

Architect Renzo Piano Fills The House in Fort Worth And Dallas

Bill Zeeble | November 20, 2013 3:27 PM

He may be an architect, but Renzo Piano attracted crowds like a rock star during his visit to North Texas this week. Around 2,800 people packed Will Rogers Auditorium in Fort Worth Tuesday night to see one of the world's most sought-after architects. And Wednesday, Renzo Piano did it again, selling out the 225-seat Nasher Salon Series in Dallas. Piano was in town for a preview of his latest creation, the Kimbell Museum's new addition, appropriately called the Renzo Piano Pavilion. Wednesday's visit to the Nasher Sculpture Center, also a Piano design, was part of that museum's 10th anniversary celebration.



Architect Renzo Piano tossed a Frisbee Tuesday with Eric Lee, the Kimbell Art Museum director. (Photo: Bill Zeeble/KERA News)

On Wednesday in Dallas, Piano praised the light in Texas, and remembered Ray Nasher fondly as both a client and a friend. He laughed recalling that Nasher originally expressed interest in building a large garden “with a little building, maybe just a few toilets.” But sprinkled in were several comments about the conflict between the Nasher and Museum Tower. It seemed he was trying to reign himself in – “It’s only a reference,” he said laughing, the first time he mentioned the tower. He expressed optimism that a solution would be agreed on soon. But several times, in Dallas and Fort Worth, Piano compared his buildings to children – picking his favorite would be like picking a favorite child; projecting the future for his buildings, the stories that should unfold around them, is similar to a parent projecting Harvard for a new born. And it’s clear he’s deeply disturbed for the Nasher. People around the world approach him asking about the building, and it’s “like having a child that is sick.”

On Tuesday, sitting exactly 65 yards from the Kimbell Museum across a vast, elm tree dotted lawn is the new, sleekly sharp-edged concrete, glass and wood Piano Pavilion. Piano said the distance between buildings is key, so they can talk to each other – have a kind of dialogue

“Because when you have a dialogue,” said Piano, “if you talk too close to somebody, it’s aggressive, when you get too close. When you stay too far, it’s too cold. So you have to establish the right distance and we measured this many, many times.”

Piano said the four acres of grass between the buildings leaves a space for people to play or to picnic, to enjoy the urban space, as he did, by gleefully tossing a Frisbee. Piano said that space also reintroduces people to the grandeur of the Kimbell Museum's front entrance. For decades, most people have entered architect Louis Kahn's masterpiece from the back. Looking across the lawn from his Pavilion, Piano says people will now see the Kimbell's front entrance anew, with its barrel vault design.

"It's a great building. A great scale. Unpretentious. Beautiful. Poetic. Magic."

And therefore, Piano said, deserving complete respect. But he also knew adding to the museum's architectural legacy created a trap that could be tragic. As he told KERA's Art & Seek producer-reporter Jerome Weeks Tuesday night, some would see the Pavilion competing with Kahn's Kimbell.

"It's still about respecting what's already there," Piano told Weeks. "But telling a story, making clear what you can do, it's a challenge but it's not competing. Competing with a masterpiece is stupid. And it's also wrong. I love that building from Kahn, since the beginning, since it was built."

Piano says his building tells a story of openness, transparency, with more glass to see out and in, and natural light, to display more of the Kimbell's permanent collection. There's also an auditorium to entertain, rooms for classes and meetings. And then there are the walls.

"The famous concrete wall. Hanging Caravaggio on the concrete wall for me is a great pleasure, because the concrete wall gives a sense of strength to the quality. It's a silky concrete and it's something almost sexy when you touch."

Piano said his Pavilion is an extrovert, to Kahn's introverted Kimbell. Kimbell Museum director Eric Lee likes that analogy.

"I think that notion of introverted vs. extroverted is absolutely correct. When you're in the Piano building you have so many views that look outward to the Kahn building or across the street to Will Rogers. When you're in the Kahn building the views are all inward looking, you're looking at interior courtyards."

Now Lee says, the public will have both, with more of the Kimbell's art displayed in a better choice of spaces, thanks to both buildings.

On Wednesday, Piano will head to Dallas to visit another of his creations – the Nasher Sculpture Center, which is in the middle of a battle with the neighboring Museum Tower. Nasher officials say that glare from the Museum Tower is harming its garden and galleries. [Piano told KERA that he's confident that the problem will be solved.](#)

A grand opening celebration for the Piano Pavilion is scheduled for Nov. 27. Previews for Kimbell members start Friday.

The 100,000-square foot building provides much-needed space for the Kimbell.

A glimpse into the Piano Pavilion

The Kimbell says that Piano's colonnaded pavilion, surrounded by elms and red oaks, "stands as an expression of simplicity — glass, concrete and wood." It's near the museum's home, designed by Louis Kahn in 1972.

There's room for both the new building and the original building, Piano said.

Visitors will still be able to enjoy the lawn between the buildings – it's a place for people to relax, have picnics or throw Frisbees.

From KERA's Art&Seek: An early look at the Piano Pavilion

Learn more about the Piano Pavilion

KERA's Jerome Weeks takes a look inside the new Piano Pavilion at Art&Seek.

On Monday's Think, Piano joined KERA's Krys Boyd to talk about his Fort Worth creation.

Listen to the podcast of the conversation that aired Monday.

Animation of Piano Pavilion

- See more at: <http://artandseek.net/2013/11/20/architect-renzo-piano-visits-his-baby-the-kimbells-piano-pavilion-2/#sthash.y23uDGgp.dpuf>