

currently fashionable idea – the focus is on abstract intellectual aesthetic theories rather than life as it is lived. A new norm is appearing in the architecture and urban design of the global commercial marketplace. It is based on producing building forms that are a departure from geometric norms using expensive materials. The results should not be dismissed out of hand as ‘glitzy’ or ‘kitsch’ even though much new Asian architecture has been referred to as ‘non-judgemental kitsch’.

The architecture versus the city literature is well established. Many of the recent buildings of architectural luminaries have paid little heed to the public spaces they are creating or how the buildings they design help make good streets. They do not relate their buildings to their surroundings other than to use their contexts as a backdrop for a display. Many, if not almost all, architectural critics support this position. They focus on a building as a work of art and many young architects strive to emulate the work. Fine though the Seattle Public Library (completed 2003) designed by Rem Koolhaas might be, it shows a ‘disdain for comfortable public spaces’ and turns its back on the city; it does not encourage people to hang around and participate in urban life. Nor is the plaza facing the Guggenheim Museum (1997) designed for Bilbao by Frank Gehry a hospitable place. The museum is an exciting building as is his Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (completed 2003; see Figure 6.1). Neither adds much to the streetscape. Is this the new urban design as leading architects and their patrons see it?

There are four situations in which the design of individual buildings or individual building complexes seem to be regarded by mainstream architects and architectural critics as urban design. The first is when buildings pay some respect to their built contexts – street alignments, ground floor uses and designs, and overall massing (i.e. they have the same ‘texture’ as their surroundings). The second is when a building acts as a catalyst for urban development. The third is when the facilities that are traditionally in a neighbourhood or city are incorporated into a single multi-use building, and the fourth is when there are a number of buildings in a complex – large-scale architectural projects.

## Contextual Design

One might think that the least obligation of any new building is make its surroundings more commodious and interesting. The trouble is that this obligation often gets in the way of an architect’s desire for self-expression in built form. The urban design awards of the journal *Progressive Architecture*, from the inception of the scheme in the early 1970s to the demise of the journal in the mid-1990s, more often than not went to individual buildings. No awards went to completed urban design schemes. In 1999, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) was considering giving an urban design award to a building that complied with the requirements of a master urban design plan. In a field where the individuality of designs is exalted and architects try to find a niche for themselves in the marketplace for services by being different, the willingness to pay attention to the public realm is indeed something to be rewarded. The development of a discrete