

Before you read this article, answer the question: What information do you expect to find in a review?

Read the text once from beginning to end for gist, that is, for the general meaning. Do not worry about specific vocabulary or details. Try to understand what the main message is. Then, write two or three sentences telling what the article is about.

The text is divided into nine sections. Find the meaning **in English** of the words listed for each section that you do not know, then read the article again more carefully.

1.

design (v.) (how is this word different from 'draw'?)

building (adj., n.)

exhibit (n., v.)

appoint (v.)

have a high opinion of

egomaniac (adj.)

2.

be in charge

commission (n., v.)

ruins (n.)

catch up (v.)

3.

exhibition (n.)

run from ... to ... (v.)

bunch (n.)

4.

lone (adj.)

engaging (adj.)

5.

workshop (n.)

installation (n.)

off-site location (n.)

mount (v.)

display (n., v.)

6.

skyscraper (n.)

vertical community

squatters (n.)

construction site

re-construction (n.)

warehouse (n.)

row (n.)

budget overrun

draw (your) own conclusion

7.

feature (v.)

pay tribute

restore (v.)

crumbling (building)

8.

willingness (n.)

spare cash

beach (v.)

finance (v.)

funding (n.)

selfish icons

caring (adj.)

spectacle (n.)

9.

crafted objects

engaged (adj.)

rivalry (n.)

## Venice architecture biennale – review\*

Rowan Moore

1 .....

The [Venice Architecture Biennale](#) is the world's grandest celebration and showcase of the design of buildings. Which, as architecture is both an art and a business, means it hovers between being a cultural festival and a trade fair. And, as architects can have a very high opinion of the importance of their work, their exhibits can collectively resemble a set of competing sales pitches.

Successive directors of the biennale – a new one is appointed each time – are conscious of this. Part of their job is to set a theme for the whole event, and they like to invent ones which stress that architects are not always egomaniacs, but have a responsibility to wider society.

2 .....

This year the British architect Sir [David Chipperfield](#) is in charge. It is a sign of his international status, which for years outran recognition at home, and which won him commissions such as the recreation of the [Neues Museum](#) in Berlin, home of the bust of Nefertiti, out of the bombed ruins of its old building. For years he seemed too intellectual, too serious for Britain. His native country, however, has caught up recently, with a knighthood, a royal gold medal for architecture and regular appearances on the Stirling prize shortlist, including this year with his [Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield](#).

3.....

Under Chipperfield's direction there is a strong British presence among the exhibitors, though not to the point where he could be accused of chauvinism. They are there on merit, running from galactic names like [Zaha Hadid](#) and [Norman Foster](#) to the young practice [Aberrant](#) and the critic [Justin McGuirk](#). Collectively they form a varied and surprising bunch with a taste for playful-but-serious provocation.

4 .....

Chipperfield's theme is "Common Ground", by which he means that architects are not lone visionaries, but work in collaboration – with each other, with builders and clients, with future users and the general public. "Common Ground" stresses the non-egomaniac side of the profession. It could be sentimental, but there is cohesion to this year's biennale. The event makes sense. It is serious, but also engaging.

5 .....

It is, as always, vast. Part occupies the 16th-century *corderie* of the arsenal of the Venetian republic, handsome rope-making workshops hundreds of metres long. Here, architects invited by Chipperfield and his team present a series of installations. Part occupies the biennale gardens which were created in [1895 for the Biennale of Art](#). (The architecture biennale, first held in 1980, is relatively recent.) The gardens form an unusually leafy part of Venice and house individual pavilions of different countries.

Each country mounts its own display, following the overall theme more or less closely. There is also the *padiglione centrale* (central pavilion) where, as in the arsenal, the director selects the exhibits. Other shows in various off-site locations, including by countries not blessed with pavilions in the gardens, complete the picture.

6 .....

Highlights include the recreation of a Caracas café, by [Urban-Think Tank](#) and Justin McGuirk, which serves actual Venezuelan food. This is a way of bringing people into an exhibit about the [Torre de David](#), an unfinished banking skyscraper now made into an informal vertical community by squatters, in order to demonstrate how an unplanned piece of city can work as well as one made by architects. The simple device of the cafe means you can experience something of the place, rather than just look at pictures. It also deservedly won the golden lion prize for best exhibit.

A different form of common ground is the display by the Chilean practice [Elemental](#), which describe its attempts to improve the copper-mining town of Calama, a place of exceptional climatic and social brutality. Yet another is the construction site, with its collaboration of many people in a shared purpose, here represented by the reconstruction of a rough-hewn house in India.

