



A winning design for opera lovers



from Italy, West Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Argentina, and the UK, met in June of that year to examine the designs. They selected the six best ones for review by President François Mitterrand.

In the end, it was Carlos Ott's design that won the day. Runners up were a group of French architects and a group of Hong Kong architects.


A new Opera for a new era

Ott's building contrasts sharply with the present Paris Opera (designed by Charles Garnier), which opened in 1875.

Garnier's Opera reflected the grandeur and opulence of the Third Republic and catered for a small and distinctive elite. Since that time, however, the audience for opera has grown enormously, with the result that Garnier's building is unable to cope with the demand. Carlos Ott's Opera will boast a larger auditorium with a seating capacity of 2700. In addition, there will be a 500-seat amphitheatre for concerts, recitals and exhibitions underneath the main auditorium; and a small studio theatre.

Performers and technicians, too, will enjoy much-improved facilities. There are large rehearsal rooms for both opera and ballet, as well as a suite of smaller studios. There is enough space backstage to accommodate five sets, which means that rapid scene changes are possible; and with plenty of temporary storage space below the stage it now becomes possible to put on as many as six different works a week - double the number that the old Opera can accommodate.

The Canadian architect has taken care to ensure that the new edifice blends in with its surroundings. Its semi-circular facade, for instance, is designed to soften its impact and to add character to the historic buildings in the vicinity. The walls will be predominantly of warm beige stone and glass while the roof will be of green oxidised copper. The strict geometric proportions produce an overall effect of homogeneity and balance.

Will the new building become a Parisian landmark in the same way as Garnier's Opera? This remains to be seen. However, there is no doubt that the Opéra de la Bastille will attract opera lovers from near and far, thanks to its combination of architectural flair and functional excellence. 

July 14, 1789, was a momentous day in the history of France, for it was then that the French revolutionaries stormed the notorious prison fortress of the Bastille in Paris and razed it to the ground.

Next year, exactly two centuries to the day after this event, a new building will be inaugurated in the Place de la Bastille, which happily will have a much less sinister function than its predecessor. It is the Opéra de la Bastille - the first opera house to be built in Paris for more than a century - designed by Canadian architect Carlos Ott.

Ott was born in Montevideo of Canadian parents 42 years ago this October. He studied architecture in Uruguay and later won a Fulbright Hays Fellowship to study for a Master's degree in Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Washington.

Moving to Toronto, he won a competition for the renovation and extension of the Royal Ontario Museum, and from 1979 to 1983 he was leader of a team of architects at the Toronto firm of Cadillac Fairview.

In February, 1983, the French government launched an open competition for the design of a new opera house. The competition attracted architects from all round the world. One of these was Carlos Ott, who worked on his designs in his spare time.

In all, 787 entries were received. A jury, headed by François Bloch-Lainé and including members

