

# FOUR FABULOUS FACADES AND THE AMAZING ARCHITECTS BEHIND THEM

By Tina Luton

The use of ceramic tile in modern architecture offers endless creative possibilities in terms of colour, texture and design, as well as providing a long-lasting, low maintenance 'skin' to the building in question. Ceramic and porcelain tiles can be used as part of a ventilated façade system designed to give buildings increased energy efficiency, or they can be used purely as an architectural feature creating a signature point-of-difference in new constructions, or to give tired-looking structures a much-needed facelift, turning them from mundane into dazzling works of art. Here, we look at four fabulous facades in South Korea, USA, Spain and Brazil where cutting-edge architects have used the vibrancy and versatility of ceramic tile to create modern masterpieces.

## LEEUM SAMSUNG MUSEUM OF ART – SEOUL, KOREA

The Leeum Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul is characterised by a terracotta ventilated façade and eye-catching geometric shapes and textured surfaces. Designed by renowned Italian architect Mario Botta, whose work is distinguished by his use of light to engender space and his passion for primary geometric shapes.

"I believe it is important to be able to recognise an image at a glance and to understand that what we are looking at is an apse, a church, a theatre or whatever. Meaning – more semantic than symbolic – is therefore fundamental. For this reason, I prefer to work with simple shapes as they help to decode the quality of the space," he said.

Mario's work is defined by his skilled use of materials; brick and terracotta are among his favourites.

"Materials play an important role in terms of the tactile, chromatic and sensitive aspects that are part and parcel of the usage of architecture. If I were offered the choice between a slab of granite and a sheet of aluminium, I would instinctively opt for the former. On the other hand, we must also learn to use 'historic' materials innovatively and to give them new meaning in the art of building."

The Samsung Museum of Art looks for all intents and purposes like a hilltop fort. Most of the building is below ground. It's above ground structure consists of two primary interlocking, geometric shapes: a parallelepiped (a prism with six faces) coupled with an inverted cone that continues underground.

The building's exterior is expressed in the texture of the ventilated extruded terracotta façade, which has been installed using the mechanical clip system that secures the terracotta pieces to the metal substructure. The cladding consists of flat, smooth terracotta pieces combined with special v-sectioned elements, also in terracotta, that were expressly produced to Mario's design.

The spire shape was designed to lend particular plasticity to the façade's surface, at the same time using just a single system for the slanted, circular cladding of the building.

The composition of the façade is created by the union of two modules: in the parallelepiped, the alternation of the two types creates a series of horizontal repetitions, while the spire-shaped element encases the conical volume giving the surfaces an unusual shimmering effect.

## WEB HOTEL – SALVADOR, BRAZIL

Brazilian architect Fernando Peixoto has a passion and fascination with using ceramic tiles as part of the urban landscape and is revered for his almost surreal use of strong colours and geometric patterns.

"It's a significant proof of the vitality and importance of ceramic that, in spite of being the very first man-made material, we are still discussing new possibilities and ways of using and producing ceramic-related products," he said.

"The effort and attention to improve and renew ceramic production and finish, to update and enlarge its application and efficiency, is living proof of the ability of ceramic to follow the development pace of human society and its needs."



From left to right: School of Architecture – Miami, USA. Teatro Circo Price – Madrid, Spain. The Leeum Samsung Museum of Art - Seoul, Korea.

Fernando believes that the modern adequacy of such an old material has much to do with its ability to express cultural images and catch the imagination of society.

“Ancient pottery, Roman and Byzantine tile, Arabesques, Chinese decorated ceramic and Islamic decoration were all the high-end cultural expression where ceramic material embodied the frontier of art and cultural identity. Likewise, external cladding achieves urban importance and I can see no better facade material able to provide the right colours, and durability to make them outstanding urban references within the intended cost, than ceramic tiles,” he said.

In most of his works Fernando uses different makes of tiles to achieve colour compatibility, because, he says, the scale of shades and tones are not available from a single manufacturer.

“As in tile sizes, a larger number of variations is desirable but not essential if relations of reference are to be respected,” he explained.

