

Business architecture

The Swiss Re building in London has just won a major architecture competition. However, today, many popular modern buildings are often highly controversial.

1 Which of the following buildings is the 'odd one out' and why?

Swiss Re Headquarters, London	The new German Parliament building, Berlin
Great Court for the British Museum, London	Petrona Towers, Kuala Lumpur
Headquarters for HSBC, Hong Kong	Commerzbank Headquarters, Frankfurt

2 Scan paragraph three of the article below to check your answer to exercise 1.

'Gherkin' wins award London's 40-storey tower commissioned by Swiss Reinsurance Co. won the UK's top architectural award for its designers led by Norman Foster. The Stirling prize is for the building making the greatest contribution to British architecture in the past year. It covers buildings in Britain or designed by a British architect anywhere in the European Union. The architects receive £20,000 (\$36,000) in prize money.

The building is popularly known as the 'gherkin' due to its shape. The tower draws fresh air through light 'wells' that run up the side, making it London's first 'environmentally progressive' tall building. It is already a popular icon on the city skyline and uses glass materials. Due to its clever structure, it eliminates much heat before it enters the building, so workers are more productive and the building's owner will save money on air-conditioning!

Norman Foster and partners have established an international reputation with buildings such as the new

German Parliament building, Berlin; the Great Court for the British Museum; the Headquarters for HSBC, Hong Kong and the Commerzbank Headquarters, Frankfurt, as well as designing the world's largest airport in Hong Kong. The practice now known as Foster and Partners, was established as Foster Associates in 1967. It currently has projects across 22 countries. Its working principles include design excellence, a concern for the environment and cost management, with some projects being completed for less than the budget.

Other buildings nominated for the prize included Coventry's city centre redevelopment, Dublin's Spire monument and the Kunsthaus arts centre in Graz, Austria. The award raises some controversial issues about aesthetics. How much should a new building fit in with its surroundings? Even with the drive towards eco-friendly design, persuading clients to spend more on sustainable materials can be difficult. Despite high-profile events like the Stirling prize many people remain suspicious of adventurous modern architecture.

3 Read the whole article. Describe the winning building.

4 Find words or expressions in the article which mean:

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| (a) officially asked by someone to do some work for you | (paragraph 1) |
| (b) something famous which people feel represents a particular idea | (paragraph 2) |
| (c) the business of a professional person such as a doctor, lawyer etc. | (paragraph 3) |
| (d) the study of the nature of beauty, especially in painting and architecture | (paragraph 4) |
| (e) substances which can be replaced without harming the environment | (paragraph 4) |

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5 Discuss the following questions in small groups.

(a) Describe the building where you work. Does it fit in with its surroundings? Is it environmentally friendly? Is it a pleasant place to work? What could be improved?

(b) Nominate a building you would like to win a 'Business building of the year' award. Think about the size, design, location, facilities etc. Make a list of all the positive qualities. Now present this building to the rest of the class and vote for the winner of the award.