



The Architectural

Masterpieces of Chicago

By SIDHARTH BALAKRISHNA



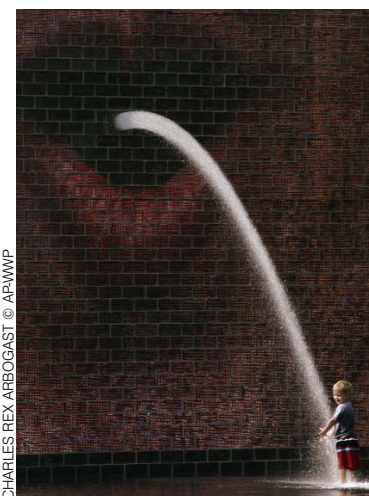
Chicago, Illinois, has long been known for its architecture. Great names in the field of design, structural engineering and architecture have created buildings in the city, from the iconic Robie House by Frank Lloyd Wright in what came to be known as the Prairie style to the imposing Sears Tower, the masterpiece of the Bangladeshi American Fazlur Rahman Khan. Modern architects have also contributed their vision of the “windy city” on the shore of Lake Michigan.

A good place to start if you’re interested in innovative art and architecture is the nearly 10-hectare Millennium Park, in the heart of Chicago, the biggest city in the American Midwest.

As I strolled into the park, I first noticed a gigantic steel arch in one corner. This is Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate, a highly polished sculpture that is said to have been inspired by a drop of mercury. Chicagoans fondly refer to it as “the bean.” At over \$20 million, that’s one expensive bean. The 110-ton elliptical masterpiece beautifully reflects the adjoining buildings, the passers-by in the park and the clouds in the sky. It was forged



JEFF ROBERSON © AP/WWP



CHARLES REX ARBOGAST © AP/WWP

Above: The Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Millennium Park in Chicago.

Far left: Chicago’s CNA Plaza is lit up with a message supporting the Chicago White Sox baseball team. On the left is Sears Tower, in the right foreground is Buckingham Fountain.

Left: A child plays in the Crown Fountain at Millennium Park.

Below: The Chicago skyline.

stantly changing video images of faces from a cross-section of 1,000 city residents.

As you are drawn to these huge faces, beware! Water suddenly whooshes from their mouths! The stream continues for a few seconds; then slowly diminishes. Children have a whale of a time trying to predict and outwit the jets of water.

The inspiration for the fountain came from fountains Plensa saw on walks through Rome. “Unfortunately, they carved the figures in stone,” he observes, “and for 500 years they have exactly the same position. I think today technology allows us to go a little bit farther. All of us, we have two sides, the daylight side, and the freak side. And those huge faces, the gargoyles, become these grotesque parts of ourselves, but that is also the most beautiful part of art, when we are out of control. When they spout water from their mouths, they are giving us life, and that is very beautiful for me.”

At night, the nearby skyscrapers glitter like stars in the

using a series of seamless, highly polished steel plates. A 3.6-meter-high arch provides a “gate” to the concave chamber beneath the sculpture, inviting visitors to touch its mirror-like surface and view their images reflected from different angles.

Not far from “the bean” stands the Crown Fountain, built to showcase Chicago’s ethnic diversity. Spanish sculptor Jaume Plensa designed the fountain with two 15-meter glass towers at either end of a shallow reflecting pool. The towers feature con-



Left and below: The 110-ton stainless steel Anish Kapoor sculpture called Cloud Gate at Millennium Park.



shallow pool. “A fountain,” Plensa once said, “is the memory of nature, this marvelous sound of a little river in the mountains translated to the city.”

