



New museum for 'exhausted hearts'

Seen from afar, the Aurora Museum along the Huangpu River in the Pudong New Area of Shanghai looks like a shining jewelry box.



At the "125 Years of Italian Magnificence" exhibition by Italian luxury goods maker Bvlgari, a special hall is dedicated to Elizabeth Taylor that showcases some of the late actress' jewels for the first time in China.

Wang Jie

The Aurora Museum in Shanghai opened in style with an exhibition by Italian luxury goods maker Bvlgari.

Prominent Japanese architect Tadao Ando designed the museum, which is in a renovated old building.

From a distance, the museum along the Huangpu River in the Pudong New Area looks like a jewelry box, which may explain why Bvlgari selected the venue for its "125 Years of Italian Magnificence" exhibit.

A special Elizabeth Taylor Hall showcases some of the late actress' jewels for the first time in China. The collection was purchased by Bvlgari at Christie's auction in December.

Ando says his favorite place in the six-story museum is a corner on the fifth floor.

"Here is the best place to view the magnificent scenery of the Bund," Ando says. "When you look outside, you see the Bund, about 100 years of history. But when you turn back, you find these Chinese antiques with maybe thousands of years of history. It is an incredible

visual experience."

However, Ando initially refused to design the museum when approached by Chen Yung-tai, chairman of Aurora Group and a collector of Chinese antiquities.

"My schedule was fully occupied at the time," Ando says. "I am a perfectionist. Every year I receive invitations from around the world for nearly 100 projects, yet I can only pick three."

Chen's persistence and enthusiasm for art, along with the museum's location on the banks of the Huangpu River, convinced Ando it was a worthy project.

"I am always happy to design for those who have dreams," says Ando, who has never had any formal education in architecture. He learned by studying the buildings he saw while traveling in Japan, Europe, the United States and Africa.

Aurora Museum is rather different from his other projects as it required the renovation of an existing structure, rather than starting from scratch.

The interior of the museum tries to communicate the concept of a "cultural jewel box."

Ando uses geometric simplicity to

reveal a subtlety and richness in the space.

The architect rejects the rampant consumerism visible in much of today's architecture, responding both sensitively and critically to chaotic urban environments.

Ando specializes in creating enclosed spaces, using walls to establish a human zone to counter the monotony of commercial architecture.

Aside from the Bvlgari exhibition, the museum is also displaying Chen's collection of Chinese antiquities that includes thousands of pieces of jade objects, Buddhist images, ceramics and porcelains on the 4th and 5th floors.

Chen wanted to build a museum that showcases his collection, which has taken decades to gather.

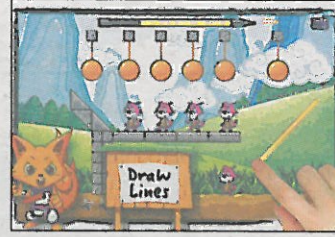
As for the museum, Ando sums it up: "In my eyes, it is a place of heaven to escape the outside hustle and bustle, where a exhausted heart could relax and be soothed."

