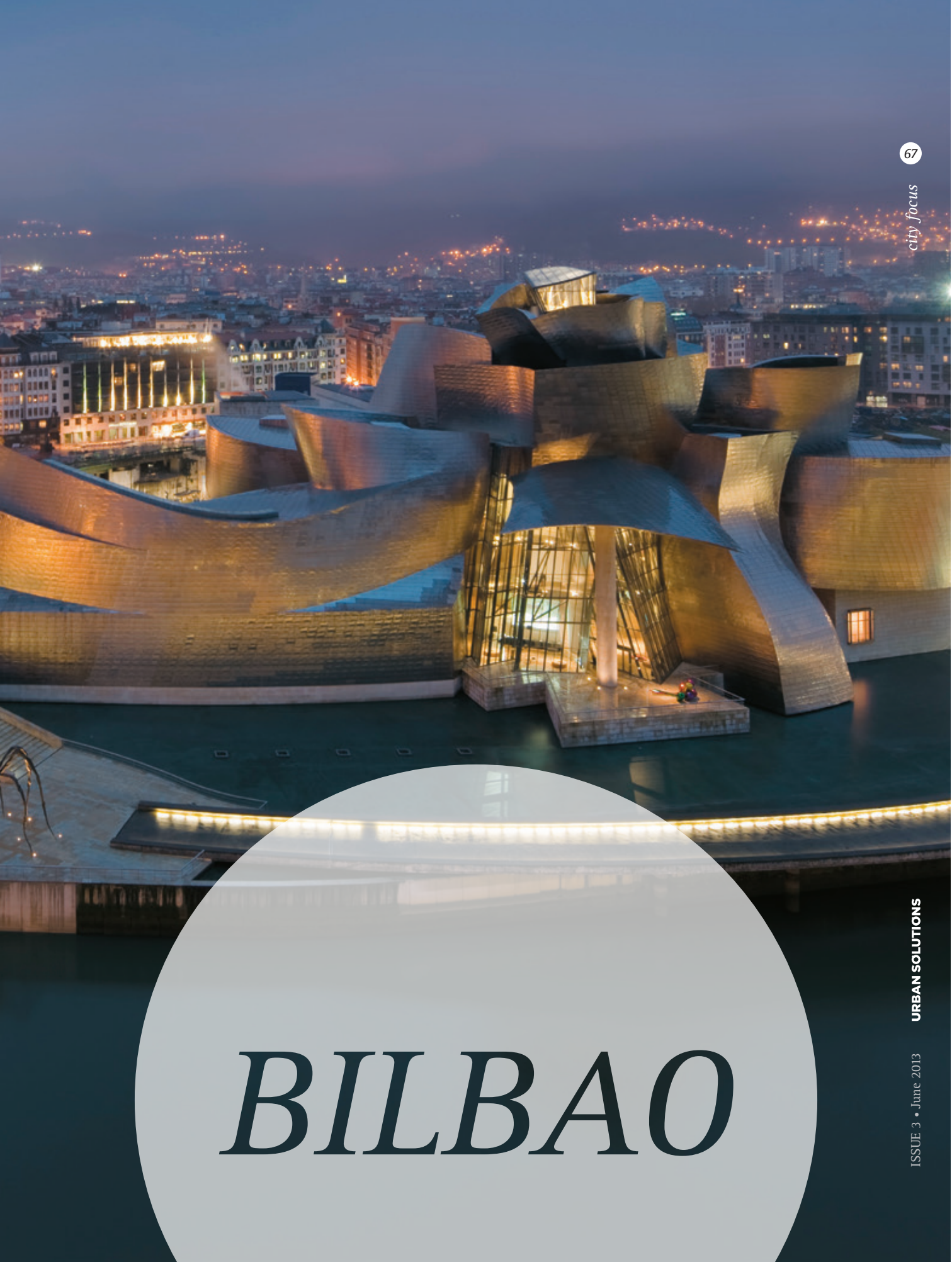




The Guggenheim Museum on the banks of the Nervión River is at the heart of Bilbao's regeneration.