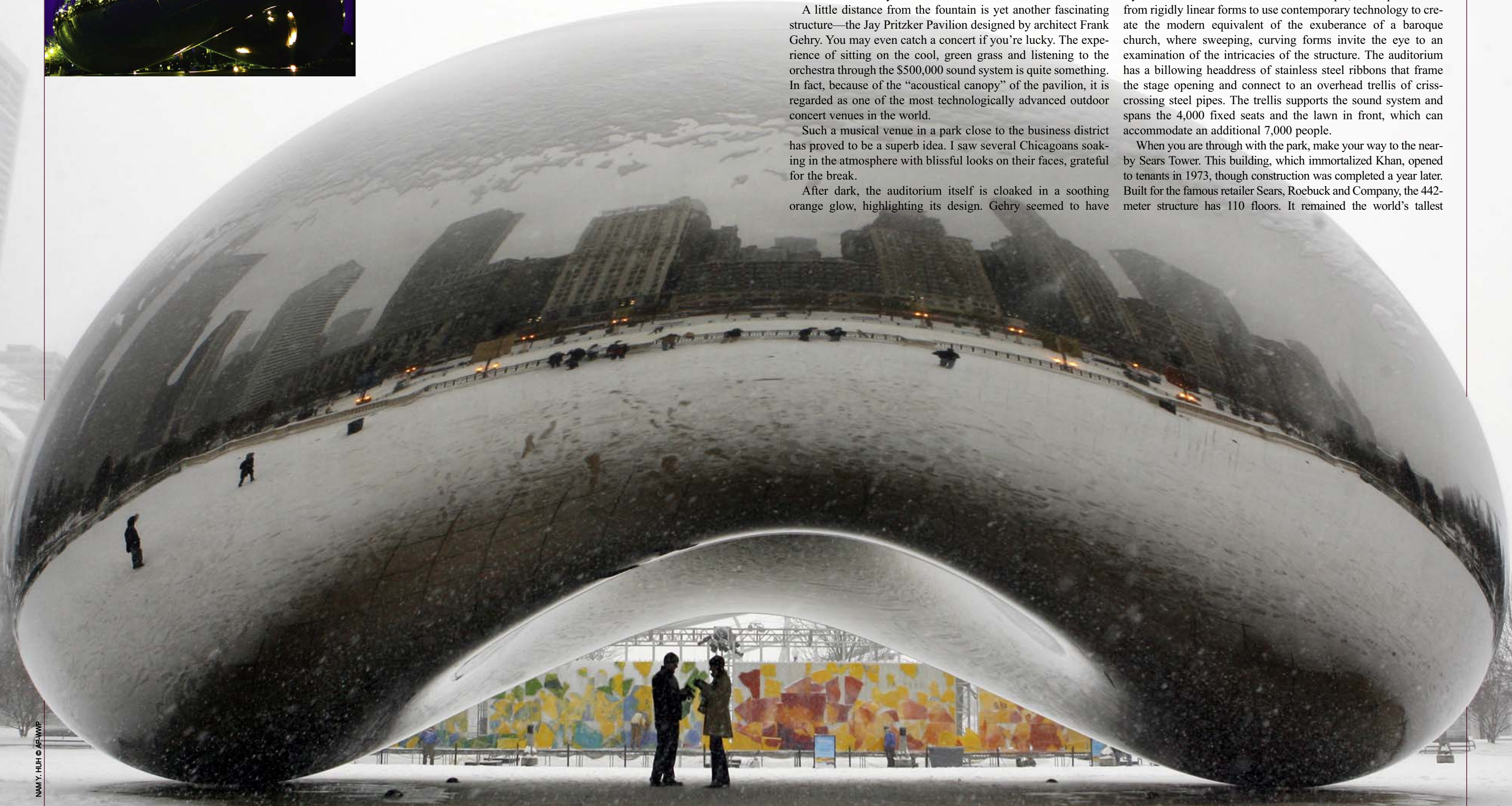
A little distance from the fountain is yet another fascinating structure—the Jay Pritzker Pavilion designed by architect Frank Gehry. You may even catch a concert if you’re lucky. The experience of sitting on the cool, green grass and listening to the orchestra through the \$500,000 sound system is quite something. In fact, because of the “acoustical canopy” of the pavilion, it is regarded as one of the most technologically advanced outdoor concert venues in the world.

Such a musical venue in a park close to the business district has proved to be a superb idea. I saw several Chicagoans soaking in the atmosphere with blissful looks on their faces, grateful for the break.

After dark, the auditorium itself is cloaked in a soothing orange glow, highlighting its design. Gehry seemed to have

taken German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s description of architecture as “frozen music” to heart. Gehry’s style has been referred to as techno-baroque, a complete break from rigidly linear forms to use contemporary technology to create the modern equivalent of the exuberance of a baroque church, where sweeping, curving forms invite the eye to an examination of the intricacies of the structure. The auditorium has a billowing headdress of stainless steel ribbons that frame the stage opening and connect to an overhead trellis of criss-crossing steel pipes. The trellis supports the sound system and spans the 4,000 fixed seats and the lawn in front, which can accommodate an additional 7,000 people.

