Right
Alvar Aalto, glass 'Savoy' vase 1936

with the vase might with some justification decide that it is a design by Frank Gehry. It has the same curved slanting walls and complex geometry as the atrium of the museum.

The choice of architect was, as at the Getty, the result of a limited competition. Frank Lloyd Wright's spiralling Guggenheim facing Central Park in New York had already shown the significance of architecture in establishing a museum. Three architects, all of whose work was known and presumably favoured, were selected: Arata Isozaki who was the architect of the conversion of a former industrial building in Lower Manhattan into the Guggenheim Museum SoHo; Coop Himmelblau from Vienna who had very recently won second prize in the competition for an arts and media centre in Karlsruhe, and Frank Gehry known to Thomas Krens, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, who was to play a crucial role in both the selection of the architect and of the site. At the end of July 1991 Frank O. Gehry & Associates were selected. The inclusion of both Gehry and Coop Himmelblau

on the list meant that there was some predisposition towards a fluid non-rectangular architecture, in fact, some expectancy. Coop Himmelblau with Günter Domenig and Günter Behnish were among the earlier exponents of this style. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that these architects were based in Central Europe where a freer version of Baroque was an everyday visual occurrence. The Baroque was also, arguably, a more dominant element of the architectural landscape in Central Europe than, say, in France or Scandinavia. Central European baroque had, moreover, as its predecessor an extremely exhuberant Gothic as in the work of Peter Parler or Benedict Ried. This is not to argue for the existence of a *Zeitgeist* or to insist on regional characteristics but to record the tenacity of tradition.

Frank Gehry was born in Toronto in 1929 but studied at the University of Southern California and the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Public recognition came to him for his work in California. This was characterised by the use of cheap everyday materials – corrugated metal, chain-link fencing, exposed steelwork – and resulted in dynamic, nervous multi-layered forms. He has labelled the result 'cheapscape architecture' and also as 'no rules' architecture (Nairn, 1976, pp. 95–102).

Writing a short piece for the 1980 edition of *Contemporary Architects*, Gehry has described his attitude at the end of the 1970s as:

> 'I am interested in finishing work, but I am interested in the work's not appearing finished, with every hair in place, every piece of furniture in its spot ready for photographs. I prefer the sketch quality, the tentativeness, the messiness if you will, the appearance of "in progress" rather than the presumption of total resolution and finality. The paintings of Cézanne, Monet, DeKooning, Rauschenberg, to name a few, compared to the hard edge painters, Albers, Kelly, etc – perhaps the comparison makes my point more explicit.