Date: Through April 17 (closed on Mondays), 10am-6pm

Address: 99 Fucheng Rd, Pudong

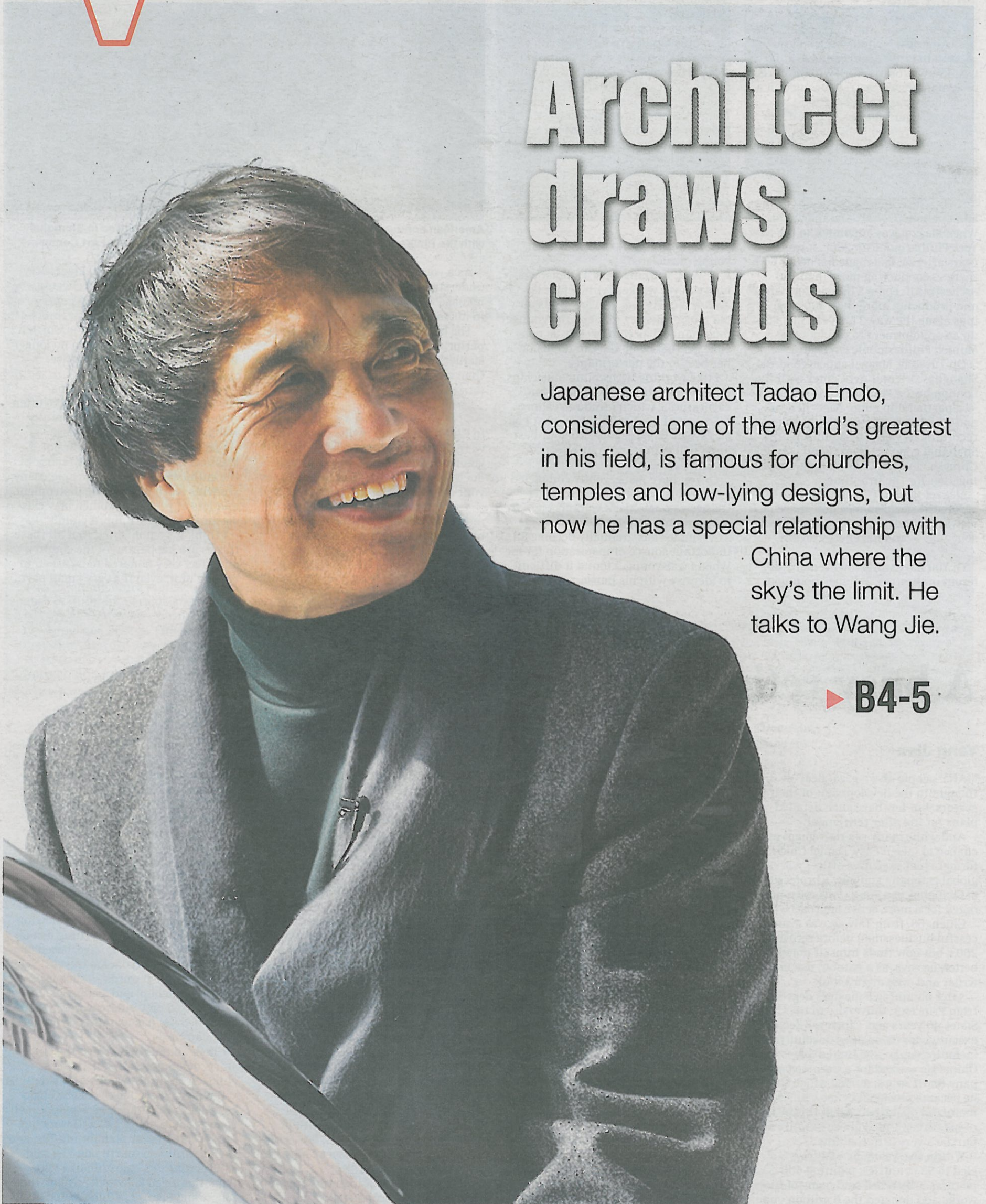
Admission: 60 yuan

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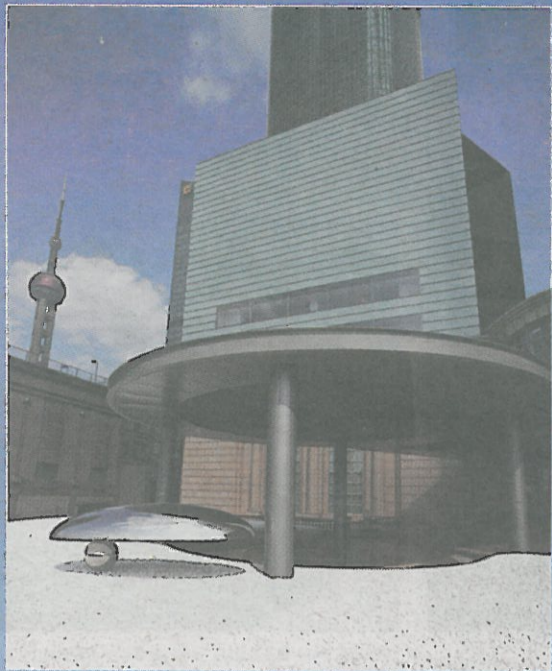
B1 **Shanghai Daily**



Architect draws crowds

Japanese architect Tadao Ando, considered one of the world's greatest in his field, is famous for churches, temples and low-lying designs, but now he has a special relationship with China where the sky's the limit. He talks to Wang Jie.