When you are through with the park, make your way to the nearby Sears Tower. This building, which immortalized Khan, opened to tenants in 1973, though construction was completed a year later. Built for the famous retailer Sears, Roebuck and Company, the 442-meter structure has 110 floors. It remained the world’s tallest



building until 1996, when it was surpassed by the Petronas Towers (452 meters) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Khan's skyscrapers were a watershed in the development of America's huge buildings. As he once put it, they enabled "people to live and work in the sky." Chicagoans often joke that the residents of the highest floors of the tower phone the doorman to find out whether it's raining or snowing, since they literally live above the low-hanging clouds.

The specialty of the tower is the use of what is known as bundled tubes, which limits the building's sway in the windy city. Nine square columns of different height make up the entire structure. At the 50th floor, two diagonally opposite columns end, making a kind of first step. The second step is at the 66th floor with two more diagonal units ending, and the last step back occurs at the 90th floor, with three of the towers coming to an end, leaving the highest tower of 20 more stories. As a result, photographs of the building vary considerably depending on the direction from which they are taken and many visitors don't recognize the place they have just visited.



M. SPENCER GREEN © AP/WIDEWORLD

The Picasso statue at Daley Center Plaza, decorated with a baseball cap.

Windy City with a Warm, Cosmopolitan Heart

By SURENDRA KUMAR

Chicago in winter and Chicago in summer are two totally different cities. In winter it's freezing cold at -20 or -30 degrees plus wind chill, which can devastate those not used to such weather. But once you have weathered the first winter, you get used to it. We loved watching snow fall from our 19th floor penthouse on South Michigan Avenue. Grant Park and the whole Lake Michigan area became an unending, thick, white blanket of snow. The bare trees in Millennium Park and on Magnificent Mile with their tiny Christmas lights looked fabulous. The cold seldom dampened the high spirits of aficionados of music and opera, who thronged Chicago

Symphony Orchestra hall and the opera hall every evening.

But by June end, Millennium Park and Grant Park, in fact, the entire 180-degree scene from the planetarium on the right, the Field Museum, and the Yacht Club up to Navy Pier became lush green with colorful tulips and fragrant lilies. A sea of human beings ran, jogged, cycled or just strolled there. How many times have I walked from one end to the other, savoring the beauty of nature,

admiring the picture postcard skyline of Chicago, listening to jazz or Gospel music, sampling different cuisine and watching people learning to dance cha-cha-cha, flamenco and samba. Thousands of people visited the Arts Council Museum while others hunted for bargains in department stores. Lake Michigan was crammed with thousands of boats in summer, and the sky was full of planes landing or taking off.

A number of symposiums and talks that I organized have left fond memories of interaction with some of the brightest brains. Chicago may be cold in winter but it has a very warm heart, matching the warmth of Chicagoans.

Surendra Kumar was India's consul general in Chicago from February 2000 to August 2003 and is now dean of the Foreign Service Institute of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.



Surendra Kumar (left) with actor Dev Anand at the House of Blues, a Chicago restaurant.

Courtesy Surendra Kumar

In 1999, Alain Robert, the Frenchman known as the human spider, climbed the tower from outside, using only his bare hands and feet and without safety devices. As he approached the top, a thick fog settled in, making the glass-and-steel exterior of the top 20 floors slippery.

You are not through with the city's architectural attractions until you pay a visit to the 15-meter-high Picasso sculpture at the Daley Center Plaza. What the figure represents is not known; it could be a bird, a horse, a woman or a totally abstract shape. Picasso designed a 42-inch model of the sculpture as a "gift to the people of Chicago." The actual sculpture, however, was manufactured by the United States Steel Corporation in the neighboring state of Indiana, where it was entirely pre-assembled, then disassembled and shipped to the plaza to be reassembled in its final form.

Cap your journey of discovery by visiting some of the surviving buildings of American architects Mies van der Rohe and Louis Sullivan. There were quite a few in the city at one time, but the demands of modernity and expansion to accommodate new offices and residents have swallowed some. Rohe's original use of a glass façade in the Lake Shore Drive Apartments was to become a hallmark of modern office and commercial centers the world over.

Chicago's many innovative buildings—as designers, engineers and architects compete with each other to get noticed—provide ample opportunities for a visitor interested in art and architecture to appreciate human ingenuity.



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For more information:

Millennium Park

<http://www.millenniumpark.org/>

The Sears Tower

<http://www.theseartower.com/>