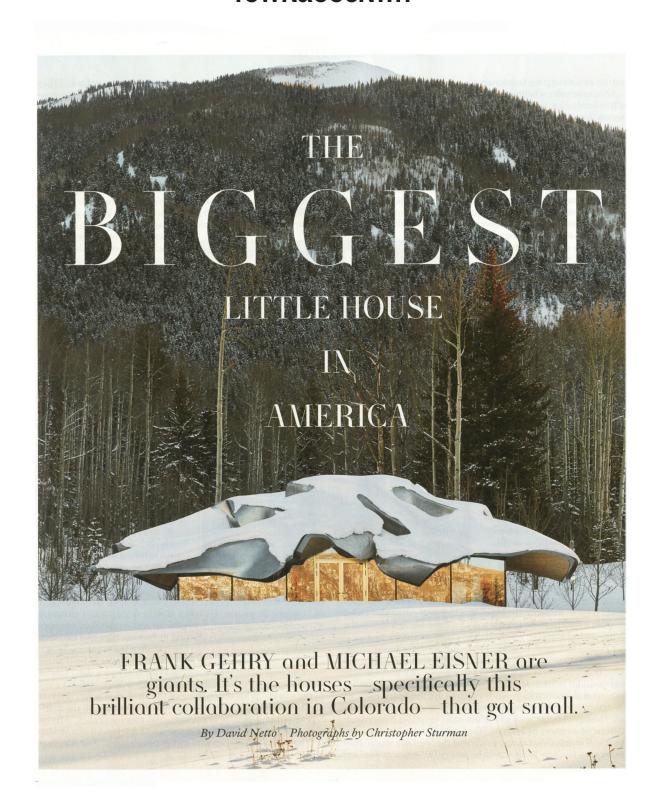
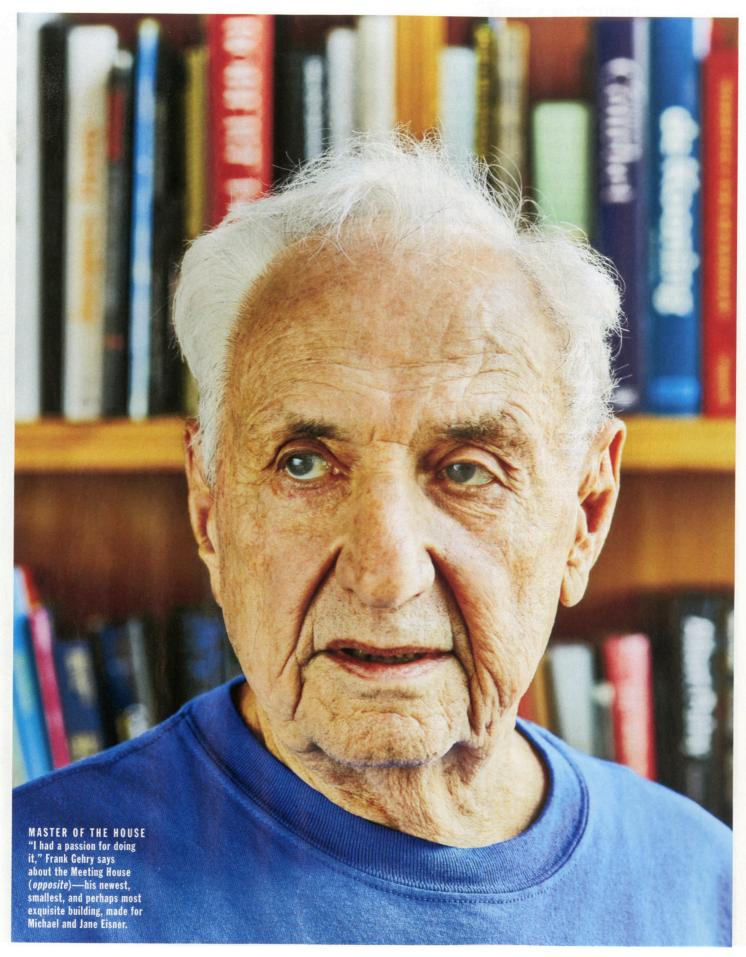
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TOWN&COUNTRY





ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

n the late summer of 2017, a ship from the Netherlands arrived at the port of Houston amid the chaos of Hurricane Harvey. Twelve containers—standard corrugated metal shipping boxes like any others, they might have been full of rubber ducks, BMWs, or Nutella—were unloaded and placed on trucks. This odd convoy then made its way into the interior of the United States, ascending gingerly into the Rockies and coming to rest by a field near Basalt, Colorado.

What was in the trucks? A dream, cut into 12 sections for transport, to be assembled from what began as 900 unique pieces of contoured stainless steel. When reconstituted, the achingly

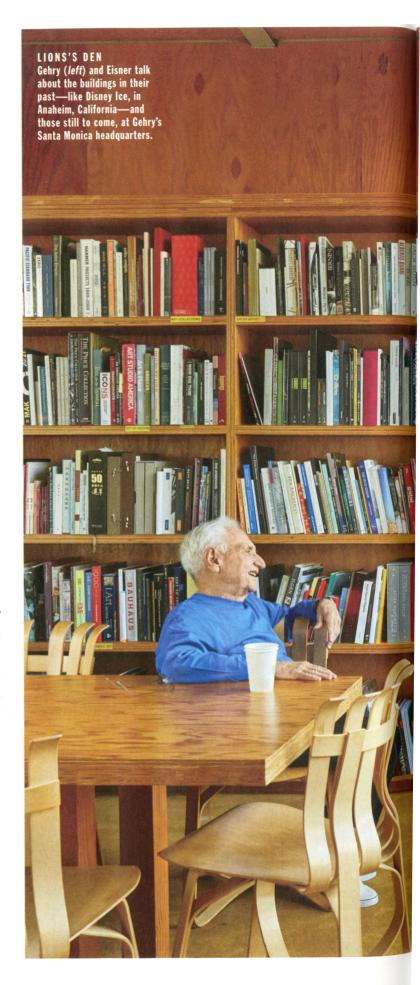
beautiful form became a roof, which was to be hoisted onto 10 wood columns staking out a simple rectangular perimeter. The result (the dream part) is a contemporary version of a colonial meeting house. The 1,600-square-foot building, the Meeting House, was completed in July 2018. Seen here for the first time, it is as intimate and compact as anything architect Frank Gehry has ever done, and as packed with poetry as his biggest museum.

"Gehry is often accused, unfairly, of making buildings that look too much like sculptures," says Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize—winning architecture critic and Gehry biographer. "In Colorado, for Michael and Jane Eisner, he has designed a pure form, with almost no real program except that it be a gathering place, and you would think this one would be the most sculptural thing of all. But the minute you look at it you see that it is truly a building; it feels like architecture in every inch of its being, and you want to be in it and...do all the things that great architecture makes you want to do to engage with it. It really affirms Gehry's genius and reminds us that he is not a sculptor but an architect—just one who makes form dance a magical dance."

For Tensho Takemori, the project architect, the Meeting House is unique among Gehry's works not just for its scale but for the monolithic nature of its roof. Everyone knows Gehry's buildings for their use of sculpted metal, but "the geometry of the skin of Bilbao and Disney Hall is panelized, whereas this is a complex geometry—like the hull of a ship, curved in two directions," Takemori says. "This would be very hard to do on a large-scale building."

If Gehry's buildings are still teaching us, so is he. "I love Frank," says Deborah Berke, dean of Yale's architecture school, "as an architect and a human being. He has an extraordinary generosity of spirit. I've seen it at Yale in his interactions with the students. He doesn't try to make them into mini-me Frank Gehrys.

"YES, THIS WAS EXPENSIVE, BUT LESS THAN A PICASSO," EISNER SAYS. "I JUST CAN'T MOVE IT OR SELL IT, BUT SO WHAT?"









