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Daniel Libeskind: Inspirations



Daniel Libeskind

From his roots in postwar Poland, Daniel Libeskind has risen to become one of the world's most recognized architects and designers, as well as a prominent contemporary thinker. His ascent had many interesting turns.

After relocating to Israel, Libeskind's family came to the U.S. on one of the last immigration boats in 1959, and he became a U.S. citizen in 1965. Libeskind was a musical virtuoso as a child, even winning a highly coveted America-Israel Cultural Foundation scholarship. However, as a young adult, he shifted his focus to architecture and earned his architecture degree from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City in 1970 and his postgraduate degree in History and Theory of Architecture at the School of Comparative Studies at Essex University in England two years later.

After many years as an architecture professor and theorist, Libeskind finally saw his first design realized at the age of 52—the 1998 opening of the Felix Nussbaum Haus in Osnabrück, Germany—and, by 1999 he gained international prominence for his design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. He most recently won international attention and respect when he was named master planner for the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site in New York City in 2003. Libeskind's work was recognized in *Time Magazine's* "The Best of 1998 Design Awards."

Libeskind and his wife, Nina, founded Studio Daniel Libeskind in 1989 in Berlin, and upon winning the World Trade Center design competition, Studio Daniel Libeskind (SDL) moved its headquarters to its current location in New York City—two blocks south of the original World Trade Center

site in lower Manhattan. In 2003, they also opened Architekt Daniel Libeskind AG (ADL) in Bern, Switzerland to build the Westside project in Bern-Brünnen and also to handle their growing European business. Relocated to Zürich in 2004, this branch now employs between 10 and 40 people. Libeskind also maintains an office in Milan, Italy.

Libeskind and his firm have created a wide variety of works, ranging from small- to large-scale projects. Their realized work includes the creation of public and private spaces, as well as objects and projects with information-technology focus. Notably, the firm has garnered international attention for its striking museums and spectacular urban designs. Libeskind often provides the initial artistic sketch in ink to his design teams, who then work with CAD/BIM and traditional 3D models to realize his vision. With his extraordinary designs, he has become an icon to the next generation of architects, as well as to those who are creating the futures of cities and culture.

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Libeskind's voracious love of the arts imbues his innovative and symbolic designs with the philosophy, art, literature, and music that most inspire him. Libeskind's process is at once illuminating and mysterious. He ruminates, "How do I know what to design? People often ask me that, and I'm never quite sure how to answer, because my approach is less than orthodox, and even I don't always understand the process. Sometimes my thoughts are triggered by a piece of music or poem, or simply by the way light falls on a wall. My design philosophy is based in my view that architecture itself is communicative. Each of my buildings tells a unique and particular story reflecting both the programmatic content and the singularity of the site. Fundamental to my thinking and motivation is that buildings and urban projects are crafted with perceptible human energy and that they speak to the larger cultural community in which they are built."

WESTSIDE SHOPPING AND LEISURE CENTER: DESTINATION WITHIN A DESTINATION

Spanning over 120,000 square meters, The Westside Shopping and Leisure Center is more than a site for recreation—it is a city unto itself. At the time of its inception in 2005, it was the largest private construction site in Switzerland. Located in Bern-Brünnen, the award-winning design includes 55 shops, 10 restaurants and bars, a bath, a hotel, a multiplex cinema, a senior residence, a wellness center, and a number of apartments. The mix of services ensures that the center is active both day and night. Libeskind got the idea from an unlikely source—the Marx Brothers. He explains, "Westside was actually inspired by the 1941 Marx Brothers' film *The Big Store*. They move into a store, and after the store closes, they start using the beds and the kitchen. I thought, 'This is the right idea.' People should live there. It shouldn't be just an abstract experience. People should own it—emotionally and intellectually. They should feel that this is their home."

Westside was conceived in a design scheme called "Nexus," the Latin word for "connection." It operates as an independent city connected to the outside environment, but is also self-sufficiently organized. Linked to the tram and the BERNMOBIL transport network, Westside also has its own completely integrated traffic and parking system. It claims prime real estate just above the A1 highway, creating a wide gateway into the city. It is also artfully integrated into the surrounding climate with natural effects like a multi-layered Robinia wood façade that mirrors the rural countryside to the west.

The ground plan features hard right angles that are softened by inclined walls. There are upper and lower rooms plastered in white, open alleys, and two plazas that mark the passage of time with shadows from their roof cuts. One plaza represents the day, and opens to the landscape and the bath. The other is the night, connecting to both the cinema and hotel and offering space for dining and other nightlife. Crystal blocks in the shopping center function as vertical platforms, rising through the straight right angles to welcome natural light. The building features a variety of partly dark, tanned window cuts as well. At night these light up, so the building fades away and the cuts become the design.

