

Travelling & Photographing Buildings

BY ANTHONY PROVENZANO OAA

THE noun *pastime* has been defined as “an activity that someone does regularly for enjoyment rather than work; a hobby.”

But what is it called when it is engrained into your being, and is such a common activity among architects that it's best described as endemic rather than a hobby? Is it still a pastime, or is it a professional characteristic?

Whenever I travel (for work or pleasure), I end up going to places and visiting buildings that I document photographically – as does nearly everyone who is reading this article. So is that a pastime? Because it's a little like work when you catalogue travel images of interesting buildings for further study, or a lecture, or a precedent, or just to provide inspiration.

How many times have you found yourself in another city for some reason? And how many times have you crafted a way to do what you needed to do and check out a few buildings along the way? How many times have you been asked not to take photos inside of a place where you clearly saw the “no photography” signs on entry? How many fences have you hopped? How many times did you sneak into construction sites? I can go on, but if any of this is mildly familiar to you, you will have to agree that this is neither a hobby nor a pastime, but a necessary activity.

When I thought about writing something about pastimes; I couldn't do anything immediately, because life had thrust me into Minneapolis, Minnesota, where we had bought a new vehicle that I needed to pick up. When I did my online map research, the first task was to find the proximity to Santiago Calatrava's Milwaukee Art Museum (five hours' drive, it turned out), which has been a bucket-list building for me since it opened. I've always wanted to experience the *brise-soleil* opening and this was the opportunity to do so.

Of course, the car dealership being a seven-minute drive from Herzog and de Meuron's Walker Arts Centre expansion and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden made visiting them a foregone conclusion. And the fact that the border crossing would be Detroit/Windsor meant that I would drive through Chicago and, having spent a lot of time studying Chicago, I thought the least I could do was pop into Frank Gehry's Jay Pritzker Pavilion, which is just across the way from Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate. At a certain point it would be rude not to pop into Chicago. After all they did win the Stanley Cup last year.

At least that's how I explained it to my wife.

I thought I might be in for some stick, because I was extending this “utilitarian” trip to pick up a vehicle into yet another archi-tour.

Fortunately, a lifetime of dragging Sheila to buildings around the world made it not much of a surprise that I would propose something like that. In fact, she was looking forward to seeing the pictures.

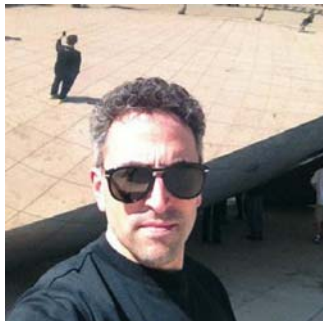
So, to pick up a car in Minneapolis, I took a direct flight from Toronto, got the car and made my way to: Walker Arts Center (Herzog and de Meuron), then Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Milwaukee Art Museum (Santiago Calatrava), Chicago's Jay Pritzker Pavilion (Frank Gehry) and Chicago's Cloud Gate (Anish Kapoor).

I spent one night in Milwaukee and, being a bit of a foodie, I searched “Diners, Drive-Ins & Dives Milwaukee” on the internet. I ended up at a restaurant called The Comet Café, which specializes in from-scratch comfort foods and craft beers. That really plays right into my “hobby” and my meal there was more (by definition) a pastime than the fact that I ended up in Milwaukee to see a Calatrava building.

I bought the “Calatrava Wings-Inspired Earrings” from the Milwaukee Art Museum Gift Shop for Sheila because I'm a husband, not because I'm an architect. (Okay, maybe the earrings are a little because I'm an architect – but mostly husband.)

Anthony Provenzano is a Toronto architect and a member of the OAA Perspectives Committee.

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ANTHONY'S SELFIES, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: OLDENBERG'S SPOONBRIDGE AND CHERRY AT THE MINNEAPOLIS SCULPTURE GARDEN; CALATRAVA'S MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM; ANISH KAPOOR'S CLOUD GATE AT MILLENNIUM PARK IN CHICAGO; AND FRANK GEHRY'S JAY PRITZKER PAVILLION IN THE SAME PARK.