One of Fernando’s most recent architectural achievements is the Web Hotel in the Brazilian city of Salvador, which opened in October 2006. This 120-room super-economy class establishment is located directly across the street from a large shopping centre and in the middle of a high-rise neighbourhood dominated by office and residential buildings.

While the fixed-rate rooms had to be small, the standards needed to be high. This blend of low cost and high quality was the focus of the design and the goal for the hotel’s final image presented not only to guests, but passers by.

To reinforce this blend, all the furniture was specially designed and the interior concept was created by Fernando to perfectly match the architecture, which boasts a 3D configuration of blue, white, grey, green and black ceramic tiles.

“Only ceramic tile can provide the solid colours and stability as needed, and, at the same time, have the lowest cost for a material of such durability. Marble, granite, glass curtain or aluminium, are more expensive than ceramic and unable to provide the alternatives and variations to achieve these compositions,” Fernando said.

**SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE – MIAMI, USA**

When it came to designing the Paul L Cejas School of Architecture building, part of the Florida International University in Miami, USA, Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi didn’t want the project to be merely a receptacle for classrooms, laboratories and offices but wanted to create a public space that would foster interaction between students, lecturers and visitors.

As a result, the four key buildings that make up the project differ in function and appearance. Two simple white buildings house the studios, classrooms and offices, while two smaller buildings, with quite distinct architecture, contain the 200-seat auditorium and café, and the art gallery and library. The buildings are separated by an open courtyard, but are united in their dramatic use of brightly-coloured ceramic tiles.

To create a truly dynamic impact, Bernard decided to use colour. After dismissing other surface covering materials, he chose ceramic tiles from

Italian companies Marazzi Group and Ceramica Vogue, largely for their highly glossy appearance and bright, incandescent colours.

“I wanted very bright colours, so I began to consider the possibility of using ceramic tiles. I was concerned about the wear resistance of tiles on exterior surfaces but once it was ascertained that tiles could be used, I chose the colours and created a palette ranging from medium red to orange and dark yellow to pale yellow,” he explained.

To find exactly the right colour tone, Bernard consulted suppliers from all over the world before settling on the Citta series from Marazzi and the Trasparenze and Interni series from Ceramica Vogue.

“In the end the Italian tiles proved to be the ones with the brightest and most luminous colours,” said Bernard.

All three products are 20 x 20 cm single fired tiles; the Marazzi tiles are 7.5 mm thick and the Ceramica products 7 mm thick.

The texture of the cladding changes from one building to the other and between different parts of the same building. The building containing the auditorium is clad with medium red and orange coloured tiles, while the building housing the art gallery and the library is clad with tiles ranging from dark to pale yellow. This clever colour play creates a seemingly random pixilation effect that is not only visually striking but a shining example of the versatility of ceramic tile.

**TEATRO CIRCO PRICE – MADRID, SPAIN**

When the legendary Price Circus disappeared from Madrid in 1970, the establishment of a new permanent circus space was not just demanded by the circus profession, but also by the public in general.

In 1999, Madrid City Council bowed to public pressure and decided to rebuild a permanent circus at the Ronda de Toledo, on the site of a former biscuit factory. The new performance space aims to continue the long tradition of circuses in Madrid, which dates from the 19th century, when 10 permanent circuses were built in the city between 1880 and 1920.

Work on the new complex began in 2002 in accordance with plans by renowned Spanish architect Mariano Bayón. Teatro Circo Price opened its doors during Christmas 2006. This 17,000 square-metre cultural centre consists of four distinct spaces. The central building contains a 13-metre circus ring and holds up to 2254 seats. The structure also includes exhibition rooms, a shop, restaurant area and rehearsal room.

To add a touch of dazzling theatrics to the building’s fabulous curved façade, Mariano opted for Italian glass mosaics and specified the Iridum collection from Sicis.

These well known and respected iridescent glass tiles are created by treating the glass with metal oxides resulting in a precious mother of pearl effect in every colour. Sicis supplied the mosaics in panels approximately 400 x 80 cm in size. The effect is a shimmering, swirling surface that not only creates a lasting impression but will stand the test of time. **T**