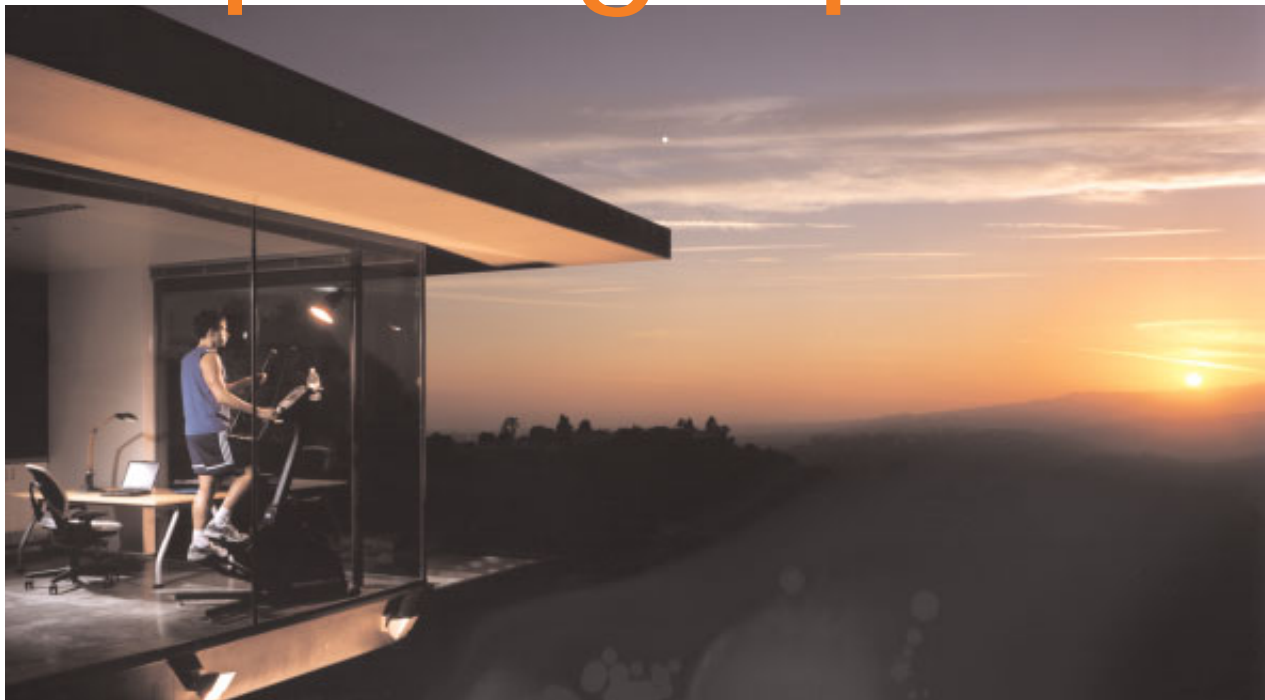


Visits to Inspiring Spaces



1. Katsura Palace,
Kyoto, Japan



By Roger Yee

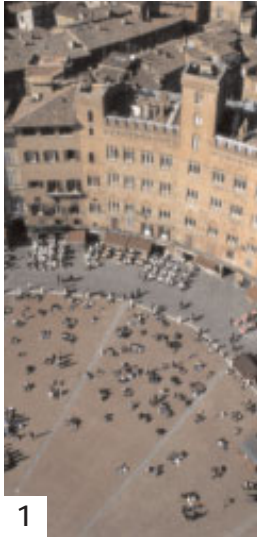


Can you think of a space that inspires you? Some highly respected designers tackle this question—and their answers may surprise you.

Who would have dreamed that “creativity,” “innovation” and “inspiration” could mobilize America? Fierce overseas economic competition and controversial exports of American capital, technology and jobs are reviving the country’s pride in Yankee ingenuity. To quote the March 22, 2004 issue of BusinessWeek, “While America’s faith in its innovation economy has often been tested, it has never been betrayed.” A growing desire to nurture economic breakthroughs makes the idea of inspiring spaces more compelling than ever.

Roger Yee is currently a senior editor for architecture at Visual Reference Publications, a publisher of books on design. In addition, he provides editorial, public relations, and marketing services for various publications and other organizations in the design community. He is a graduate of Yale University School of Architecture.