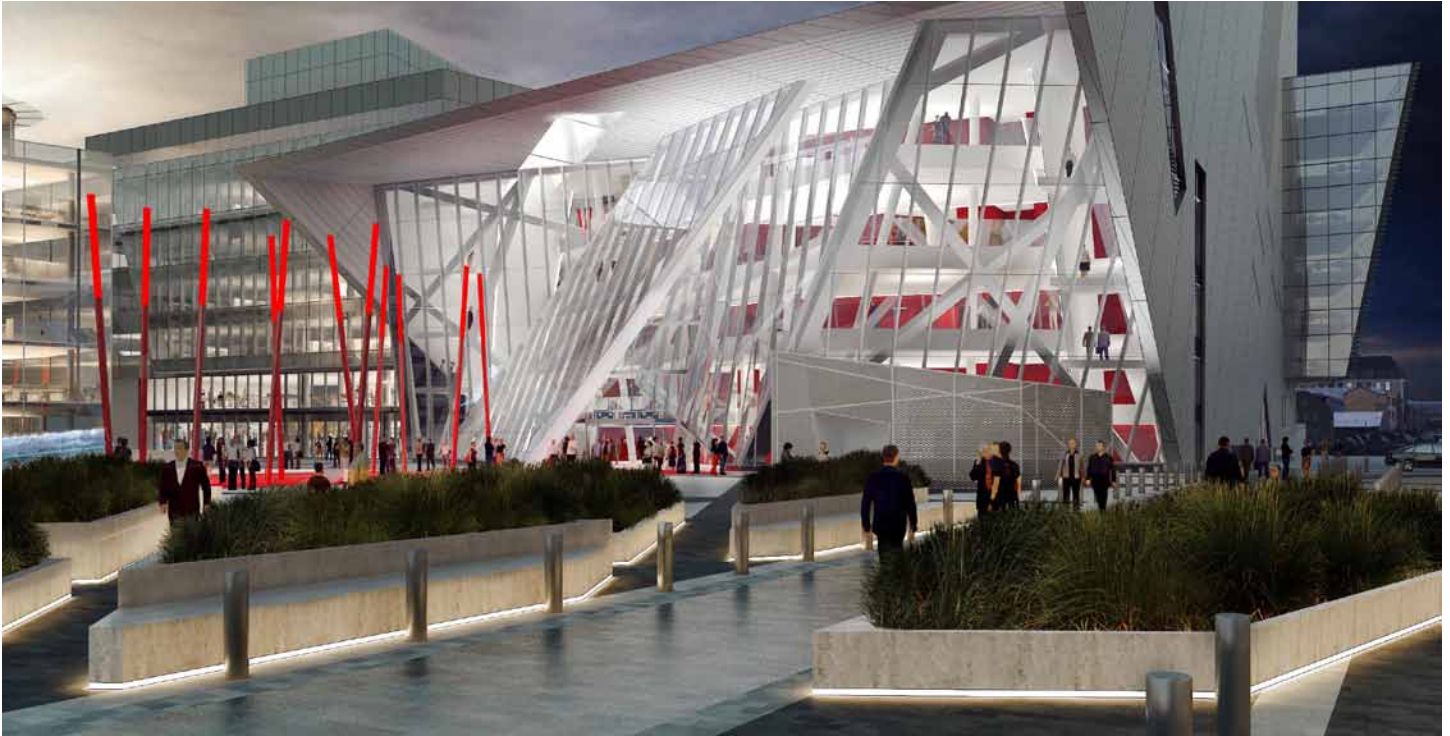
The Westside Shopping and Leisure Center in Bern-Brünnen, Switzerland receives between 15,000-20,000 visitors each day.



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The Grand Canal Square Theater at the re-developed Dublin Harbor.



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The design team at ADL realizes Libeskind's visions by using the Vectorworks® Architect software in both their design development and construction document phases. For Westside, they used the software to generate the base for the physical working models, followed by highly detailed construction drawings. Since the project was a mixed-use space with a wide variety of functions, the Vectorworks program's intelligent BIM objects such as walls, doors, spaces, and the vast array of drafting library symbols were especially helpful. The project team also appreciated the application's reliable interface for exchanging models and data with other programs.

"Westside is undoubtedly cast in a striking mold. That was also the intention—trends and fashions should be able to change without the physical form of the location being constrained to adjust to them," notes Libeskind. The project has met with astounding success. Westside received a record breaking 1.5 million visitors in the three months after it opened in October, 2008. The project won first prize in the 2010 Rigips Trophy, as well as the 2010 Prime Property Award. A joint venture between ADL and Burckhardt & Partner with Rhomberg Bau AG/Strabag AG, the Westside Shopping and Leisure Center has become a destination in its own right.