# BILBAO



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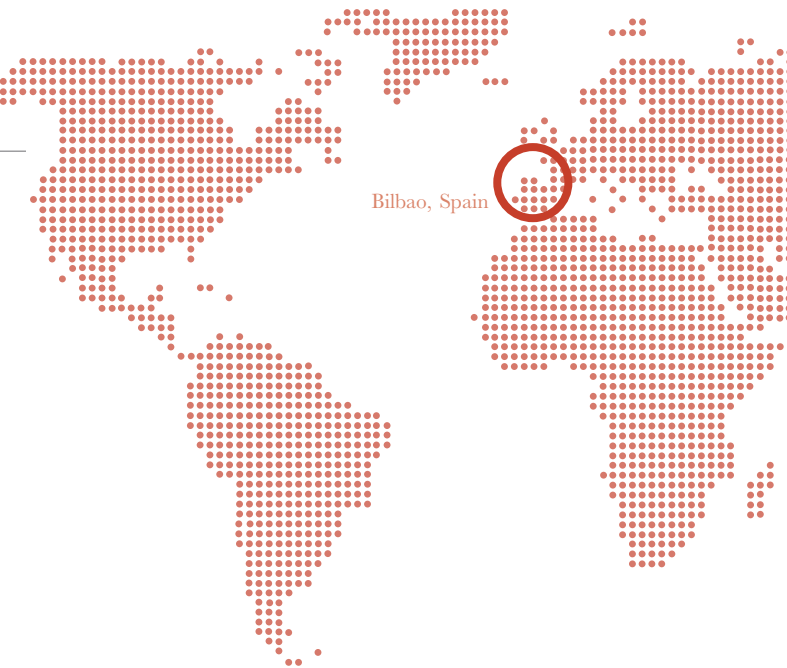
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01 Ships in Bilbao's port, its gateway to the world.

02 Historically, steel and shipbuilding industries made the city wealthy.

03 Bilbao struggled with declining heavy industries in the 1980s.



Bilbao, Spain



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**B**ilbao lies in the north of Spain. It is the capital city of Vizcaya, one of the three provinces that make up the autonomous community of the Basque Country. The Nervión River, which flows through Bilbao, empties into the Bay of Biscay where it is known as the Estuary of Bilbao.

In this issue of **URBAN SOLUTIONS**, Bilbao Mayor **Iñaki Azkuna** reflects on the importance of the Nervión River and its estuary in the city's reinvention. Mayor Azkuna has been credited with the city's transformation from a declining industrial city to an international arts hub since he took office in 1999.

Bilbao is a city that tells its own story if you just walk along the estuary, which is a clear reflection of our past and future. The estuary is the big umbilical cord that links Bilbao with the rest of the world. The iron we exported and the ships left from there; it was the door to wealth and progress. But the estuary was also the sewer of the city and the cause of many floods that devastated Bilbao in the last centuries.

In August this year, it will be 30 years since the last floods, which were probably the most devastating of all times. They occurred at a time when Bilbao was in the midst of an economic and social crisis: the steel and shipbuilding industries that had turned Bilbao into the spearhead of Spanish industry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were collapsing. The floods of 1983 made us start from the very beginning as both city and society.

Once a model industrial city forged by its iron, steel, machine engineering and shipbuilding industries, Bilbao had to start a new chapter in its history; through a new city approach that has become an international role model of good city practices.



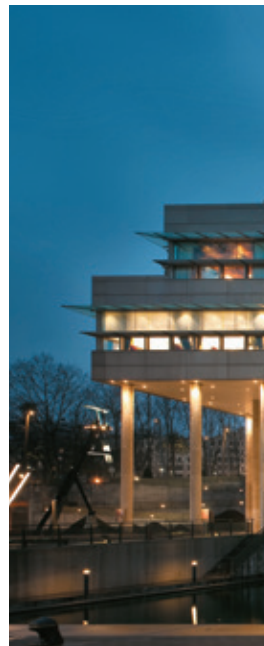


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### **Starting All Over Again**

The first thing we did was to start the environmental recovery of the estuary. For the last 25 years, around 600 million euros have been invested in water treatment plants and collectors for the treatment of the wastewater and sewage of the whole metropolitan area, allowing the estuary to have some aquatic life brought back to it.

