

## Parti

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Two apparent architectural achievements are positioned at Milwaukee's lakefront giving Milwaukee a recognizable skyline and putting the city on the map for two of the best examples of modern and post-modern architecture. The War Memorial Center completed in 1957, was designed by Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen to create a new home for two previously separate art collections and a veterans' memorial. "The modernist building is shaped like a floating cross, with wings cantilevered from a central base and proportionally is based off the box in all its forms."

The post-modern addition was completed in 2001, designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. Highlights of the building are the magnificent cathedral-like space of the main room upon axis of arrival, with a vaulted a 90-foot-high glass ceiling; Burke Brise Soleil, a moveable sunscreen with a 217-foot wingspan that unfolds and folds twice daily; and the Reiman Bridge, a pedestrian suspension bridge that connects the Museum to the city." – (MAM.org) Outside the museum is a network of gardens, plazas, and fountains designed by landscape architect Dan Kiley to parallel the Calatrava addition.

There are many ways to dwell on and in architectural space. Rather than writing an essay about all the buildings components this informational viewpoint will focus on a word used so often in architectural design, that word is "parti." Every building has a parti and I do not mean a gathering of people who are looking for a good time on any giving day of the week. Parti is found in all designed structure form the vernacular barn houses in northern Wisconsin to the coliseum in Rome.

A parti is the central idea or concept of a building. Parti can be described in many ways but most often expressed by a diagram depicting the general floor plan organization of the building and, by implication, its experimental and symbolic sensibility. Some will argue that an ideal parti is wholly inclusive- that it informs every aspect of the building from its over all configuration and structural system to the shape of the doorknobs.

How do you find parti? Or even better how did Calatrava find it? This is an answer that nearly always must be found through our experience in the building itself while analyzing its special qualities. Floor plans, sections, and details shows us how the building might have been thought up in the design development stages. To understand parti one must understand architectural schematic design, which revolves around and consists of programmed information that is processed through a certain amount of time, diagrams then are worked into a building's parti sometime in that process. Parti can describe massing, entrance, spatial hierarchy, site relationships, core location, interior circulation, public/private zoning, solidity/transparency and many other concerns. Once the parti is found it then can be used as a guidepost in the thoughts and concerns of all aspects of the building.

“A proper building grows naturally, logically, and poetically out of all its conditions,” said the architect Louis Sullivan. Calatrava must have found the museum’s parti through context and the dynamic composition of his abstract form. Context being the state, the city, the figure and ground, relation to Saarinen’s war memorial, climate conditions, culture budget and program. From there, this idea of a white abstract form dynamically lifts from the ground cantilevering its mass. This is suggested while the building’s wings open up to the beautiful lake Michigan and the rest of Milwaukee suddenly takes flight into a world of modernity.

This building has changed lives here in Milwaukee. Its sculptural themes and characteristics absorb all local viable contexts. The museum looks as if it were a bird, a sail on a boat, a cathedral. Though much controversy was held and is still held about the building today, it is said to be one of Calatrava’s most excellent masterpieces. Architecture is a language, a language that is often banal but when given certain principals and a creative imagination, architecture can become a five hundred-page book of award winning literature. Again it is a luggage and sometimes it is hard to interpret and read but everyone has a story about it.

Architecture is in our daily lives all around us and all of us can read into it, even just a little bit. It’s the difference when seeing something so apparently out of place in relation to its neighbors, like Calatrava’s art museum, that makes you have to read into it further than normal and gives you that feeling of wonder.

So what is the Milwaukee Art Museum’s parti? This is often hard to explain in words because it is often drawn. It is seen that Calatrava’s parti is axis and circulation through contacting and expanding spaces giving hierarchy to grand space and viewpoints as it diminishes into the art galleries giving the art the hierarchy over the buildings space.

#### Sources

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