

# lingua weekly

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## Postcard from Los Angeles

Gina Cariño



What's that in the picture? If you think it's the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao, you're not so wrong. That's the Guggenheim-Bilbao's sister, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. They have a baby sister near us now, the Marqués de Riscal winery in La Rioja. Their dad is Frank Gehry.

Gehry's Guggenheim was commissioned primarily by the Basque Government. Gehry's Disney Hall was commissioned by Walt Disney's widow.

One houses art, the other houses music. The Bilbao Guggenheim is home to Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* and Jeff Koons's *Puppy*. The Disney Concert Hall is home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Gehry's Guggenheim is diagonally across the river from Deusto University. Gehry's Disney Hall is diagonally across the street from Rafael Moneo's Los Angeles cathedral.

The curves of Gehry's Disney Hall are like the tangle of freeways nearby. They speak

of speed and constant motion. The Walt Disney Concert Hall describes what it's like to live in L.A.

The freeway curves because it is a continuum in which everybody is always moving. The grid of straight ground-level streets in compact urban centers, with its stops and starts at right angles, doesn't work much in L.A., because in L.A., there really are no urban centers in the "European" sense of the term. Los Angeles is the capital of suburbs and de-centering. Commuters commute not from suburb to center, but from suburb to suburb. There is no need for downtown.

A lot of time is spent in a car talking on your cellphone to others who are likely to be on the road as well. Angelenos talk but don't walk much. Who walks in L.A.? Only vagabonds and visitors.

Bilbainos talk *and* walk. So what does Bilbao's tempest of titanium say about Bilbao, which does have a center, and the Bilbainos, who do "walk it"?

It is said that Gehry's Guggenheim put Bilbao on the world map. Gehry's Disney Hall did *not* put L.A. on the world map because L.A. was on the world map long before Disney Hall went up. Los Angeles needed no Gehry to put it on the map.

Did Bilbao?

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