

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
Spiral museum at 50



NB: This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript

Dima: Hi, welcome to 6 Minute English from bbclearningenglish.com. I'm Dima Kostenko

Rebecca: and I'm Rebecca Byrne. Hi.

Dima: Today's language has to do with visiting places of interest and in particular, describing architecture, and later we'll get the chance to test our prediction skills. But first of all Rebecca I have a question for you.

Rebecca: *Fire away!*

Dima: When you are visiting a new city, how would you normally choose which places to see?

Rebecca: *Responds (a variety of reasons... heard from other people... read about in travel guides... some are just unmissable, e.g... - 1-2 examples)*

Dima: 'Unmissable' – great word!

Rebecca: *Comments: actually 'unmissable' is a fairly recent word, not every dictionary has it. But you can use an even simpler phrase: 'it's a must to see', or 'a must-see'.*

Dima: Well Rebecca, today we're talking about one of the definite 'unmissables' for any visitor to New York City. It's an arts museum which first opened its doors to the public 50 years ago almost to date. And from day one the museum's building, the creation of Frank Lloyd Wright, stirred quite a bit of controversy because of its very unusual architecture. And here comes this week's question for you Rebecca. Which famous landmark do I have in mind do you reckon? Is it

- a) Rockefeller Center;
- b) Guggenheim Museum or
- c) Tate Gallery?

What do you think?

Rebecca: *Guesses giving reasoning*

Dima: We'll check if you're right in a second as we're listening to the BBC's Laura Trevelyan reporting from NY, but first do you mind taking us through some of today's key vocabulary?

Rebecca: *Responds.* OK. First of all, the word 'landmark'. It means a famous place, often a building or another structure, that's visited by many tourists. Then the adjective 'bulbous', meaning round, looking like a bulb, or like a sphere. There will be the phrase 'a curving wave that never breaks'. Here, it simply refers to the spiral-like shape of the building, so the key word is 'spiral'. And finally, the phrase 'badly maimed'. Literally, it means 'seriously injured', 'deformed' or 'crippled'. In our context it means 'badly presented', 'not showing their best'.

Dima: So that's 'landmark', 'bulbous', 'a curving wave' and 'badly maimed'. Let's listen:

Clip 1 0'22"

The bulbous, white Guggenheim Museum with its central rotunda is now one of New York's landmarks, overlooking Central Park. Frank Lloyd Wright envisaged this creation as a curving wave that never breaks, yet when it first opened to the public half a century ago, one critic described it as a war between painting and architecture, in which both came off badly maimed.

Rebecca: *I think I got it right/wrong. The report is about the Guggenheim Museum!*
Laura says that when the Museum was opened, one critic used some rather imaginative language to describe the 'bulbous' structure. He called it 'a war between painting and architecture, in which both came off badly maimed'!

Dima: Well not many would support this view today. In fact, if you listen to Richard Armstrong who is the current Director of the Guggenheim, the building is now seen as the main treasure in the Museum's collection.

Rebecca: And here are a few more key phrases for you. 'Reinvented notions'. This means 'changed the understanding, created new ideas'. 'Beaux Arts', an artistic style. 'A train shed', which is the spacious covered part of a major railway station. And 'highly sociable', meaning encouraging communication, bringing people together.

Dima: Now, attention, a little task for you. Rebecca will say some of today's vocabulary again, in the order that it appears in Richard Armstrong's clip. And you will then try and predict what he's going to say. Don't worry about trying to construct the full correct answer – just try to predict the gist – and then listen to the clip to see how you've done. Ready? Here goes:

Rebecca: 'Reinvented notions' – 'A Beaux Arts building that's like a train shed' – 'Spiral' - 'Highly sociable'.

Dima: OK, 10 seconds... 5... 3-2-1

Clip 2 0'10''

Well it reinvented notions of what art museums could be and should be. Previously it had either been a revamped palace, or a Beaux Arts building that was something like a train shed. Here you see a spiral, it seems altogether different, and you look across the space and see people on the other side. It's highly sociable.

Dima: Well I hope you've done well with that prediction exercise. [And of course you can find out more about the Guggenheim Museum and its creator Frank Lloyd Wright by following the links from our website, bbclearningenglish.com.]
Until next week.

Both: Goodbye!