

The Future of Glass is Now

Glass Buildings are the Utopian Vision of the Future

by Brian Pitman

As members of the commercial glass and glazing industry, we are all fans of using our products in architecture. That use continues to increase as architects embrace the “green” and “futuristic” aspects of glass. In the history of architecture, though, it is surprising that the push towards glass did not find its genesis in the architectural community.

Movies became a psychologically subversive tool, and the collective psyche of the world accepted that the future of architecture was glass.

At the turn of the 20th century, architects such as Berthold Lubetkin were beginning to develop buildings that become iconic of the Modernism period of architecture, with its scientific approach and analytical methods of design. Part of the Modernist design way of thinking included Structuralism, which does not initially lend itself to great incorporation of glass and glazing. Some cornerstones of the Modernist architectural movement were:

- Very little to no ornamentation;
- Factory-made parts with an emphasis on industrialist design;
- Non-organic/man-made materials, such as metal and concrete; and
- Heavy emphasis on function.

Meanwhile, artists for the growing pulp magazine and novel industry were pressed to design interesting covers and artwork for their publications. With an in-

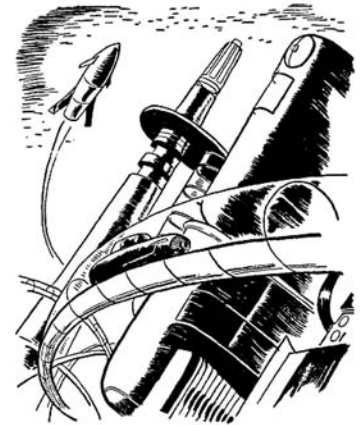
creased demand for pulp fiction and comic books, these artists had to design something futuristic, romantic and graphically intriguing, and usually in bulk on a tight deadline. As competition increased among artists, these covers began rejecting the Modernist style, with its sense of order and industrial limitations, and artists began creating wildly stylistic cities of the future with 200-story-tall structures, skywalks hundreds of feet in the air and, most importantly for our purposes, an abundance of glass buildings.

This artistic direction was quickly picked up by the art directors in the film industry. Plots focused on the future began incorporating this aesthetic into their films, epitomized early on by Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* in 1928, with its visionary architectural design of tall cities with plenty of glass. Other films upped the ante to the point that any vision of the Utopian future had to include large glass buildings in their metropolitan back-grounds. Movies became a psychologically subversive tool, and the collective psyche of the world accepted that the future of architecture was glass.

Embracing the Future

That subconscious belief continues today in film. Large “all-glass” (or mostly glass) buildings are in futuristic films today (such as Spielberg’s *A.I.* or Besson’s *The Fifth Element*), and even appear in television shows and commercials as the aesthetic of the future.

Finally, the architectural community relented. Pulp artists had shaped the way of the future, and new architects rejected the Modernism of the past, leading to the Post-Modernist, High-Tech and Organic movements, all of which



Not every science fiction design from the past has become a reality, but the prevalence of glass in architecture is a trend that’s here to stay.

heavily promote the use of glass. Additionally, as the architectural community continues to discover the “green” attributes of glazing, the pro-glass movement continues to accelerate.

Architects looking to embrace the future in glass should visit the Glass Association of North America at the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Expo in Boston, May 15-17. Located in Booth #14165, we will help you discover newly emerging glass technologies with our AIA-accredited presentations, as well as put you in touch with our members who continue to evolve and expand your design options with this truly unique building material. ■

the author



Brian Pitman is the director of marketing and communications for the Glass Association of North America. Mr. Pitman’s opinions are solely his own and not necessarily those of this magazine.