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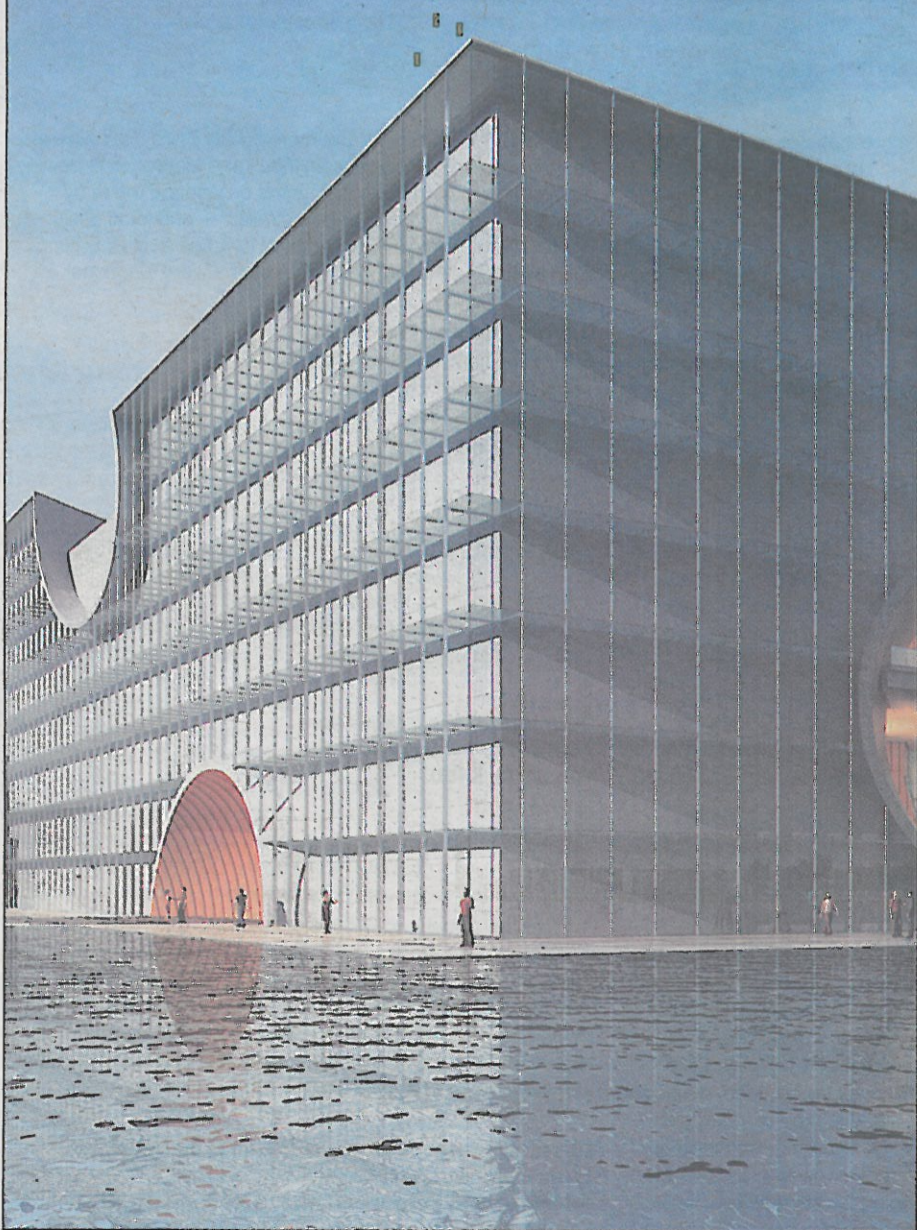


Main picture: Shanghai Poly Theater in Jiading District (completion expected late 2013)

Left: The jewel box-like Aurora Museum on the Bund — Courtesy of Tadao Ando



The interesting part of design lies in its creativity ... On one hand, the designer has to drift with the tide, while on the other hand, he must express his own creativity. Inevitably there will be conflict between the two.



