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ARCHITECTURE

Well Built

Our critic chooses her favorite buildings that were unveiled in 2007—and one that wasn't.



Corporate Confection: The IAC Building, Gehry's first in New York

By Cathleen McGuigan | Newsweek Web Exclusive

Architecture, unlike most other art forms, doesn't recede with the passage of time—it's here to stay, whether good, bad or just plain ugly. Fortunately, some great new buildings went up this year—and the best tend to look a little quieter and more elegant than the wild-looking architecture of recent years. Even [Frank Gehry's](#) first building in [New York City](#) is mellow—a milky glass mélange of pleats rather than an all-out symphony of metal edges and curves. And more than ever, designers are showing a keen interest in making buildings green.

The [Nelson-Atkins Museum](#) by [Steven Holl](#). For an addition to the cherished Kansas City, Mo., institution, architect Holl came up with an ingenious way to expand the museum without overpowering—or even touching—the original neoclassical building.

Most of his beautifully scaled new gallery spaces are subterranean—with natural light coming in through a series of translucent "boxes" that cascade down a hillside next to the old museum and connect to it below ground. A big bonus: at night those boxes glow like beacons in a fog.

The [IAC Building](#) by Frank Gehry. This office building for Barry Diller's world headquarters, on the edge of [Manhattan](#)'s Chelsea neighborhood, took the classic corporate material—glass—and turned it into a confection of muted tones of white (to cut glare), formed into big vertical pleats (why? because it's unexpected). Inside, the offices and common areas are wonderfully flooded with daylight—and on the higher floors there are views of the Hudson. The building looks especially great at night, if you're speeding by on the West Side Highway, as if those softly lit pleats are bending in the wind.

The [New Museum](#) by [SANAA](#). The Tokyo-based architects of this museum for cutting-edge art in lower Manhattan used a clever strategy for its tight urban site: their seven-story high-rise looks like an uneven stack of boxes, which allows slots of daylight to filter into the galleries from above. Known for quietly ethereal buildings, SANAA has designed a structure that's both tough and tender in its beautiful simplicity and its refined use of industrial materials such as concrete and silvery aluminum mesh.

The [Grand Rapids Art Museum](#) by Kulapat Yantrasast. This calm and cool modernist building in Grand Rapids, [Mich.](#), is the first newly constructed "green" museum in the United States, designed to be [LEED certified](#). The elegant exterior is glass, aluminum and concrete; on the inside 70 percent of the illumination comes from natural light.

The [San Francisco Federal Building](#) by [Thom Mayne](#). A boldly inventive structure with a glass and perforated-metal skin, it is the latest star in the General Service Administration's Design Excellence Program. It's also an award-winning green building with natural ventilation—unheard of in a [California](#) public building since the advent of air-conditioning.

On top of all that: [Burj Dubai](#) by Adrian Smith of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Already the world's highest tower, it's still under construction. It won't open until 2009, and its developers in the booming desert city aren't saying just how tall it will be when completed.