Visits to inspiring spaces, continued



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2



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1. Central Square, Siena, Italy
2. Wright's Meyer May House, Grand Rapids, MI
3. Okavango Delta, Botswana, Africa

Progressive business leaders have long argued that physical environments can influence workers' performance. Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, told viewers of "The Creative Spirit," a 1992 PBS television series, "I used to be a teacher, and I know that one way to encourage creativity is to make the environment stimulating, even entertaining." In this spirit, a handful of respected designers have been asked what spaces inspire them, and their answers are presented here.

Decision makers seeking their own inspiring spaces may be surprised by the replies from Gyo Obata, architect, co-founder and chairman of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, Arthur Gensler, architect, founder and chairman of

Gensler, Tom Eich, product designer and practice leader of IDEO Product Development, Lori Weitzner, textile designer and principal of Lori Weitzner Design, and Michael Gericke, graphic designer and principal of Pentagram Design. Our designers' observations do not constitute a consensus on how or why inspiration happens. They should intrigue corporate America, nonetheless.

Why creativity's cookbook is hard to read

How does an Albert Einstein invent a Theory of Relativity? In *The Creative Spirit*, the companion book to the 1992 PBS television series, co-authors

Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman and Michael Ray describe a process for inspiration first proposed by 19th-century French mathematician Henri Poincare. The creative spirit begins with preparation, proceeds through frustration, incubation and illumination and concludes in translation. It's a cookbook—to a point.

Preparation, for example, occurs when you immerse yourself in investigating your problem, and is followed by frustration as you reach the limit of your rational abilities. Then things get hazy. Incubation unfolds as your unconscious mind roams over everything you know. Next comes illumination, the moment your solution suddenly appears, and finally, translation, when "aha" becomes useful action.

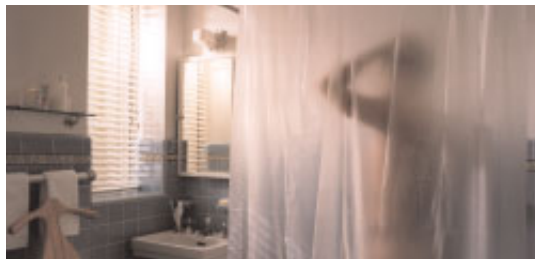
Incubation and illumination thrive largely in the unconscious mind during moments of reverie, when people are open to insights. Goleman, Kaufman and Ray note, "Anytime you can just

Visits to inspiring spaces, continued



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1. Piazza San Marco,
Venice, Italy



daydream and relax is useful in the creative process: a shower, long drives, a quiet walk." Although organizations cannot always give employees a shower, they can provide more inspiring spaces.

What makes a space inspiring?

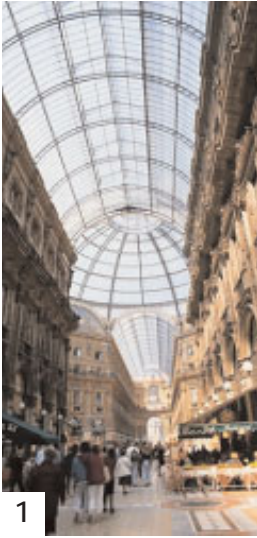
For the designers in this survey, inspiring spaces often represent a total experience of the senses. Lori Weitzner speaks of a sunny August afternoon in Italy. "People had come to Siena for the Palio, a traditional horse race," she recalls. "The central square where the Palio is run had an

ancient feeling, yet everyone walking through it was a picture of modern sophistication. The colors were incredible—the sepia of buildings and streets formed a rich background for people dressed in holiday clothes, festive banners flying and an intensely blue sky. I can still hear the click of heels on pavement and the echoes of children playing, and smell the hot, dry dust mingling with freshly baked bread." Similarly, Weitzner cherishes a visit to Botswana's Okavango Delta, a fabled lagoon that showed her nature's unsullied splendor.

A sense that everything converges on the inspiring space also recurs in designers' recollections. For Gyo Obata, who cites Italy's Piazza San Marco in Venice, Piazza Navona in Rome and Galleria in Milan, along with Japan's Ryoanji Temple and Katsura Palace, both in Kyoto, memorable settings reach out to their surroundings even as they draw visitors in. Of the Piazza San Marco he says, "I love the way the buildings form a living room for Venice with a view of the sea."