This was followed by other projects centred along the river and the estuary, such as the construction of the metro (designed by Lord Norman Foster) that ran along the Nervión River, the commissioning of the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum, and later on, the conversion of the huge industrial “cemetery” of Abandoibarra into a beautiful promenade along the river banks by the architect Cesar Pelli. It is now lined with vegetation, art and architectural milestones such as the Euskalduna Palace and the Hotel Sheraton designed by Ricardo Legorreta. The latter was undertaken in collaboration with the Bilbao Ria 2000 Company,





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a non-profit entity set up in 1992 by the Basque and Spanish administrations to lead the urban transformation of Bilbao.

The aim was to turn a post-industrial city into a new urban place adapted to human needs while being economically and environmentally sustainable. We wanted to build a strong tertiary sector and new infrastructure and equipment that would better the quality of life of citizens and visitors.

- 01 Waterways were cleaned to improve quality of life and biodiversity.
- 02 Bilbao has focussed on the needs of its people, of all ages.
- 03 Major architectural projects were central to the city's regeneration.





## The Spirit of Bilbao

The reconstruction of Bilbao was massive – as was the number of international prizes that the City obtained, thanks to the urban transformation process. Awards like the LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE from Singapore are universal acknowledgement of the huge collective effort made by the people of Bilbao in order for it to rise from its industrial ashes.

I am among those who think that the main characters of the transformation are the population of Bilbao, apart from the vision and leadership coordinated among all the institutions: City Council and Regional Government, Ministry of Development, Renfe railway company, Port of Bilbao, etc.

It is also true that in Bilbao we have the advantage of our innovative tradition, the same that made us create the first set of commercial rules for traders and merchants, or

import from England that curious sport called football, that has been and will be a cause of happiness and sadness.

Being entrepreneurial and innovative by nature, Bilbao is today a city full of life and potential. We have good gastronomy, culture and leisure, and adequate infrastructures; and above all, we have a society open to the world that supports tolerance, plurality and solidarity.

Fortunately last year the City Council was able to pay off its long-term debt that amounted to 200 million euros in 1999.

There is no miraculous formula for this. The recipe is not to spend beyond our means but to take advantage of good times to pay old debts, prioritise the expenditure, and avoid wasting money in unnecessary and superfluous expenses. In other words, expend money taking into account the income.

This is the formula that we have applied in the Council during all these years, the same that helped us win the 2011 European Public Sector Award for Economic Stringency and Strategic Budgets, given by The European Institute of the Public Sector.



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01 Bilbao's residents have a strong entrepreneurial tradition.

02 Bilbao now enjoys quality dining and leisure options.

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- 01 Bilbao's key qualities include tolerance, solidarity and plurality.
- 02 The city's spirit is seen in its entrepreneurial, innovative and football-loving citizens.
- 03 Bilbao's past and future are linked by its ancient waterway and enduring values.

### Looking Into the Future

At this point, our priority is to create wealth and work, so everyone can have a decent and respectable life. In order to do so, the City Council is promoting real and rigorous measures that will help us boost the economy and start writing a new chapter in the history of our society.

This new chapter of our history will be mostly about the new knowledge district of Zorrotzaurre, the peninsula of the Nervión River. It will be linked to the new economic model, based on talent, creativity, knowledge and new technologies, in a region with a strong industrial tradition.

In this change, it is necessary to claim once more the values that have always guided us, such as honesty, solidarity, compromise and the capacity to gather the will of the people. In fact, those values are the ones that give us the strength to fight and hope for a better future.

And, as always, we are looking to the estuary, an eternal reflection of our past and our future.



Born in 1943, **Iñaki Azkuna** studied Medicine at university, specialising in Radiology and Cardiology. He started his political career in 1982 as the Director of the Basque Government's Hospitals, and was elected the Mayor of Bilbao in 1999. Under his leadership, Bilbao underwent considerable regeneration. It received the LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE in 2010, and was featured as an example of good urban practices at the Shanghai World Expo. The French government has made Iñaki Azkuna a Knight of the Legion of Honour, and he was also named the best City Mayor 2012 by the World City Mayor Foundation.