



EXPLORING A WORLD ON THE MOVE

A trailblazer firmly set on an inclusive approach, the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban is now to be seen everywhere. With offices in Tokyo, Paris and New York, he is in demand for projects worldwide. He is already recognized as one of the most important architects of the 21st century.

Shigeru Ban All the materials in the world

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I don't set myself any rules in terms of materials or structure. I like to develop new systems and adapt my approach to what is available on site.” Shigeru Ban draws his inspiration from his everyday surroundings and it is by using materials that are out of the ordinary, such as paper and recycled cardboard, that he has built his reputation on. “The idea of using paper came to me from rolls of fax paper and stiff cardboard,” he explains. “You can do almost anything with it and it's very simple to make it waterproof.” After carrying out several tests with the help of engineers, a first version using structures made out of compressed rolls of paper (now known as PTS – Paper Tube Structure) was built in 1989 for the World Design Expo in Nagoya. Other “cardboard architecture” projects would follow, becoming benchmarks of contemporary architecture, in which PTS has become both a structural and movable component. A virtuoso, minimalist and essential style is being established. Can one detect an ecological bias through using a recycled material? “When I began to use this material, nobody was talking about the environment or sustainable development. These are sensitive subjects today but I hadn't anticipated this trend.”

However, as founder of VAN (Voluntary Architects' Network) and consultant to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees from 1995 to 2000, the architect now claims to be very concerned with the social dimension of his work. So he has used cardboard tubes for several emergency aid projects: shelters for refugees from the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; construction of a church in Kobe, Japan, after the 1995 earthquake and, more recently, an elementary school in China in the devastated region of Sichuan. Light, easy-to-assemble and economical, this material is perfectly suited to these emergency situations. In the Chinese city of Chengdu, an amazing, 500m² school was built in just one month. “The material here reveals an approach that puts architecture firmly in the present,” notes architect Arata Isozaki, for whom Shigeru Ban once worked as an assistant.

Importance of context

However, paper is just the first word of Shigeru Ban's vocabulary. His architecture cannot be restricted to the use of just one material, whatever it is. Today, for a project in progress in Abu Dhabi, the architect needs Ductal®, ultra-high performance, fiber reinforced concrete. In his constant quest for harmonizing the building with its context, he is studying the possibility of adapting the composition of this innovative concrete to the characteristics of the sand that surrounds the city. ■

In July 2007, Shigeru Ban opened a “paper bridge” half a mile from the Pont du Gard aqueduct (France).



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POMPIDOU CENTER, METZ (FRANCE)
Due to open in early 2010.

SHIGERU BAN

Known for his creations of a humanistic nature, Shigeru Ban is one of the great architects of our time. Born in Tokyo in 1957, he was educated in the United States, at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, then at Cooper Union School of Architecture in New York. Returning to Tokyo in 1985, he set up his own firm of architects. Between 1995 and 1999, he taught architecture at the University of Yokohama, and then in 2000 he became a visiting professor at Columbia University in America. From 1995 to 2000, he was also a consultant to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Since 2001, he has been a professor at Keio University (Japan). He has won several awards for his work (World Architecture Awards in 2001). He is now working on building the Pompidou Center in Metz, France.

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