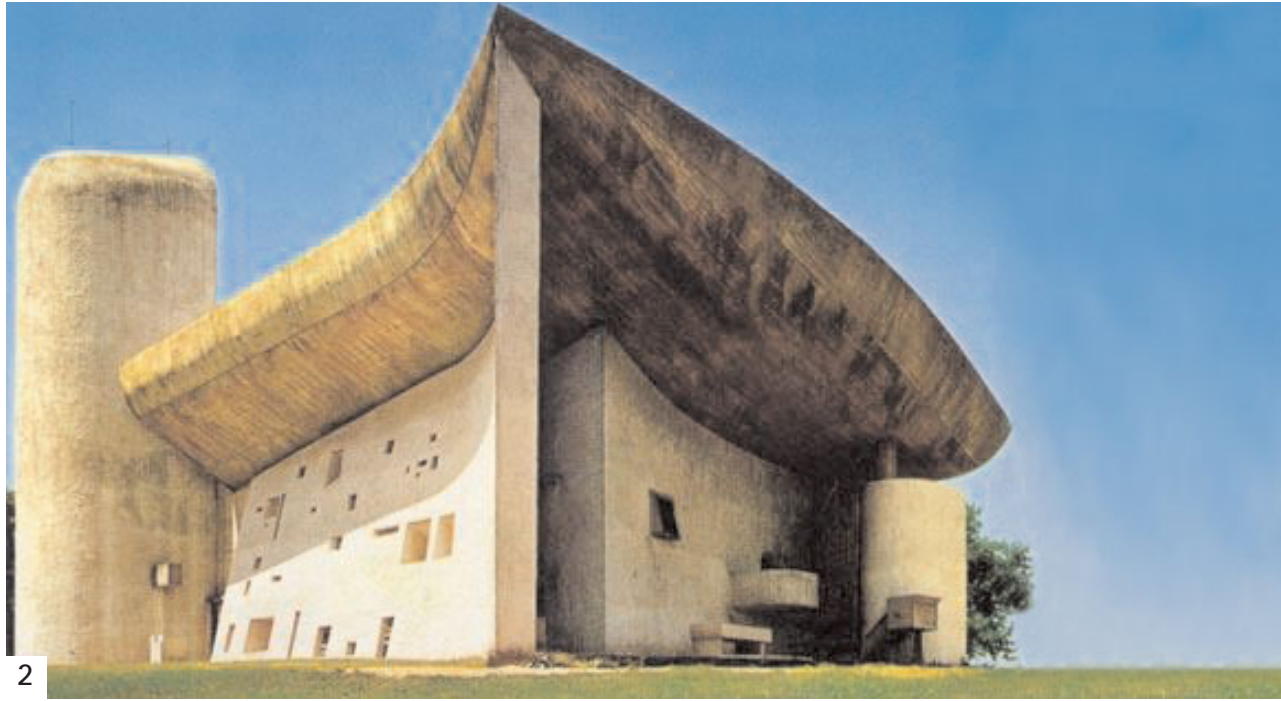
Spatial variety also matters. Arthur Gensler relishes the surprises in New York's Grand Central Station, where confined entrances lead to its glorious, monumental hall. He also marvels at the houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. "Wright wasn't tall, and he didn't design houses for someone like me," notes Gensler,

Visits to inspiring spaces, continued



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1. Galleria, Milan, Italy



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2. Notre Dame du Haut,
Ronchamps, France



3

3. Grand Central Station,
New York, New York

who's six feet plus. "But I don't feel confined in Wright houses. Every time I enter one, I marvel at the way space is squeezed down, opened up, raised, lowered, reshaped and redirected. The inventions never stop."

Inspiring spaces can transform their surroundings too, as Tom Eich observed at Le Corbusier's great Chapel in Ronchamp, France. "I saw the light of a clear April day filtering through colored glass windows in the thick walls," he says. "Nature collaborated with Le Corbusier, and the result was glowing and mysterious."

By contrast, Eich praises the rooftop of Andre Balasz's Downtown Standard LA Hotel for turning a conventional 1950s penthouse into an exciting pinnacle overlooking Los Angeles.

Businesses and institutions should regard inspiring spaces as a call to experiment. Although the elements of variety, surprise and transformation give many spaces their distinction, Michael Gericke's experience suggests there are spaces that can inspire without embodying these values. Gericke simply finds a room

where he can be alone, closes the door and turns off the lights. "The absence of light makes any room an inspiring space," he explains. "It becomes whatever size or shape I imagine. This way, I can find inspiration anywhere." And so can corporate America.