'In China I now must work at Chinese speed'

Wang Jie

One of the world's greatest living architects, 70-year-old Tadao Ando started out as a truck driver, a boxer and a carpenter. He went on to design daring, jaw-dropping architecture combining Japanese minimalism and the best of modernism.

Today, self-taught architect Ando draws worshipful crowds of thousands to hear him discuss his architecture and philosophy, most recently at the Mercedes-Benz Arena in Shanghai where almost 10,000 people listened to a powerful, two-hour speech last month.

French designer Philippe Starck has called Ando "a mystic in a country that is no longer mystic."

"I think that architecture is not about making buildings but about creating space. I am always trying to reduce all the material elements as much as possible so the space itself can become rich and stimulating," Ando said later in an interview with Shanghai Daily.

To the crowd he posed questions about the mission of an architect in a world, and notably in China, facing problems of environmental pollution and degradation, population growth, hectic development, rampant consumerism and other critical issues.

Ando received the Pritzker Prize in 1995, the highest accolade in the architecture world, and has won numerous other awards. Celebrities request him to design their homes — Steve Jobs invited him to design his home, then walked together with Ando in his garden, and picked vegetables with which he cooked a meal for the architect.

He is best-known for dramatic low, culturally and climatically specific works using cast-in-place concrete, notably Buddhist temples, churches, museums and cultural facilities. He focuses inward; large, geometric exterior walls often enclose comfortable interior spaces. High-rise is the exception.

He is drawn to China where high-rise is virtually the rule, its speed of development, openness to new ideas and can-do attitudes. "In China I now must work at Chinese speed," he said in the interview.

There's a growing synergy between China and the Osaka-based architect; an increasing number of his projects are in China, notably Shanghai, and more are expected.

Ando, still energetic at age 70, was in town for the public opening of his latest project, the jewel box-like Aurora Museum in Lujiazui financial district. He renovated the old marble structure on Fucheng Road, retaining the lower marble facade and sheathing the upper part in a geometric curtain of glass. At night, when the interior lights are on, it appears to

be a softly gleaming jewel box on the Huangpu River.

"When you look outside, you see the Bund with about 100 years of history. But when you turn back, you find these Chinese antiques with maybe thousands of years of history. It is an incredible visual experience," he said.

He has called the museum "a place of heaven to escape the outside hustle and bustle, where an exhausted heart can relax and be soothed."

His other projects include the spectacular Shanghai Poly Theater in Jiading District (completion expected in late 2013), the Shanghai Design Center at Tongji University in Yangpu District (completed 2008), the Taihu Lake Museum in Suzhou (completed 2011), Jiangsu Province.

"Shanghai is undoubtedly the most energetic city representing today's Asia," Ando said in the interview. "That was also the reason to design a museum along the Huangpu River."

But as an architect he was not impressed by China in the early 1970s when he first visited.

"I was struck by the size and oppressive presence of the Forbidden City and walked such a long way to arrive at the entrance of the gigantic complex," he said in the interview. "Other Chinese architecture, whether ancient or modern, was on an intimidating scale, symbols of concentrated political power. I felt so uncomfortable facing these structures. Even standing in front, I felt distant."

By contrast, he was accustomed to design for smaller spaces that were functional and built on a human scale and was engaged in edgy design projects. Thus, Ando found the symmetry in China oppressive.

No formal training

Born in 1941 in Osaka, Ando attended Semi Mode, similar to an art school, after high school, but he had no formal training in architecture. He taught himself by reading and traveling from 1962-69 in Japan, Europe, the United States and Africa, where he studied buildings. He was never apprenticed to an architect because, as he has said in interviews, each time he tried he was fired for "stubbornness and temper." He was transfixed by works of architect, designer and urbanist Le Corbusier (1887-1965), a pioneer in modern architecture.

Growing up he worked with artisans and wood workers. He became a boxer at age 17 and on a trip to Bangkok for a match he was struck by Buddhist temple architecture. He left the ring and worked as a carpenter.

Later, from 1962-69, he used his winnings to finance extensive travels. In 1969 he founded Tadao Ando Architect & Associates in Osaka.

