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The rise of the

by [Michael J. Lewis](#)

On the ungainly fusion of architecture and celebrity.

A neologism like “starchitect”—an ungainly fusion of star and architect—would never have caught on if it did not fulfill some deep need. How else would we describe the architectural celebrity of today, with his fulltime publicist and a roster of projects in New York, Berlin, and Hong Kong? This exclusive fraternity, with such members as Frank Gehry, Norman Foster, and Tadao Ando, dominates the architectural profession in much the same way that a few dozen movie stars dominate Hollywood: in casting a film or selecting an architect to design a museum, it is inevitably the same small handful of names that comprises the short list. The emergence of this international celebrity culture is the most important development in the architectural profession in a generation, and we have scarcely begun to take its measure.

It will be objected that there have always been architectural celebrities. Long before Gehry appeared ...

Michael J. Lewis's latest book is *American Art & Architecture* (Thames & Hudson).

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