



'It plays with light' Glittering new Gehry building unveiled

Kim Willsher

Rising from the skyline of Arles, in southern France, the tower appears like a futuristic structure from a Marvel movie with nearly 11,000 stainless steel panels gleaming in the sun.

This twisting structure is 92-year-old architect Frank Gehry's tribute to Arles' most famous residents: the Romans and the artist Vincent van Gogh.

The tower - its glittering facade meant to evoke Van Gogh's painting *Starry Night* - will be the literal high point of a new "creative campus" called **Luma Arles**, a multidisciplinary art and culture complex sprawling over 27 acres at the Parc des Ateliers, the site of former railway workshops.

At its base is a vast steel and glass rotunda, also by Gehry, nicknamed the Drum, a structure he said was inspired by the city's noted Roman amphitheatre. Arles was once the centre of the Roman empire in France.

At a press conference yesterday, Gehry explained his thinking behind the building that has taken 13 years and a reported €150m-€225m (£193m) to complete. "I visited here when I was living in Paris and studying

Roman architecture and I was very moved," he said. "This is my first Roman building."

The tower's opening exhibition will include works by Diane Arbus, Annie Leibovitz and Olafur Eliasson and will have a permanent room dedicated to a rotating display of the collection of Maja Hoffmann, whose **Luma Foundation** commissioned the building.

Her grandmother, Maja Sacher, was a well-known collector of Picasso works, and her father, Lukas Hoffmann, was a co-founder of the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Gehry, famous for the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain, is best known in France for his "iceberg building," housing the Louis Vuitton Foundation in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, a cloud of glass that opened in 2014.

"I love the light in Arles and the wind, the *mistral* that is here," he said. "I liked the idea of capturing and reflecting the light in this region and this city. It is not a cold building ... the metal has a softness about it, even inside. It plays with the light in the extraordinary way I hoped for. It is part of the city and I wanted it to be soft and welcoming."

The collector and documentary maker Maja Hoffmann, who was born in Switzerland but grew up in the south of France, said the

"creative campus" of **Luma Arles**, which will be free to enter, was the foundation's gift to the city.

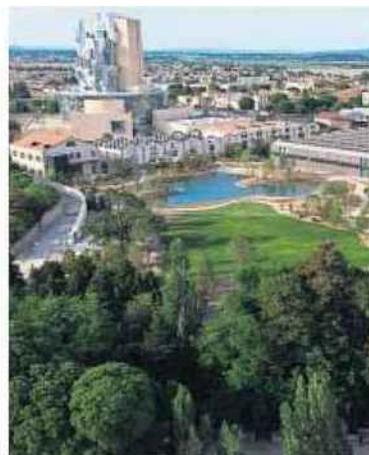
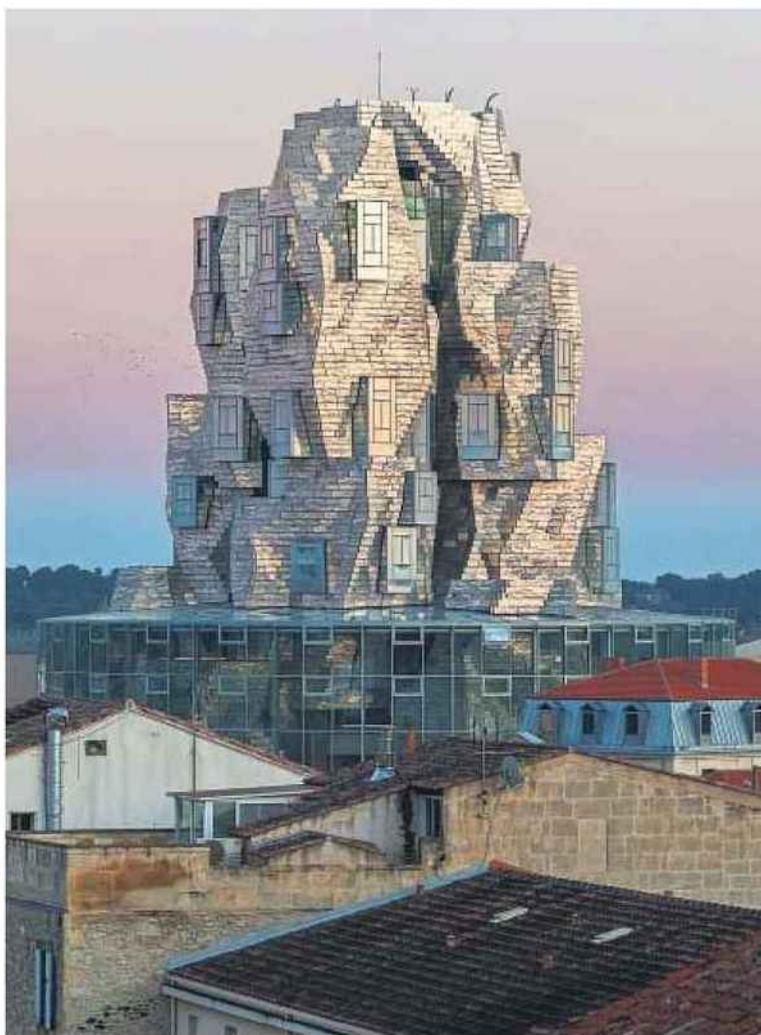
"I hope the people of Arles will get to know this tower. It represents a notion of hope, an archipelago where everything is possible. It is a place where the past, present and future come to mix," she said.

Gehry, from Canada, worked with two Belgian architects, Bas Smets and Jan Boelen.



► *The entrance, seen from within the vast steel and glass 'drum' at the base. The project took 13 years and cost an estimated £193m*

PHOTOGRAPHS:
ADRIAN DEWEERDT/
LUMA; PASCAL GUYOT/
AFP/GETTY



▲ Frank Gehry's futuristic tower on the Luma Arles 'creative campus' in the south of France, which opens today



▼ *Inside Gehry's tower, and (below)
the 27-acre exhibition space in Arles
on the site of former railway yards*

PHOTOGRAPH: ADRIAN DEWEERDT/LUMA