

Dubai's Architectural Masterpieces

A modern city, expanding at an incomparable rate, Dubai is a futuristic metropolis with some of the greatest architectural masterpieces of the 21st century

BY DANIELLE SIMPSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY NOEL MILLER

Dubai is envied by architects the world over for the opportunity it has provided to the architectural community to conceive some truly unique and challenging construction projects. However, it still has some way to go before it can be considered a world-class and completely successful example of a liveable city, despite the widespread respect it has earned from the international architectural community.

Traditional architecture of old Dubai can be found along Dubai Creek, and is some of the only original architectural identity found in Dubai. Bill Helmers, a Canadian architect residing and working in Dubai explains how, as an architect, it has been a remarkable experience to be part of the development of Dubai during the last 10 years. 'Many quality projects have been delivered by very talented teams of professionals from all corners of the globe,' he says. 'However, this flurry of construction and growth has not been guided by an equally competent urban design vision of what a truly liveable city in the desert should be. With the exception of developments like Old Town, DIFC Gate

Village and Dubai Marina, residents' needs have not been considered. 'Dubai has been very much an experimental playground for designers – and the 'Dubai brand' can be defined by two polarities; iconic architecture with international appeal such as Burj Al Arab, Emirates Towers, Jumeirah Beach Hotel and the Madinat and the charm, timelessness and hospitality of the Arabian culture – wrapped in perpetual sunshine with beautiful beaches – making it an instant success story for tourism.'

The great architectural masterpieces of Dubai, as far as Helmers is concerned, are Burj Al Arab, Emirates Towers and Burj Khalifa, along with the master planning of Old Town, Dubai Marina and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) Gate Village. 'They all, without a doubt, timeless, enduring design statements; extremely well detailed and crafted. The master planning collection equally demonstrates truly inspirational design with regards to urban planning and conceptualisation but also delivers a very pleasant and liveable pedestrian environment on a large, community scale.'

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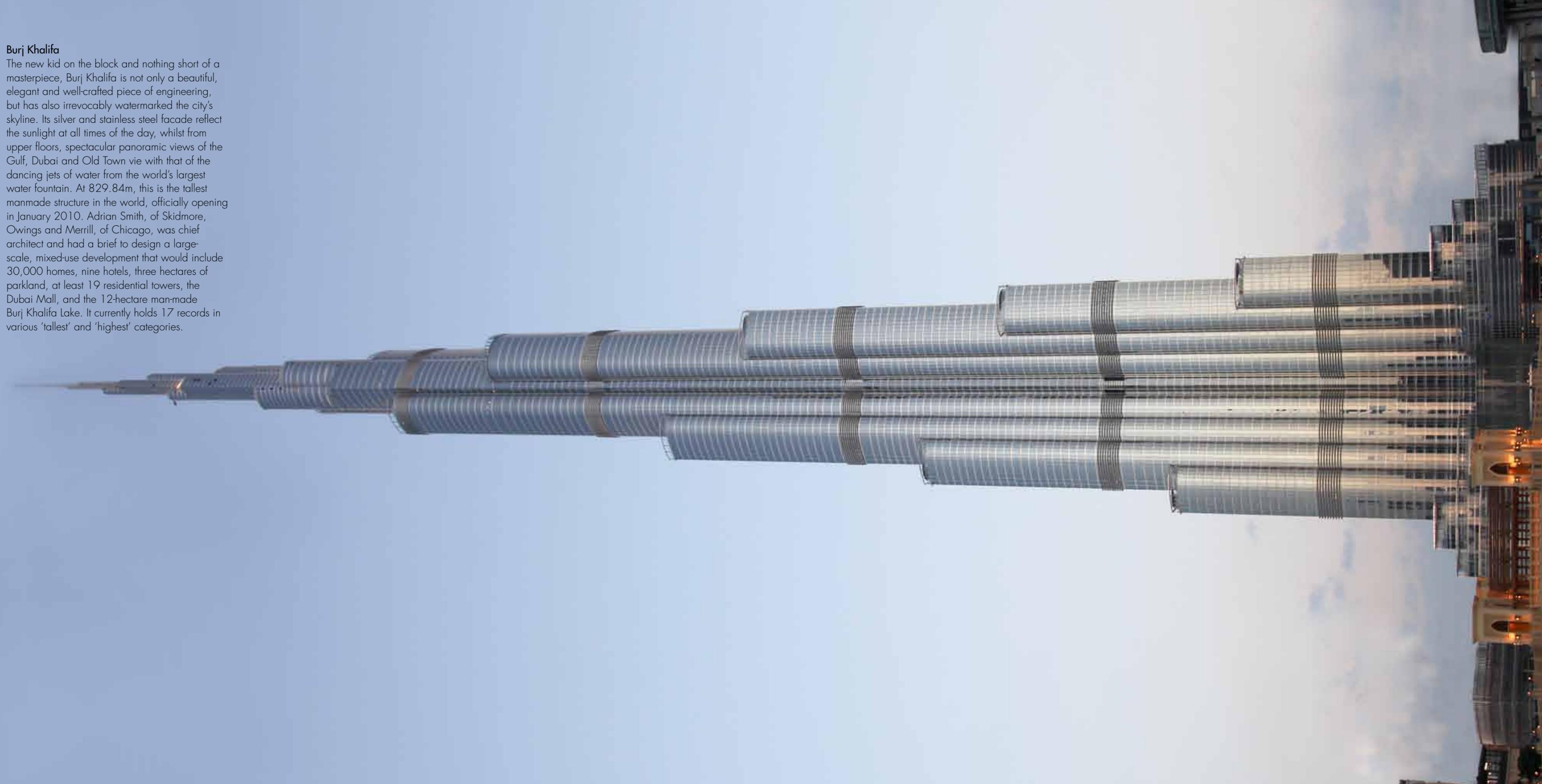
Burj Al Arab

