



View of the Changsha Meixi Lake International Culture and Arts Center, in Changsha, capital of Central China's Hunan province. PHOTOS BY DAVID BLAIR / CHINA DAILY

# China inspired late architect

Zaha Hadid was world renowned for a unique style combining high-tech, organic elements

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The late Zaha Hadid, the noted Iraq-born British architect who was the primary designer of Beijing Daxing International Airport, was highly influenced by her first trip to China in 1981.

"My trip to China was a very seminal experience, because before then I wasn't interested in landscape. After I went to China, I became very interested in landscape and also the way they manipulated the Chinese garden. My work might not look like Chinese gardens, but I was very influenced by that trip," she said during a question-and-answer session at the Oxford Union in 2016. She died later that year from a sudden heart attack at age 65.

In Beijing, the Galaxy SOHO shopping center and office building, a prominent feature on the East Second Ring Road, and the similarly designed Wangjing SOHO in northeast Beijing — both designed by Hadid — are a series of curved towers that evoke the steep karst mountains of southern China, she said in 2012 at a panel discussion held at Ivory Press in London. The sunken lower concourses in these centers resemble hidden grottoes.

Hadid is sometimes called the "queen of curves" because she used few, if any, straight lines or right angles in her designs. Her works are seen as an intriguing combination of high-tech and organic.

For example, the Meixi Lake Inter-



The Galaxy SOHO shopping center and office building is a prominent feature on the East Second Ring Road in Beijing.

national Culture and Arts Center in Changsha, Central China's Hunan province, might look to some like a natural rock formation, but also might be seen as a spaceship preparing to lift off.

Experts say her architecture is not just stunningly original, but also serves the intended purpose of the building.

Wray Armstrong, a Canadian classical music impresario, told *China*

*Daily* last year: "In Changsha (at the Meixi Lake center), the acoustics were brilliant and the look is completely different and wonderful. The center looks like orchid blossoms when seen from above."

Like many other international architects, Hadid was attracted to the booming construction market in China and created much of what is considered her most significant work in the country.

In a 2011 interview with *China Daily*, Hadid emphasized that the Chinese authorities really wanted to embrace new ideas.

"They are very updated in their approach. They don't want you to do something you have done 10 or 15 years ago. They want something fresh and new, something that connects to the situation in the country now."

Soon after her death, the Sky

SOHO building near Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport was completed. Some commentators viewed it as a spaceship, while others interpreted it as a series of train cars. From above, it also looks like the Chinese character *zhou*, which means administrative district. Its courtyard incorporates gardens and waterfalls at many levels.

Perhaps Hadid's most famous building in China is the Guangzhou Opera House in the southern Guangdong province, which she said was intended to represent two stones eroded by the Pearl River.

Hadid designed many buildings in the 1980s and 90s, but many of them were never built. Her career only took off after 2000. Her firm, Zaha Hadid Associates, pioneered a design technology called "parametricism", which allows the designer to lay out the underlying form and then use computerized engineering programs to develop a buildable version of the design. Many of her ideas could not be engineered or built before the advent of faster computers.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Wangjing SOHO in 2014, Hadid said: "How do you match oblique angles with scale? ... We were led to this idea of landmass. Through this investigation, we began to look at buildings like grottoes, like hills and mountains. Then we began to look at living organisms.

"We have always been interested in geometry. So with work and digital technology, we combine all these things together."