THE GRAND CANAL SQUARE THEATER AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN DUBLIN: MAKING AN ENTRANCE

Libeskind has a knack for creating dramatic spaces, so when he won the competition for designing a cultural center to anchor the redeveloped Dublin Harbor in 2003, he extended the concept of theater well beyond the building, fashioning many stages that build to a peak. For instance, the urban waterfront piazza that creates a grand entrance is a stage itself, framed by a five-star hotel and residences on one side and an office building on the other. From its rooftop terrace, one has a commanding view of the sparkling Dublin Harbor. The 10,870-square-meter theater is a dramatic backdrop and viewing platform for the outdoor piazza stage, which can host gatherings and other public events. The multi-level lobby rises above the plaza, setting another stage that's illuminated at night and leads to the theater, the most grand of all stages. With 2,100 seats, it can showcase musical productions ranging from amplified shows to operas and ballets.

Connecting the Liffey quayside and the Grand Canal Square, the development also includes 34,839 square meters of leasable, sustainable office and

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"I think that everything good that's produced in the world is produced through [love]. You're in love with [a site's] uniqueness; therefore, you cannot just treat it like a commodity and do something on it that can be done in any other place—you have to do something that grows out of the roots of the place. . . it's an evolution. . . you have to start with a vision, with a community, with emotion. . . and, as time goes on, embody it. . . in every detail of the building."

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The Robinia wood façade of the Westside Shopping and Leisure Center in Bern-Brünnen, Switzerland artfully integrates into the surrounding rural countryside to the west.

retail space. Their twin façades boast glazed multi-story atriums and landscaped roofs, and provide state-of-the-art work spaces. The theater, which is the centerpiece, is constructed from reinforced concrete and steel, with stainless steel rain screen panels that feature strips of high-performance glazing. The curtain wall also has high-performance glass and exposed polyester, powder-coated, pre-fabricated steel box sections. When the theater opened in 2010, ADL won the Real Estate Award (REA) "Best European Scheme" and the 2010 Trophy Award of Saint-Gobain Gyproc in "Innovation" for its work.

For designs like this, Libeskind relies on working models created from his initial sketches. The architectural design teams generate 3D computer models and then turn them into physical models by using a laser cutter. The models are assembled and often produced in different scenarios to optimize the shapes and placements of the buildings. For the Grand Canal Center and other public space design, ADL architects like the convenience of the Vectorworks program's workgroup referencing. It allows them to establish and maintain office standards, because everyone links to a master symbol library. This creates an error-free workflow between team members that makes working together easy. ADL considers the Vectorworks software to be the most efficient design tool for organizing symbols and keeping them clean.

Libeskind's vision with this project was to construct "a powerful cultural presence expressed in dynamic volumes and sculpted to project a fluid and transparent public dialogue with the cultural, commercial, and residential surroundings, whilst communicating the various inner forces intrinsic to the theater. This composition creates an icon that mirrors the joy and drama emblematic of Dublin itself."

LIBESKIND'S THINKING

Of his evolution in thought over the years, Libeskind remarks, "I would not say my philosophy has changed, but developments in technology, politics, culture, and personal experience all contribute to your new perspectives. I am actively engaged in the design of buildings that are capable of transmitting, in an exciting and innovative manner, historical and cultural material to a contemporary audience using the latest in twenty-first century technology."

It's an exciting future, and Libeskind hopes to continue to create more exciting spaces. "I think there is a Renaissance in architecture today. More people are interested in architecture and its cultural value, especially with respect to sustainable and ecological issues, creating a higher standard for the field. The public's heightened sense of awareness and involvement is a benefit to us all," he notes. When more people are passionate about architecture, then it can be better realized and better enjoyed. Libeskind's work, too, has inspired future generations to embrace architecture. And, that is a beautiful thing.

Daniel Libeskind's work has been featured on the cover of *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Architectural Record*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, among other publications.

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SPECIAL HONORS:

In 2001 Daniel Libeskind was the first architect awarded the Hiroshima Art Prize, which is bestowed upon an artist whose work promotes international understanding and peace. He was also the first architect to accept the Buber-Rosenzweig Medal from the German Coordinating Council of Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation (DKR). In another act of distinction, Libeskind was appointed the first Cultural Ambassador for Architecture by the U.S. Department of State, as part of its CultureConnect program to build and strengthen cultural relationships among diverse world cultures, especially for youth.