

Formal comparison of two museums



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Frick Collection and The Guggenheim Museum are both museums on 5th Avenue in New York's Upper East Side neighborhood, and they are both named for famous American tycoons from the early 20th century. But their similarities pretty much end there. The Frick Collection is the former residence of steel baron Henry Clay Frick who spent forty years assembling a large collection of artwork for his personal enjoyment.

The Guggenheim Museum, on the other hand, was always intended as a public museum to display various art exhibits. These fundamental differences are most evident in the architectural design of the buildings themselves: the Frick building is a calm, warm house built for a family to live in while the Guggenheim building is a cold, public hall built to accommodate hundreds of art enthusiasts at a time. The styles of the architecture are quite different, and they reflect the very different styles of artwork inside.

Furthermore, the shapes and layout of the buildings lend themselves to quite different viewing experiences for the visitor. From the outside, the only things the two buildings have in common is that they both dominate an entire block of 5th Avenue and they are both white. The Frick building, designed by architect Thomas Hastings, was built from 1913-1914 in the neo-classical style prevalent in New York at the time. Classical arches, ionic columns, and outdoor gardens and fountains remind the viewer of an ancient Roman villa, much like fellow baron and art collector J. P.

Getty's museum in Malibu, CA. Elaborate decoration over the doorways and columns as well as ornamented atriums and statue niches further enhance the classic design and tranquil setting. The building is relatively horizontal, primarily one story that sprawls out much lower than the towering buildings

which surround it. The Guggenheim building is just the opposite. Built in 1956 from architect Frank Lloyd Wright's design, it is as much a vision of the future as Frick's house is an homage to antiquity. The Guggenheim is a giant concrete and glass spiral designed with mathematical curves and no right angles. The surfaces are all completely smooth and there is no decoration or ornamentation inside or out. The bizarre structure conjures up images of alien civilizations and challenges the viewer with its unusual shape. The Guggenheim resembles an upside-down wedding cake, which gives it a much more vertical feeling than the Frick, even though it is also shorter than the surrounding buildings. There are no living areas inside the Guggenheim, just one huge chamber with a long spiral that visitors are intended to wind down and view all the artwork from.

The artwork is primarily installed along the large spiral, although there are also small rooms that come off the spiral ramp. Because visitors take the elevator to the top, they have nowhere to go but to follow the spiral down. This ensures that they see the artwork in a specific order and provides the satisfying feeling that the viewer has seen all there is to see. The Frick, however, has no set order. Even though some modifications were made by architect John Russell Pope in the 1930s to convert it for public use, the building largely retains the feeling of a house.

Just as one would expect of a house, it is a mixture of narrow hallways, living areas, large banquet rooms, and outdoor courtyards that sprawl out in various directions from the entryway. The rooms are designed for comfort and practical living, not for efficiently taking a tour. Visitors are encouraged to wander through the rooms in any particular order without guidebooks,

simply enjoying the pieces as Frick himself did. This provides a relaxing and laid back setting for viewing the assorted artwork inside but also leaves the visitor unsure of when he has finished seeing the entire collection.

Since the collection doesn't change much, seeing it all is not the point. Relaxing in the setting is. This very different interior designs demonstrate the different priorities of the museums. The Frick Collection is primarily static; that is, it is almost entirely the varied artwork collected by Frick himself (although there is a small area in the basement for temporary exhibits). There is no unifying theme of the pieces inside and Japanese vases sit right beside European paintings. Frick's goal was to collect pieces of art that he found pleasant to live with, regardless of their genre or origin.

For this reason, he had a house built to hold his artwork rather than a museum, even though he always intended to eventually bequeath it as a public collection. The Guggenheim, on the other hand, transforms itself every several months as it rotates in a new exhibit. One month it may be almost entirely 20th-century French paintings and the next month mostly Harley-Davidson motorcycles. That permanent collection of the Guggenheim is relatively small and not its main focus. The main focus of the Guggenheim is to show off a particular theme or genre of artwork assembled by professional museum curators.

Since the exhibits only last a few months, the museum encourages repeat viewers who benefit from the spiral design that allows them to efficiently see the entire new show. What is consistent about Guggenheim's exhibits is that they are generally modern and challenging, just like the building. The design of the Frick residence is to inspire tranquility. The painting, sculpture,

furniture, and pottery range from the Renaissance to the late 19th century, and there are no violent or startling works in the collection.

The building's layout, from the peaceful fountains to the elegant columns and niches all enforce a feeling of serenity inside the building and out in its gardens. The constantly changing Guggenheim strives to do just the opposite. Its goal is to be thought-provoking and shocking which is emphasized by its strange structure and lack of benches and resting areas, which are abundant in the Frick. Because Frick's artwork is pre-20th century and somewhat traditional by today's standards, the mansion built to house the works were designed to be as classical as possible.

The building itself is a classically inspired artwork. Likewise, the Guggenheim building is an abstract, thought-provoking piece of 20th century artwork. The Guggenheim Museum and the Frick Collection are two of New York's most famous museums. They have fundamentally different architectural designs, both inside and out, that reflect and enhance the different goals of the museums. And yet, they both interact with their environments in a similar manner. Neither building is a large rectangle like the apartment buildings and consulate offices that tower over them.

Their unusual designs which dominate entire blocks instead suggest buildings that are open to the public, just as libraries or churches do. Neither of them blends in with the surrounding buildings, and yet each one elegantly faces Central Park and adds to the neighborhood's overall harmony. The unique shapes of these museums invite passersby to marvel at them and perhaps to come in and admire the artwork, or at least browse through the gift shops. In this sense, the different architecture of these buildings, one

classical and one futuristic produce a similar emotion in the viewer and thus achieve the same goal.