



10 things to see at the Venice architecture biennale

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Fresh back from Venice, Christine Murray has recommendations for those planning to visit the Venice architecture biennale.

1. Ordinary Architecture, China pavilion

Tucked away in the Virgin Garden and Oil Depot at the Arsenale, many visitors overlooked this stunning pavilion. Four architects built structures as a response to natural disasters, including the Paper-brick house by Li Xinggang, which questions the use of heavyweight materials after the Sichuan earthquake, when many victims were buried beneath concrete buildings. In the Oil Depot, photographer Wang Di exhibits his Red Dwelling & Beijing Streets photo series, which questions the selective history created through the destruction and retention of selective buildings.



2. Gaasitoru Gas Pipe, Estonian Exposition

A biennale favourite, this lemon yellow gas pipe in the Giardini runs from the Russian pavilion to the German pavilion without stopping, a comment on the controversial Nord Stream initiative to build a direct gas pipe from Russia to Germany. From the catalogue, 'The installation highlights the spatial dimension of politics and the political dimension of architecture.'

3. 1907... after the party, Belgian pavilion

With the exception of a large photo print by German artist Thomas Demand and another by French fashion designer Hedi Slimane, the white-walled rooms of the Belgian pavilion are empty, but the floor is inch-deep in confetti.

4. Italian pavilion

There are more than two dozen architects on display in the Italian pavilion, but a highlight was Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei and Herzog & de Meuron's installation, soaring pyramids of bamboo chairs.

5. Home/Away, British pavilion

Beautifully designed, the sparse and sober air of this exhibition acts as a counterpoint to the eccentric French and German pavilions nearby. A highlight are the lovely wooden models.

6. Extreme Nature: Landscape of Ambiguous Spaces, Japanese pavilion

Junya Ishigami has designed a gentle exhibition. Fine pencil sketches of gardens and houses cover the walls of the Japanese pavilion, while a series of transparent greenhouses, interspersed with plantings and household items and furniture, are positioned outside. The pavilion has a quietly powerful presence.

7. Open: Position Practice, American pavilion

There are real ideas here, in a pavilion that examines the work of architects in desperately deprived areas, highlighting 'the means by which architects reclaim a role in shaping community and the built environment' – an inspiring show and arguably the finest pavilion at this year's biennale.

8. Towards Paradise, Gustafson Porter

Located on the fringes of the Arsenale, Gustafson Porter reclaimed a piece of land to create this magical, secret garden, which includes abandoned buildings, a large garden allotment bursting with fruit and veg, and an elegant balloon installation over an elliptical green lawn.

9. Fantastic Norway

Norwegian design studio Fantastic Norway's red caravan journeyed to the biennale. The caravan is a mobile platform for architectural discussions, debates and workshops.

10. Gathering Place, Scottish pavilion

Situated next to Santiago Calatrava's new bridge, Gareth Hoskins' seven-metre high structure is a whimsical staircase to nowhere on the banks of the Grand Canal.