connection with the city. The building oozes and estuaries around the Puente de Salve, creates a curvilinear riverside promenade and forms a generous new public plaza on the south side of the site, where the Ensanche grid ends.

The promenade and promenade of the site is curiously well suited to Gehry’s architecture, which generally works best on a tabula rasa. Bilbao is his biggest stage yet, and it is attached with an evangelical breeze. The building languidly slopes and coils its way along the riverside, its toppling conflation of titanium-clad forms shimmering serenely like a pile of improbably huge fish or a fractured trillion splayed. The famous titanium scales seized upon when a price fluctuation in world markets made titanium briefly affordable impart an extraordinary lightness and transcendence to the overall composition. Fixing clips make a shallow central dent in each of the very thin (0.38mm) plates, so that the surface appears rippled and undulating in the changing light. Like the van Gogh prints of ships that sailed over shipbuilding towns, the warped, metallic panels of the museum surreally terminate vistas in the long straight streets of the Ensanche.

The plaza on the south side acts as a public focus and collection point. Here the atrium is partnered with creamy, ashed limestone and a discrete cobalt volume which houses administrative functions: if there too is a rather fatuous piece of tepary shaped like a giant dog, by Jeff Koons, which appears to be a permanent fixture. Visitors descend aarily ceremonial light of limestone steps to the entrance, pausing, perhaps, to inquisitively fondle the titanium clad railing that comes just within reach. The steps gradually narrow, like a canyon, propelling you into the entrance hall. Dog-legging to the left is a cloakroom, bookshop and 350 seat auditorium; to the right a kind of man-made fissure which leads through to the start of the gallery tour. This monumental compresion is quickly followed by release as you enter the atrium. The spectacular fulcrum of Gehry’s devilish whirling volumes. The soaring, 50m high space lens and a half times the height of the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum in New York) stimulates Tenciu and free-association - Marilyn Monroe’s wind-assisted skirts, the moulded screens of a Willem de Kooning drawing, an exploded atomic heart. Light is diffused through slashes of glass in the inclined walls, casting perpetually changing shadows through the luminous, luminous, cathedral-like space. On its north side, stone and titanium are peeled away to reveal a soothing water garden, the river and the city framed by the steep hills beyond.