, VITAL, AND CONNECTED

Hadid’s architectural designs tend to have fluid shapes, and the buildings appear to flow effortlessly into their building sites. She feels that her designs are best shown through paintings rather than architectural drawings. Appearing to morph and change shape as one moves through the space, her buildings take on a science fiction–like feel. The advent of computer-aided design allowed architects and engineers to realize out-of-this-world buildings. Engineering the designs required

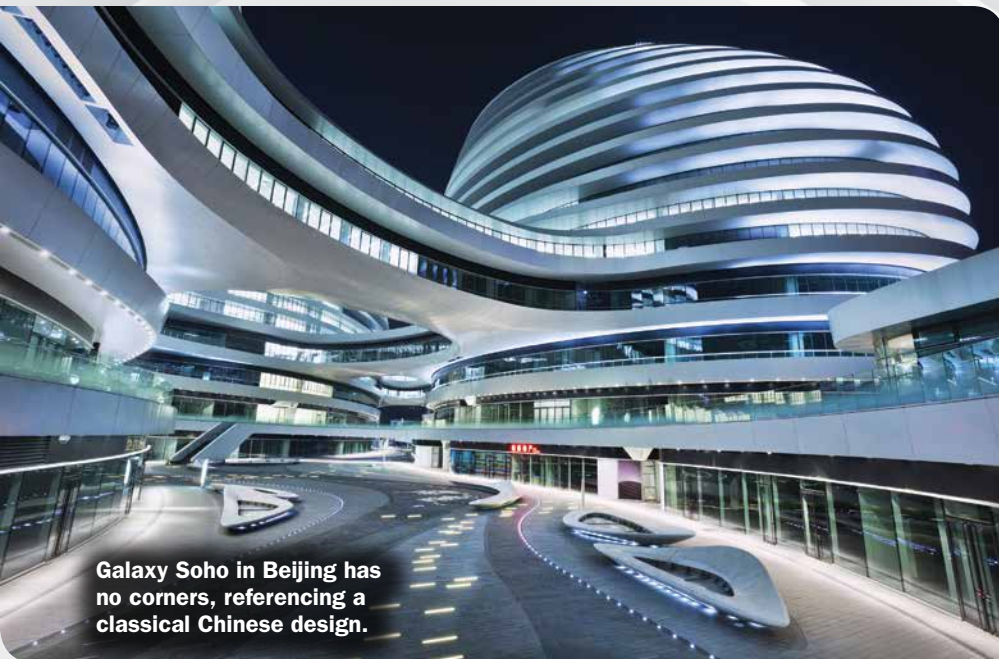
woman and, at 54, the youngest architect to receive this award. Then in 2010 and 2011, Hadid was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects Stirling Prize for excellence in architecture. For the 2012 Olympics, Hadid designed the dramatically curved London Aquatics Centre, the first thing people saw as they entered Olympic Park.

Zaha Hadid has risen to the top of her field, also finding time to teach at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Architecture, and many other universities around the world. In 2012, she was appointed Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to architecture (so technically her name is Dame Zaha Hadid).

Hadid is firmly committed to her unique style. She told *The Guardian*, “As a woman, I’m expected to want everything to be nice, and to be nice myself. A very English thing. I don’t design nice buildings—I don’t like them. I like the architecture to have some raw, vital, earthy quality.”

About her future as an architect, Hadid has said, “I started out trying to create buildings that would sparkle like isolated jewels; now I want them to connect, to form a new kind of landscape, to flow together with contemporary cities and the lives of their peoples.”

Anna M. Lewis is the author *WOMEN OF STEEL AND STONE: 22 Inspirational Architects, Engineers, and Landscape Designers*, Chicago Review Press, January 2014. This article was abridged from her book.



Galaxy Soho in Beijing has no corners, referencing a classical Chinese design.

a woman. Other high-profile projects that Hadid designed include the Car Park Terminus in France, the Bergisel Ski Jump in Austria, the BMW Central Building in Germany, the interiors of the Hotel Puerta America in Spain, the Ordrupgaard Museum extension in Copenhagen, and the Phaeno Science Centre in Germany.

substantial time and money, but slowly clients were showing they were ready to invest in Hadid’s work.

On May 31, 2004, Hadid was awarded architecture’s most prestigious award, the Pritzker, for her body of work and contributions to architecture, at the State Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg, Russia. She was the first