

Craft over software –



Summer construction I

Gehry, craft and computers

Constructing the Dundee Maggie's Centre, was a unique, ground-breaking experience, applying the CATIA computer rendering system to models developed by **Frank Gehry**, sending these halfway around the world to local Dundee architects James F. Stephen, and last though not least, actually getting the building realised. **Mark O'Connor**, who worked on the project, explores the process.

It is rare that involvement in a design project makes you fundamentally reappraise the way in which you work. Working on Frank Gehry's Maggie Centre in Dundee provided just such an experience. This small building provides a snapshot of what is becoming possible using rapidly emerging design technologies that have the potential to alter the design and construction process.

Frank Gehry constructs his boundary-pushing buildings in numerous countries throughout the world. Because of the need to work within a wide range of climates, and navigate various planning and building regulations, his office will often work closely with a local executive architect. As well as providing advice, the executive architect will assume responsibility for the detailed development of the construction package and supervision of the building on site. I was fortunate to be working with Glamis-based James F. Stephen Architects when they were appointed to work on the Maggie's Centre.

Like many architects of my generation, I had studied and been influenced by Frank Gehry while at college. Earlier buildings such as the Davis House provided mould-breaking explorations of material and form, influenced by a close working relationship with his artist client. Gehry's own reworking of his house seemed to break all the rules of domestic architecture, with its mixtures of corrugated metal and steel mesh (reminding me of the time of rural RUC stations in my native Northern Ireland).

Jim Glymph and Tomaso Bradshaw of Gehry's office travelled to Glamis to discuss the project. They brought an infectious enthusiasm mixed with a clear understanding of the issues and complexities of building Gehry's complex designs. The discussions conveyed