"In order to create good architecture, the architect needs both talent



1. Ando gives a two-hour speech in Shanghai on March 17 at the Mercedes-Benz Arena. Nearly 10,000 people attended.

2. Chinese entrepreneur Wang Shi (left) and former NBA star Yao Ming meet Ando. — Gao Jianping

and experience," Ando said. "The most important thing is to have the team realize the building. Good architecture can only emerge if the client has strong enthusiasm and diverse consultants and if the construction company is by his side."

"The interesting part of design lies in its creativity," he said. "On one hand, the designer has to drift with the tide, while on the other hand, he must express his own creativity. Inevitably there will be conflict between the two."

In life and architecture, Ando pursues depth and harmony, exploring past and future, East and West, modernity and folkways.

For example, while renovating the Aurora building, he leaves space for visitors to appreciate the magnificent scenery of the Bund, even through a small corner near the staircases. Inside, visitors see luminous displays of antiquities.

Light, especially natural light, is an important element and lighting changes in the museum during different periods of the day.

"In my works, light is always a critical element to dramatize the whole space," Ando said, "because light enables the creation of unexpected visual effects." Sun, wind and rain are part of his works that seem to emerge from the ground.

Ando has famously said: "Light is the origin of all being ... The creation of space in architecture is simply the condensation and purification of the power of light."

Within the Bund museum he uses a pale gray backdrop with soft or dim lighting, creating a soothing and peaceful ambience.

Much of his architecture is focused inward.

In contrast with traditional Japanese architecture, Ando creates spaces of enclosure rather than openness. He uses walls to establish a human zone and to counter commercial architecture. Exterior walls, often large and powerful, deflect the surrounding urban disorder, while the interior encloses a private space.

Ando developed a dramatically new architecture characterized by the use of unfinished reinforced concrete structures. It has geometric simplicity, serenity and clarity typical of traditional Japanese architecture.

His buildings are known for following the natural forms of the landscape, rather than disrupting them. Sometimes there are three-dimensional circulation paths between interior and exterior spaces. His Design Center at Tongji University, which contains a 25-story structure, was a departure from his trademark Zen-like minimalism.

Retirement - not yet

About 13 years ago, Ando told the media he would retire 15 years later, but at age 70, he shows no signs of slowing. He still receives around a hundred project offers each year, but he selects only three.

"Yes, I remember saying that," he said. "Being an architect demands a strong body, creativity and technology. If one day people find my works old and boring, it's time for me to leave. But fortunately, people still like my work. I don't want to be categorized simply as an architect but as an artist."

During the interview, Ando frequently checks his mobile phone.

"This is an old mobile phone, but you see I also have an iPhone for decoration. In a high-tech society, I have to be equipped with something cool," he joked.

"I have no intention to be an opinion leader, I am just a questioner," Ando said, "and I like to pose questions and make listeners ponder. I want to encourage young people, architects and others, not to give up their dreams under any circumstances. True, there will be sacrifice and a cost of pursuing one's own dream, but that's life."

At the Mercedes-Benz Arena, he asked the audience: "What can architects and their works achieve in a world consumed by problems such as population growth, environmental destruction, resource shortages and natural disasters? China's economy and culture, for example, has developed at a rapid pace recently, but you still have the problems that come with being the largest population in the world.

"So what is the responsibility of an architect when he sets out to design a building in China? For me, I will consider the surrounding environment, both social and natural. In architecture, my first principles are safety and comfort, and I think every architect should have a sense of social responsibility."

The perfect scale

French architect Paul Andreu, guest professor at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, knows Ando well. Andreu designed the National Grand Theater in Beijing, known as the Egg.

"His architecture is so pure, fascinating and original, dealing with the relationship between people and space exactly well. He makes the scale neither too big nor too little, neither twisting nor wasting space ... Therefore, people standing there feel very well ... I like the Church of Light and Oogana Museum in Venice ..."

"Excellent people don't need teachers. There are a lot of architects like him (without formal training), such as Le Corbusier. Ando visits a lot of places in the world, and that's where he gets inspiration."



The Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, in the United States, is one of Ando's most famous works. — Courtesy of Tadao Ando