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COLLECTING TIME

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GETAWAYS FOR TWO

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LUXURY HOMES

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AMAZING ARCHITECTURE, AMAZING ART THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO

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THE ARCHITECTURE

Photos of this building show a spectacular and unique grouping of forms, which somehow create the unexpected and visually moving symphony of an architectural masterpiece.

However, it is only when one is physically present, viewing the exterior from all angles and perspectives, and then walking into the interior space, does one fully realize the incredible beauty and sculptural elegance of this piece of modern architecture.

It was on my annual visit to Western Europe that I had the privilege of seeing the Guggenheim Bilbao first hand.

It is breathtaking.

Throughout my life, I have been a student of architecture and have followed the design and construction of the great buildings of our time. My assumption was that the Frank O. Gehry design would be another one of the 20th Century's most noted avant-garde buildings.

I was so wrong.

It is a truly breathtaking and spectacular accomplishment, having the presence of a huge sculpture in the beautiful, recently renovated city of Bilbao. The museum is constructed using interconnected shapes of octagonal blocks of limestone, contrasted with curved and bent forms covered in titanium. It is truly astonishing how the

curved shapes, seemingly without rhythm, create spectacular forms and undulating movement. Somehow, this eclectic mixture of shape and form, without a noticeable pattern, and certainly without evident symmetry, creates a serene, yet audacious architectural wonder.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was built between October 1993 and October 1997, and was part of a massive re-invention of the old port city of Bilbao. The museum was designed to be the highlight of this re-invention, and is perfectly integrated into the surrounding urban areas. Plazas, pedestrian walkways, open squares and expansive terraces all give generous pedestrian access to the building as well as to its exterior spaces.

Walking into the interior of the building, one is greeted with light and transparency to the exterior, due to the great mass and curved shapes of glass walls, which were constructed and installed in a complex metal structure. The glass also protects the interior from heat and radiation.

Looking up in the 55 meters high atrium, one of the most noted and idiosyncratic features of the building's design, one feels as if they are in a sacred, modern version of a 15th Century cathedral. This mix of seemingly unrelated complex configurations of volumes and proportions, covered by a great skylight, creates an almost spiritual atmosphere. It is truly a breathtaking experience, and one that surprised me greatly. I will forever be in awe of this magnificent building.

THE ART

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is part of the Guggenheim institutions, which includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

Each collection consists of diverse selections and perspectives of modern and contemporary works.

What is so unique about the collection in Bilbao, however, are the numerous displays of spectacular and oversized contemporary art pieces on its terraces and plazas.

Jeff Koons, one of America's foremost, most prolific and sometimes outrageous artists, commands one of the exterior public terraces with *Puppy*.

Puppy was completed in 1992 and is made from a stainless steel frame embedded with soil and flowering plants. The piece is imposing in scale and is literally always growing due to the thousands of potted plants used as its skin.

Puppy is an extremely well known piece throughout the world. It appeals to almost everyone! Who doesn't love dogs and flowers? It is sentimental on a very grand scale. Koons designed this contemporary sculpture to create optimism, to amuse, and to instill joy. *Puppy* stands guard at the museum, and continually has dog lovers, flower lovers, and art lovers as its companions.





Another colorful and amusing sculpture by Jeff Koons, *Tulips*, was created between 1995 and 2004. These fantastically colored shapes, made from high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating, also are immense in scale. *Tulips*, just like *Puppy*, makes you smile. These are tulips on a massive scale with simple shapes and highly fluorescent colors. Koons has amused us once more, treating us to seeing a commonplace object in a new, whimsical way. By manipulating scale and color, Koons brings us a jaunty, buoyant, and colorful sculpture, which looks completely at home on the terrace at the Guggenheim Bilbao.

As to the permanent collection, one finds works from the most stellar artists of the 20th Century, concentrating on post-war painting and sculpture in America and Europe.

Some of the artists represented in the collection are Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Gerhard Richter, James

Rosenquist, Clyfford Still, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol. Also included are major acquisitions by Robert Rauschenberg and Mark Rothko.

There is a great deal of incredible art to appreciate in this permanent collection. One of the major sculptural works in the collection is *The Matter of Time*, by Richard Serra. The sculpture fills an entire room, and is a piece of art that the viewer literally walks through, sometimes getting lost. It is comprised of eight different sculptures, constructed from weathering steel, set in a series of spheres, sections of spheres, double ellipses, and spirals.

Walking through the sculpture is akin to walking through a maze, however with larger shapes set in a pattern to create an unforgettable, almost dizzying feeling of space in motion.

It is truly a walk-able, large scale sculpture which gives the viewer (and walker) an

entirely unique experience of space and time.

The Museum also offers permanent collections of film and video art, and presents numerous educational and experimental pieces.

The Guggenheim Bilbao also has special exhibitions. Currently on view is *Yoko Ono: Half a Wind, A Retrospective*, a look at the works of this pioneering performance artist. On the other hand, there is a wonderful retrospective of the painter Georges Braque, known as one of the founding fathers of Cubism.

Following my visit the previous summer to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice (which I wrote about previously in this publication), a visit to the Guggenheim Bilbao was one of this year's highlights on my ever expanding quest for learning about and experiencing art. It is a truly unique, spectacular, and magnificent building and collection. ✈