The fourth tallest hotel in the world, Burj Al Arab stands on an artificial island 280m out from Jumeirah Beach and is connected to the mainland by a private curving bridge. Its shape mimics the sail of a dhow, with two 'wings' spread in a V to form a giant mast, whilst the space between them is enclosed in a massive atrium. Burj Al Arab (Tower of the Arabs) was conceived in October 1993 and finished in 1999 by British architect Tom Wright, of WS Atkins Plc, whose brief was to create an icon for Dubai: a building that would become synonymous with the city, like the Sydney Opera House is with Sydney and the Eiffel Tower is with Paris.



Burj Khalifa

The new kid on the block and nothing short of a masterpiece, Burj Khalifa is not only a beautiful, elegant and well-crafted piece of engineering, but has also irrevocably watermarked the city's skyline. Its silver and stainless steel facade reflect the sunlight at all times of the day, whilst from upper floors, spectacular panoramic views of the Gulf, Dubai and Old Town vie with that of the dancing jets of water from the world's largest water fountain. At 829.84m, this is the tallest manmade structure in the world, officially opening in January 2010. Adrian Smith, of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, of Chicago, was chief architect and had a brief to design a large-scale, mixed-use development that would include 30,000 homes, nine hotels, three hectares of parkland, at least 19 residential towers, the Dubai Mall, and the 12-hectare man-made Burj Khalifa Lake. It currently holds 17 records in various 'tallest' and 'highest' categories.





DIFC Gate Village

Viewed from the air, this development looks nothing more than a collection of shoe boxes tightly packed together. The salient point of this is, that located in a desert climate, the close proximity of the buildings creates its own shade for the pedestrian population which meanders through Gate Village. The mixed use development, designed by Hopkins, sits on top of a large podium containing the necessary vehicle parking and services, creating an entirely people-populated plaza free of cars and congestion. The Gate Village comprises premium art galleries, fine dining and entertainment venues, design and fashion retailing and office and residential spaces, resulting in a vibrant mini-community dedicated to people and the arts.



The Emirates Towers

Constructed at the same time as the Burj Al Arab, Emirates Towers, with eye-catching equilateral triangular features, completed in 2000, was the 10th tallest building in the world upon completion. Designed by architect Hazel Wong and comprising two towers, the Emirates Office Tower and Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel which is the 2nd tallest all-hotel tower in the world, they are connected by a 9000m² two-storey retail complex known as The Boulevard. A curiosity of the design is that the towers have a similar number of floors; the taller office tower actually contains 54 floors, while the hotel tower contains 56 floors. This is because the individual floor heights of the office tower are greater than that of the hotel. The Emirates Towers complex is set in over 42 acres of gardens.



Jumeirah Emirates Towers is an award-winning iconic triangular prism shaped structure made of glass and steel. It consists of a 350m office tower and a 305m 400-bedroom hotel tower joined by a central podium containing a Shopping Boulevard. The Emirates Towers seamlessly combine form with function, high technology with unparalleled luxury and elegance with efficiency. It is well worth taking a ride in one of the glass lifts for the superb views.