

Whose Bright Idea Was This?

Disney Hall glare gets to neighbors

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The exuberant curves and shimmering stainless steel of the [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) have awed architectural aficionados. But the very features that make the \$274-million building sparkle have been blasting some condominiums across the street with a near-blinding glare.

To a handful of condo owners whose units face the Disney Hall on Hope Street, the view of the Frank Gehry landmark is glorious — until around noon on a sunny day. Then, the sun hits the stainless steel arches on the hall's Founders Room and bright light is reflected into their condominiums. Soon, the temperature rises as much as 15 degrees, forcing residents to get off their patios, draw the blinds and turn on the air conditioner for up to three hours, until the sunlight shifts.

"You couldn't even see and then the furniture would get really hot," said Jacqueline Lagrone, 42, who lives on the fourth floor of the Promenade Residences. "You would have to literally close the drapes and you'd still feel warmth in the house."

Lagrone, who owns a nail salon inside the condo complex, said the harsh reflections would hit her home just as she came home for lunch. "You would have the air conditioning on all the time," she said. "It would be comfortable, but not cool."

The complaints have Disney Hall officials scrambling to reduce the glare. Already, they have placed a temporary synthetic net over two parts of the Founders Room that has reduced the glare while they consider a more permanent solution.

Architects for Gehry's firm said the problem has to do with the type of steel used on the Founders Room and an error made during construction. The Founders Room is clad in a glossy, mirror-like steel that reflects the sun more brightly than other parts of the structure, which feature duller, brushed steel.

In designing the hall, architects took into account the glare the shiny steel might cause for neighboring buildings, including the condo complex, said Terry Bell, a partner at Gehry's architecture firm. But during construction, the curving sheets of metal ended up facing a slightly different angle than the plans called for.

"It is a very complicated shape and, to keep it up, we didn't push that there be a precision within a few fractions of an inch where the surface was," Bell said. "We were looking for a smooth shape."

Residents began complaining about the glare in late June, Bell said, soon after workers peeled off a special film that had covered the steel during construction.

Los Angeles County, which provided the land for the concert hall, hired a consultant to look into the problem.

Bell said he hoped the mesh blankets, which cost \$6,000, would soon give way to a permanent solution: dulling the shine of the Founders Room steel.

"We've chosen a sort of sand-blasted finish," Bell said. The process will make the steel look more like the matte finish visible in the canopy above the Cal Arts Theater portion of the Disney Hall.

"I think the people across the street think it's beautiful," Bell said. "But just a couple of surfaces' shape and angle at a certain time of year create a little bit of a bad reflection."

This isn't the first time one of Gehry's iconic stainless-steel buildings has needed adjustments to fit into its surroundings.

Last winter at Case Western University in Cleveland, snow and ice were sliding off the curvy, stainless steel roof of the Peter B. Lewis Building and crashing onto the sidewalk below.

Kenneth Basch, vice president for campus planning and operations, said the university is working with Gehry architects to find a solution, including the installation of additional heating cables.

Despite the winter hazards, Basch said, Gehry's swirl of metal "has been very well received. It's attracted a lot of interest and a lot of visibility."

And there have been no complaints about the glare of the sun. "I got to tell you, on some days we could use that," he said.

At the Promenade Residences on Hope Street, the glare problem presents something of a quandary. Many residents said they are thrilled to live next to the landmark structure and would not publicly discuss the controversy for fear of sounding critical of the hall.

Peggy Moore, who sits on the board of directors for the Promenade Owners Assn., said she is pleased that hall officials are dealing with the problem. "At this point, it is very amicable," she said.

Lagrone said the netting has dampened the reflection, but lately the glare "hasn't been a problem because it's not that sunny." She hopes for a more permanent solution.

"If they take care of that problem, it'll be just fine," she said.

Charles Brown, owner of Delanie's Cards & Gifts on the ground floor of the Promenade building, concurred that the netting must go.

"It looks pretty bad," he said.