



## Architect's Corner: Architecture matters to all of us

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By **Staten Island Advance**

BY AIA STATEN ISLAND CHAPTER

Architecture is, at its essence, the making of shelter and, therefore, essential to society. Both Architecture with a capital "A" and architecture with a lower case "a," encompassing most of the buildings we inhabit daily, are equally important.

Let's take the Cape Cod-style house as an example. As its name suggests, this type structure originated on Cape Cod, Mass. First built by settlers in the 1600s, its form was dictated by function and location. The most recognizable feature of the Cape Cod is a steeply pitched gable roof, under which nestles the second floor. Dormers provide for windows on the sloping sides of the roof.

Such a steeply pitched roof was easily able to shed rain and snow, thus protecting the occupants of the home from the harsh weather of the Cape. These houses were not designed by professional architects but nonetheless were so successful as a design, they remain with us today. Look around Staten Island and you will find many examples of the Cape Cod, a style of architecture that has become a part of the fabric of our lives. □

### **BUILDINGS WE □ CAN RELATE TO**

In fact, our neighborhoods are made up of buildings that we relate to and use, which may not be special in their design but make our style of living possible. What most neighborhoods consist of is architecture with a lower case "a," background buildings that do their jobs without calling attention to themselves, which is vital to the proper function of any town or city.



Photos Courtesy of the AIA Staten Island Chapter

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, designed by Frank Gehry, injected new energy into a sleepy post-industrial Spanish city.

But, in every area of every town, there are standout buildings of all ages. These examples of exceptional design are Architecture with a capital "A." These buildings are important to us as a society. They can be houses or museums, churches or park pavilions, but they are structures which, when we enter them, take our breath away and bring us to our knees with their brilliance.

Sometimes they surprise and even shock us with their boldness, yet their presence both enhances the areas where they're built and the lives of the people who experience them.

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, which was designed by Frank Gehry, was a sweeping structure unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. It was so successful in its design it has transformed Bilbao and recognized Architecture worldwide as the right medicine to inject new energy into a city. □

### **TOO FEW □ SPECIAL STRUCTURES □**

One may ask, "Why aren't all buildings special in their design?" The answer is similar with regard to all the arts and explains why we have so few 21st-century Beethovens composing or Michelangelos creating great works of art.

Today there are few great sponsoring patrons like the European nobles and Popes of old. As with music, painting and sculpture, the combination of artist and patron would make for great architecture. But budget structures principally aim to be effective, functional and profitable.

These three goals are such an overriding consideration they often impede the addition of any additional design element or desire for change. Unremarkable architecture ultimately becomes necessary to satisfy the demands of the majority.

Great Architecture can happen at a more frequent pace only when we demand it. If you consistently request gourmet food and improve your palate, restaurants eventually have to rise to your standards. The same holds true in the world of architecture: The built environment can change when the populace recognizes the need to enhance our living experience. □

*Architect's Corner, written by members of the Staten Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), [aiasiny.org](http://aiasiny.org), appears twice a month in Home.* □

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