



Contacts:

Donna Williams
212.560.8030, WilliamsD@wnet.org

Donald Lee
212.560.3005, LeeD@wnet.org

Press Materials: pbs.org/pressroom or thirteen.org/pressroom

THIRTEEN's *American Masters* explores the creative genius of I.M. Pei as he reshapes the future of architecture in China in *I.M. Pei: Building China Modern*, premiering March 31 on PBS

Film captures the visionary architect addressing the prevailing issue of modern development, to reconcile tensions between modernity and tradition, through his architectural journey in designing and building the Suzhou Museum in the oldest neighborhood of a 2,500 year-old city.

Get to know other cultural artists at pbs.org/americanmasters.

I.M. Pei has been called the most important living modern architect, defining the landscapes of some of the world's greatest cities. A monumental figure in his field and a laureate of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, Pei is the senior statesman of modernism and last surviving link to such great early architects as Corbusier, Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe. Entering into the twilight of his career and well into his eighties, Pei returns to his ancestral home of Suzhou, China to work on his most personal project to date. He is commissioned to build a modern museum in the city's oldest neighborhood which is populated by classical structures from the Ming and Qing dynasties. For the architect who placed the pyramid at the Louvre, the test to integrate the new with the old is familiar but still difficult. The enormous task is to help advance China architecturally without compromising its heritage. In the end, what began as his greatest challenge and a labor of sentiment, says Pei, ultimately becomes "my biography."

Premiering nationally on Wednesday, March 31, 2010 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings), *American Masters's I.M. Pei: Building China Modern* follows Pei on this historic journey to define China's architectural vision as it comes into its own on the world stage. Post-broadcast, the film will stream online at pbs.org/americanmasters.

Currently in its 24th season, *American Masters* is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG – one of America's most prolific and respected public media providers.

"I.M. Pei is an architectural poet – a living legend," says Susan Lacy, series creator and executive producer of *American Masters*, a seven-time winner of the Emmy Award for Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series. "He's among the league of rare American masters whose artistic sensibilities have both provoked public debate and transformed our notions of what is possible, of how tradition can be honored in the 21st century."

The film captures Pei as he forges an architectural language that brings together Western modernity and Eastern tradition into a current synthesis. After decades of living in the U.S. and amassing unprecedented international acclaim for his projects, Pei returns as a "foreigner" to his birth country to give a new direction for Chinese architecture in which history can live in the midst of change. In effect, Pei, who has contributed to America's urban landscape during the height of its architectural and engineering power is now helping China do the same. Few architects have played such a critical dual role.

With an agenda of change, Pei inevitably enters into a crucible of conflict in Suzhou. For those concerned about the loss of traditional forms of architectural identity, he is too modern. For those who would simply bulldoze China's past, he is too tradition-minded. Adding to the already complex assignment, he faces the controversy of displacing residents living at the museum site. To meet the design challenges, Pei draws on ideas that stretch far back within his own life and work – including a 1946 thesis project at Harvard, where he was taught abstract modern architecture. Throughout his education and career, Pei maintains his "impossible dream" to bring together modernity and traditional, regional influences (including nature) in his work. Eight years in the making, *American Masters' I.M. Pei: Building China Modern* traces Pei's pursuit of that dream and explores the defining conflicts of our age – the lure of the modern versus the pull of history. The result is a surprisingly revealing and intimate portrait of the man who set as his goal nothing less than the redefinition of architecture in modern China.

American Masters' I.M. Pei: Building China Modern is a co-production of PACEM Distribution International, LLC and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in association with South Carolina ETV (SCETV), the China Intercontinental Communication

Center (CICC), and The New River Education Fund, Inc. Eugene B. Shirley, Jr. is producer. Anne Makepeace is director. Eugene B. Shirley, Jr. and Anne Shirley are executive producers. Caroline Courtauld and Tom Parry are co-executive producers. Anne Makepeace and Brian Funck are writers. Polly Kosko is executive-in-charge of production for SCETV. Sally Jo Fifer is executive producer for ITVS. Susan Lacy is the series creator and executive producer of ***American Masters***.

American Masters is made possible by the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding for ***American Masters*** is provided by Rosalind P. Walter, The Blanche & Irving Laurie Foundation, Jack Rudin, Elizabeth Rosenthal in memory of Rolf W. Rosenthal, The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation, Michael & Helen Schaffer Foundation, and public television viewers.

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To take ***American Masters*** beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site (pbs.org/americanmasters) offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources.

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