# Norman Foster secures Queen Elizabeth Memorial commission amid global architectural legacy



Lord Norman Foster has undeniably left an indelible mark on London’s architectural landscape, arguably more so than any other architect since Sir Christopher Wren. His iconic works, such as the Wembley Arch, the Gherkin skyscraper, the pedestrianisation of Trafalgar Square, the Millennium Bridge, and the Great Court at the British Museum, are now quintessential parts of the city's identity. Even his own practice’s office on the Thames bank in Battersea stands as one of London’s most refined buildings, a glass structure that harmonizes with the river’s movement. Recently, Foster secured the commission for the Queen Elizabeth Memorial in St James’s Park, featuring a striking glass bridge, reinforcing his continuing influence over the capital’s public spaces. Nevertheless, despite this remarkable concentration of work in London, Foster was born outside the city, hailing from Stockport in 1935, and maintains his residence abroad. The capital is just a glimpse of the vast scope of his global architectural empire.

Born into working-class roots, Foster’s journey to architectural greatness is compelling. Inspired by the grandeur of the Gothic Town Hall in Manchester and driven by his curiosity in industrial structures, space-age designs, and aeronautics — interests that have shaped his aesthetic and technical style — he studied at Yale before co-founding a practice with Richard Rogers and others. Early projects like Creek Vean and the Willis Faber Dumas Building pushed architectural boundaries with their futuristic yet functional designs. Foster’s breakthrough came with the HSBC headquarters in Hong Kong, completed in 1985, which at the time was the most expensive building ever constructed. This high-tech marvel, characterised by modular steel components and open, flexible workspaces, became an emblem of corporate modernity and public interaction—its impressive plaza inviting picnics and protests alike, blending private capital with public life.

Foster’s architectural influence extends far beyond London and Hong Kong. His redesign of the Reichstag in Berlin after German reunification transformed the blast-damaged parliament with a luminous, spiralling glass dome symbolising transparency and democratic openness—an iconic gesture of reconciliation and hope. He also reshaped Bilbao’s metro stations with the famous “Fosteritos,” recognized for reviving the city’s urban identity. His airports, including Stansted near London, Beijing’s enormous international terminal, and the King Salman International Airport in Riyadh, exemplify his signature clarity and scale, although they have drawn some criticism for environmental impact given their size and Foster’s known enthusiasm for aviation.

Among Foster’s significant projects are the Carré d’Art in Nîmes, a modern mediatheque that dialogues respectfully with its Roman neighbour, and the Millau Viaduct in France, a breathtaking engineering achievement. In the tech world, Foster's design of Apple Park in Cupertino, a vast circular corporate campus set in flowing parkland, is a modern homage to innovation and sustainability. His recent work includes the new Apple Store at Battersea Power Station, London, reimagining retail with an emphasis on universal design and environmental responsibility.

In London, the Gherkin (30 St Mary Axe) stands as perhaps Foster’s single most recognised landmark. Completed in 2003 and soaring 180 meters high with its distinctive curving form, it has permanently altered the city’s skyline. Its diagrid structure reduces the need for internal columns, offering panoramic views and efficient office space, while visually embodying a new architectural era. The Millennium Bridge, despite an initial wobbly launch, now serves as an essential pedestrian link connecting cultural hubs, and the Great Court of the British Museum shelters millions yearly under its spectacular glass roof, demonstrating Foster's skill in merging modern engineering with historic context.

While Foster’s lifestyle appears charmed—still piloting planes and engaging in endurance sports well into his nineties—his career has not been without controversy. His move to Switzerland sparked accusations of tax exile. Critics also point to the ecological footprint of some of his large-scale projects, a complex contradiction to his professed commitment to sustainability. Nevertheless, Foster’s body of work embodies an enduring optimism about the future, blending exceptional technical innovation with a vision of architecture that serves both private ambition and public good. His portfolio remains one of the most admired and influential in contemporary architecture worldwide.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[2]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[6]](https://hgtv.co.uk/uk-architecture/the-buildings-that-define-london-architecture/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/8021614a-5884-417a-acdf-b2143338bd54), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HSBC_Building_(Hong_Kong)), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gherkin), [[6]](https://hgtv.co.uk/uk-architecture/the-buildings-that-define-london-architecture/), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/norman-foster-architecture-ultimate-guide> - This article provides an in-depth exploration of Norman Foster's architectural impact, highlighting his significant contributions to London's skyline, including landmarks such as the Wembley Arch, the Gherkin, the pedestrianisation of Trafalgar Square, and the Millennium Bridge. It also discusses his design of the Great Court at the British Museum and his own practice's office in Battersea. The piece delves into Foster's early career, his partnership with Richard Rogers, and notable projects like the HSBC Hong Kong headquarters and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Additionally, it touches upon his design of the Reichstag in Berlin and the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, France, as well as the Millau Viaduct in France. The article concludes by highlighting Foster's recent projects, including Apple Park in Cupertino and the Apple Store at Battersea Power Station in London.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/8021614a-5884-417a-acdf-b2143338bd54> - This article examines Hong Kong's dense and complex skyline, describing it as a 'museum of architecture.' It highlights several significant towers, including the HSBC Building designed by Norman Foster, renowned for its high-tech structural design and public plaza. The piece also discusses other notable buildings such as the Bank of China by IM Pei and the Hong Kong Club Building by Harry Seidler, illustrating the fusion of public and private realms in Hong Kong's urban landscape.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gherkin> - This Wikipedia page provides detailed information about The Gherkin, officially known as 30 St Mary Axe, a commercial skyscraper in London's financial district. Designed by Norman Foster and completed in 2003, the building stands 180 meters tall with 41 floors. It is noted for its unique, curvaceous form resembling a gherkin, and has become an iconic part of London's skyline. The page includes details about its design, construction, and significance in modern architecture.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HSBC_Building_(Hong_Kong)> - This Wikipedia page details the HSBC Building in Hong Kong, designed by Norman Foster and completed in 1985. Standing 180 meters tall with 47 storeys, the building is known for its high-tech structural design, including a modular design consisting of five steel modules. The page discusses the building's design, construction, and its significance as an example of high-tech architecture.
6. <https://hgtv.co.uk/uk-architecture/the-buildings-that-define-london-architecture/> - This article highlights key buildings that define London's architecture, including The Gherkin, designed by Norman Foster and opened in 2004. The piece discusses the building's distinctive design, its impact on London's skyline, and its role in the transformation of the city's architecture.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Foster> - This Wikipedia page provides a comprehensive overview of Norman Foster's life and career. It includes information about his early life, education, and the formation of his architectural practice. The page also details his notable works, including the Willis Faber and Dumas Headquarters, the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, the Reichstag in Berlin, and the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, France. Additionally, it covers his more recent projects, such as Apple Park in Cupertino and the Apple Store at Battersea Power Station in London.