

Yoshio Taniguchi, Design Architect
Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design
Video Conference/Interview
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New York City 8:00 a.m.
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Terence Riley: Yoshio, all of your other museums are free standing buildings. Your design for MoMA is part new construction, part renovation, part restoration. How did this affect the way you approached the design and how did it affect the outcome?

Yoshio Taniguchi: I approached the project as if it were an urban design. As opposed to designing one thing of beauty, I designed a museum within a city—a city within a city. Because MoMA has a lot of complexity and so many different functions—unlike the other museums I designed—I felt it was most important to incorporate a wide variety of positions and an overall system, like a city rather than focus on strong architectural identity.

TR: Yoshio, which elements of the museum did you feel motivated your interest in history and tradition? And which areas do you think offered you the opportunity for the greatest change?

YT: Well, I studied the Garden a lot. How this Garden was designed and conceived. Then I tried to bring the Garden back to its original form. So there are two things: the definition of the Garden is very important, but also important is the radical change in the scale of the atrium and the linkage between the atrium and the Garden. Because now, in the current MoMA, you have...what do you call... the glass hall?

TR: Garden Hall.

YT: Garden Hall, which is not really defined, you cannot feel this space as exterior or interior space. Where in this new place, there is a large atrium, a defined interior space. That's where I thought I could really express radical change. When you go look at the atrium from the Garden, you can feel the extension of the exterior space into the building. If you look at the Garden from the atrium, you can feel the atrium is going to be extended into the Garden. So, this is a very exciting space.

TR: At the very beginning of the design process, you told me that one of your goals was to make the architecture “go away.” What did you mean by that? And how can we see that in the new building?

YT: I think the answer will be evident once MoMA is completed. I did not try to create just a physical building, but to design an environment that holds people and objects inside; I tried to create an

environment rather than physical objects of architecture. That's what I mean. For instance—maybe this will help you understand—in the Japanese tea ceremony, the tea cup for the ceremony is very simple in form and very subdued in color. But once the tea's poured, the teacup transforms into a whole new object. So, it's not the object alone that is important, but the total—the temperature of the tea, its color, its smell. That's the environment. That's what I mean, about architecture, when I say it can “go away.”

TR: It's a very different attitude than many other contemporary architects though. If you look at some museums around the world, it seems like there's more and more architecture, so this is a very different approach that you take.

YT: If I had a particular style, it would be easy for other people to recognize my architecture. But my method makes it very difficult for people to recognize my architecture. But once you go inside, if you look at the use of materials, the combination of natural light, and the proportions, I hope you will see my “trademark” in these strict fundamentals.

TR: One of the notable features of your design was how on 53rd Street you kept all the historical façades, almost like a history of the museum, but then on the other side, on the Garden side, you talked about a synthesis. Could you elaborate on this a little bit?

YT: Yes, simply, I felt on 53rd Street, which is more urban, there should be contrast between each of the buildings. You know, you can see it here (*points to model*): Johnson's building, Goodwin and Stone's building, etc. Then my architecture—very composed and serene. I intended it to be so. So there are clear juxtapositions of the different architectural forms—a very interesting façade on 53rd Street. But on the 54th Street side, I just wanted to emphasize MoMA's Garden, so the façade on 54th Street is just a backdrop, a simple backdrop to the MoMA Garden. I tried to synthesize all the elements, you know, tried to make it much quieter than 53rd Street. So you have very simple synthesized elements in contrast to 53rd Street.

TR: I know you hoped to be at the Museum for this press conference and, as we all know, the work is going so quickly. What part of the work do you most want to see right now? Which part of the work do you need to see to sort of feel whether or not your experiment is successful?

YT: Well, I'd like to see everything. I'd like to go to New York as soon as possible.

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