Common ground is not always a peaceful place, as the Swiss architects [Herzog and de Meuron](#) demonstrate with their exhibit about their plan to build a concert hall, the Elbphilharmonie, on top of an old warehouse in Hamburg. It is currently stalled in mid-construction. Herzog and de Meuron paper the walls of the installation with newspaper articles that chronicle the early hopes for the project and the increasingly intense rows and budget overruns. Models of the hoped-for building hang in the space and you are left to draw your own conclusions.

7 .....

Commonness extends to the past. Nicholas Hawksmoor, nearly three centuries dead, features in beautiful photographs by [Hélène Binet](#). The Britons [Caruso St John](#) pay tribute to inspirations including [Sir John Soane](#). There is an exhibit about Mario Piana, who, by restoring some of Venice's crumbling buildings, played a vital but invisible role in the history of architecture.

The collaborative group [Fat](#) (Fashion Architecture Taste) shows a large white model of a fragment of Palladio's Villa Rotonda, as part of its "Museum of Copying". Copying, Fat argues, was always an essential part of architecture, and the myth of the utterly original genius is therefore suspect. The [Villa Rotonda](#) is possibly the most copied building in the world.

8 .....

All of which – the relative humility, the willingness to acknowledge others – makes an obvious comparison with the recent past. Not long ago, the singular and spectacular were celebrated and masterpieces were commissioned from international stars, financed with the ample spare cash moving around the world. Often, these works were used to distract us from more substantial issues, such as exactly where this money was coming from and where it was going.

Now, as we all know, some of this money didn't really exist at all and in few places are the architectural consequences more conspicuous than in Spain. There, a succession of monuments has been beached by lost funding. There were also some very fine buildings in the boom years, but their architects are now mostly unemployed. An exhibit at the biennale commemorates this, with a series of black, tomb-like objects, containing nice white models of what was once possible in Spain.

The idea that there is a transition in the world of architecture from selfish icons to something more caring is not entirely true. There is still plenty of appetite in many places for flashy spectacle. A complicating exhibit in this respect is one by [Renzo Piano](#): he shows the Shard from many viewpoints. It's clearly a work of the icon era, but Piano shows it as part of the common ground of London, almost as a piece of folk art, and it's not obvious that he's wrong.

9 .....

But there is an atmosphere of generosity in Chipperfield's biennale that should be appreciated. There's also patience and care, exemplified by the returning popularity of crafted and handmade objects, such as a very large city plan hand drawn by the South African [Jo Noero](#), or a long scroll in the British pavilion with a detailed image of an imagined Sino-English townscape. The mood is calmer, slower and more spacious than in previous years and the architects involved seem to be quite happy not to be engaged in frenetic rivalry for totems of status.

It remains to be seen how substantial will be the mood of common ground outside the biennale. Chipperfield shows an attractive, thoughtful attitude to doing things that certainly should be more widespread. It also happens to make a more enjoyable and accessible biennale than many. They can be opaque affairs, not to be recommended to non-specialists, but this one is worth the detour.

\*This is a simplified abridged version of the article for exclusively non-profit classroom educational purposes. The original article may be found at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/sep/02/venice-architecture-biennale-2012-review>

After reading the text for the second time, answer these questions. The answers to some questions are not in the text. (Hint: do a quick google.)

1. According to the text, what kind of character do architects have?
2. How does the writer portray the biennale?
3. What is the Neus Museum and where is it?
4. What is the Stirling prize?
5. Why are there so many British exhibits?
6. Who are Zaha Hadid and Norman Foster?
7. What does the name of the theme, 'common ground', mean in general?
8. Where is the Biennale located?
9. Which exhibits does the director choose?
10. What is the objective of the Venezuelan installation?
11. Why is there a café in the installation?
12. How does the Chilean installation relate to the theme of common ground?
13. What message does the Swiss installation try to communicate?
14. Who are Nicholas Hawksmoor, Hélène Binet, Caruso St John, Sir John Sloane, Mario Piana?
15. What is the message of FAT's exhibit?
16. How is this biennale different from past ones?
17. What does the writer imply about architects and money in the pre-recession period?
18. Are architects less egotistical today?
19. What adjectives does the writer use to describe Chipperfield's approach?
20. What is the writer's final opinion on the biennale and what does he suggest?

Now that you have read the article carefully, write a brief subtitle for each section next to its section number. The subtitle does not have to be a complete sentence but it must indicate the section's content.

This article is a **review**, that is, an article that gives a critical evaluation of a piece of art or an exhibition, discussing both good and bad points.

Look at the article again, and think about how the writer has organised his text. Then try to illustrate the article's structure, using either a traditional outline form or a mind map.