

Transcript for Richard Rogers: Senedd Welsh Assembly Building, Cardiff

Intro to animation

If any British architect is associated with big, landmark buildings, it's Sir Richard Rogers.

Say "hello" to him...

and to the Senedd Welsh Assembly building in Cardiff.

Setting the Scene

Richard Rogers (a perfect name for mono-grammed hankies) moved to Britain from Italy just before the Second World War and got his degree from the AA

... that's the Architectural, not the Automobile ... Association.

After a stint at Yale, he teamed up with some of the most powerful architects of his era, including Renzo Piano and Norman Foster

Rogers is known for pushing the high-tech envelope; if that envelope has its insides on the outsides, that's all the better. He worked with Piano on the ground-breaking Pompidou centre.

When he won the competition for the new Welsh Assembly in 1998, a key point of his design was to reflect openness and democracy ... At the Senedd even the Cardiff Bay cod get to look inside.

The Big Idea

The Senedd, like politics, is designed to be open and transparent. Rogers was determined to make public space integral to the structure.

He wanted the streets and square adjacent to be a people-friendly environment.

The Assembly's aspect would suggest it comes straight from the water, displaying its inner workings to everyone—a bit like a jellyfish.

Sustainability and recycling were at the heart, with the building using recycled water, natural ventilation and an Earth heat exchanger.

It did however miss out on recycling all that 'hot air' from the debating chamber.

Drawings

The bay is a huge exceptional site with a lot of freedom to create. It's possible to be open and integrated even on a large scale.

The plot highlights the close relationship of Cardiff to the sea. Glass walls, slate and timber add an organic feel and an investment of place to the structure. Local materials were used where possible: especially the slate.

The centrepiece cowl reacts to its situation by rotating in the wind and allowing for natural ventilation.

The Senedd is very much a 'Rogers' building, with its hi-tech and inside-outside combinations.

Construction

The construction of the steel was a complex process involving the bending of steel into curved shapes.

The parts were put together off-site and erected on site 2 bays at a time.

Rogers employed solid supporting walls below ground and masonry above ground. He placed the curved steel roof construction, and the cowl, on top.

The process to complete the building was tortuous. Rogers was even fired because of the increasing costs of the building and then re-employed later, with new management and different contractors.

The Welsh Assembly Government initially overruled the continuation of the building, with the main worry being that the structure was costing five times its budget. They eventually proceeded with Rogers' original vision intact.

Using the various locally sourced materials was noble, but also caused difficulties. The slate was actually found to be more expensive when sourced nearby.

Critique

People feel the openness and are drawn to the central chamber and want to look down into the debating chamber. Its combined renewable energy systems halve its running cost. But the build went five times over-budget and, of course, a nice view is not actually real participation in government.