He's menschy. He's warm. He has the curiosity of a child, and I mean that as the highest form of compliment."

Gehry can take or leave the press, and even on the subject of this most special building he is indifferent to being interviewed. He wants the Meeting House, like all his work, to speak for itself. "Architecture is going to a funny place," he tells me. "I guess it has to do with our culture. It used to be a gentleman's profession. You didn't self-promote. Now the architects have agents, publicists." The world's greatest (and most Instagrammed) living architect turned 90 in February, and he ends our interview, bemused, by

asking me a question: "Do I have a website? I'm not sure."

Want to know more? The best way to learn is to listen. Here Gehry and his client Michael Eisner, both great storytellers in different vocabularies, talk about their work together, which has resulted in one of the most extraordinary small buildings of our time.

Is there a specific building that inspired this project?

Michael Eisner: Nothing but the great work of Frank inspired me. But I have been looking at architecture since I was about six years old. My obsessions with the art of architecture followed me always, although I never studied it. We did build 80 buildings at Disney, plus parks.

Tensho Takemori mentioned that you and Frank had been looking for something to do together for some time.

ME: We talked about this for years but really started a decade ago. There were no arguments, never once. It was a lovefest between me and Frank, Jane and Frank, [my son] Breck and Frank. We had real fun—maybe 60 models. I always felt a small building was like a poem, while a large building was like a novel. And Frank is a poet.

about wood. My professors at USC had just returned from tours of duty in Japan and brought back the beauty of wood. I got to metal because it's the only material you can use for wall and roof.

Did the idea of a meetinghouse come from spending time in Vermont? **ME:** I did try to bring an abandoned church in the Hudson Valley to Colorado as a meetinghouse, but a judge in New York state killed that. So when Frank and I started talking, this idea came up. And, remember, I'm on the board of the Aspen Institute, where Herbert Bayer designed the series of meeting rooms I have been

sitting in since the 1960s.

Every project has a scary part. Did this one?

FG: The budget when we started was already two times what a normal building would be. I never really thought Michael would go through with it. Then I thought the waterproofing issues would kill the project: snow getting into the folds of the roof and freezing, expanding, doing terrible things. I love seeing these pictures of it, because the snow takes forms that you couldn't build. Islands of snow in the crevices are not forms that you would naturally see.

Have you ever done a one-room building before?

FG: Yes [long pause]. Concert halls are one room; a church is a one-room building. One-room buildings are the hardest thing to do. They're nice, because they're a stage set, but they are humbling. They drop you to your knees! There's no place to hide.

Frank has a reputation for standing his ground in the design process, and for being testy in defense of his ideas. Were there any disagreements?

ME: There was nothing different

about working with Frank on this than on a large public building. I never had an argument with him. He was always right, and we tested his ideas all the time. We have a history. He designed the practice ice rink in Anaheim, which is fantastic; he designed the corporate office building at Disneyland; he designed downtown Disney at Marne-la-Vallée, in France. He did this before he became the darling of the architecture world, before Bilbao, before Disney Hall.

Did your wife ever ask if you were crazy?

ME: My wife knows I'm crazy. That is nothing new. But Jane was on board. Yes, this was expensive per square foot, but less than if you bought a Picasso, or a Rembrandt, or a van Gogh... I just can't move it or sell it, but so what? **«**



THE EYE HAS TO TRAVEL
The Colorado building Gehry created is one room, but behind
a floating wall of beechwood panels is a slice of space
that frames views of Deborah Nevins's landscaping and is as
dramatic as the exterior.

What was it like to work with Michael on an intimate building, as opposed to something like Disney Ice?

Frank Gehry: Michael was very present at Disney when it came to architecture, but in that context he had a lot of staff around him. The corporate culture did not resemble what we did in Colorado. Michael was very emotional about this building. He had feelings that he wanted to express. And so did I—I felt a passion for doing it.

You had a job early in life washing airplanes. Was that when you discovered the sensuality of metal?

FG: I've never thought about that. I grew up in Canada, so it was all

