

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR BUILDING WEIGH,  
**MR. FOSTER?**

A Film by  
**Norberto López Amado & Carlos Carcas**

78 minutes, Color, 2010  
Dolby Digital



**FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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### **Short Synopsis**

A portrait of one of the world's premier architects, *How Much Does Your Building Weigh, Mr. Foster?* follows Norman Foster's unending quest to improve the quality of life through design. By investigating his origins to how his dreams and influences inspired the design of emblematic projects such as the world's largest building to its tallest bridge, Foster offers some striking solutions to humanity's increasing demand on urban centers.

### **Full Synopsis**

The film shows Norman Foster's journey from Manchester to a global practice, discussing architecture, why it matters, and how difficult it is to do it well. Norman Foster has rewritten the rules of architecture. His vision and unswerving passion for excellence have created some of the most exceptional structures of our times.

Architecture comes alive. Foster's projects are photographed in a cinematic style that seeks to bring the spectacular nature of their size and scale to the big screen.

It speaks to the specialists and the priesthood of design, but it's not just for them. It speaks to everybody who has ever been excited by a work of art, or who has understood that some spaces have special qualities that others do not share. It's for everybody who has been excited by the daring of a bridge, jutting out into space, or by the spectacle of a skyscraper that can define the identity of a city. It portrays how the world of art has influenced Foster and how Foster has brought the world of art into his design. Art, for the sake of the pleasure it gives and how, when combined with architecture, it leads to something greater and more uplifting than the sum of the two. It celebrates the special qualities of some of the most extraordinary structures of our times, and explores what it was that made them possible. It documents the way that great architecture is created, but does not flinch from the disappointments, and the setbacks, and even the failures that come with it.

It tells the story through images. Key projects are filmed in detail, conveying the movement of sunshine across the atrium of the Hearst Tower, the exhilaration of crossing the heights over the Pont Millau through early morning mist, whose central column is taller than the Eiffel Tower; or how the restoration of the German parliament becomes the symbol of a reunified nation. The experience of moving through each of these spaces shows what makes them special. We will also see how cities will be in the future through the example of Masdar in Abu Dhabi, a bold experiment in sustainability now under construction, which strives to become the first zero carbon, zero waste city in the world. At the same time, we hear the words of remarkable people who have collaborated with Foster such as Bono, Anish Kapoor, Richard Serra, Cai Guo-Qiang, Richard Long or Anthony Caro speaking for themselves, directly to the camera about the parts that they played..

### **About Norman Foster**

Norman Foster was born in Manchester in 1935. After graduating from Manchester University School of Architecture and City Planning in 1961 he won a Henry Fellowship to Yale University, where he gained a Master's in Architecture. He is the founder and chairman of Foster + Partners. Established in London in 1967, it is now a worldwide practice, with project offices in more than twenty countries. Since its inception, the practice has received over 500 awards and citations for excellence and has won more than 86 international and national competitions. Current and recent work includes the largest single building on the planet, Beijing Airport, Millau Viaduct in France, the Swiss Re tower, the Great Court at the British Museum in London, the Hearst Headquarters tower in New York, the Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and research centers at Stanford University, California.

He received the Order of North Rhine Westphalia in 1995 and the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1999. He became the 21st Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate in 1999 and was awarded the Praemium Imperiale Award for Architecture in 2002. In 2009, he became the 29th laureate of the prestigious Prince of Asturias award for the Arts and was awarded the Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany 2010. In 1990 he was granted a Knighthood in the Queen's Birthday Honours, and in 1999 was honoured with a Life Peerage, becoming Lord Foster of Thames Bank.

## **Q&A with the Directors**

### **What can cinema lovers find in this documentary? Why a documentary based on an architect?**

**Norberto López Amado (NLA):** I've always been attracted by architecture, by being able to relate the mystery that is hidden behind the creation of the master pieces that transcend the era of their creators. This will happen with Norman Foster and I expect this documentary could be seen in 50 years and the audience could be able to recognize the person who is behind all these buildings.

**Carlos Carcas (CC):** I'm not an architect, nor do I consider myself someone who knows about architecture. So for me, the main question in this film is "Why should I care about architecture and what does it matter to me?" I think the film addresses this question and shows the audience that architecture is not just about building a pretty building, but that the difference between intelligent and mediocre design has a huge impact on peoples' lives, especially if it's in a major city.

### **When/how the idea of this documentary came up?**

**CC:** Antonio Sanz (executive producer) and I have worked together on several projects for over ten years. The idea for this project is something that we had talked about on more than one occasion. In 2007, Foster was awarded the Aga Khan prize for architecture and I was asked to cover that event. That trip coincided with a visit to the Beijing airport before its opening. Foster had been given permission to film there for the first time since that start of construction. I was hired to shoot both the award ceremony in Kuala Lumpur and Foster's visit to the Beijing airport, and it was during that trip that the idea for the film really clicked. We had good chemistry working together. It was during that trip that Elena, who's more from an arts background, understood that the idea of making the film was, in the end, a good one.

### **Making documentary is something like solving a great puzzle without seeing the final photo before. Could you explain us about the preparation process in this case?**

**NLA:** It has been a demanding, rigorous and slow creative process (more than two years) in order to draw the conclusion that "less is more," as Norman learned from Buckminster Fuller (one of his mentors.) This exact quote has become the exact metaphor for this project.

**CC:** Besides studying a stack of books, the most important thing for me was to spend time with Foster and the architects who work with him. This came about in a natural way from day one, during the trip to Asia in 2007. Visiting the Beijing airport, it was easy to see the amount of pressure the team of architects there was facing to build the world's biggest building in record time. I remember driving up to the terminal for the first time – and keep in mind that it was almost finished but it still wasn't open. There were no lines of taxis or passengers with baggage, so out front it was kind of empty. Driving up I saw this huge, futuristic blade curving out against a rare, clear blue sky in Beijing. My breathing stopped. It was like landing on Mars and discovering a lost colony. I realized at that moment that I was surrounded by a very special group of people. So once the project for the documentary began, the first step was to spend some time in the main office in London. I began to attend design meetings and conduct interviews, but instead of taking

notes with pad and pencil, I used a camera, which is the way I think and work. So in the beginning, I shot a lot of footage that doesn't necessarily appear in the film, but the very act of filming was my way to get to know them and for them to get to know me.

**You have done documentaries, feature films and TV series before. Did you find there was a big difference between past projects and making this documentary?**

**NLA:** No I haven't, there's always underneath everything the aim of finding the emotion, and this is what has exactly happened.

**CC:** I think the main difference in this film was the challenge of capturing the portrait of a man who is constantly in motion, traveling great distances at great speed. Add to this the fact that deep down inside, Foster didn't really want to have a film made about him. He has a huge list of priorities and a movie about his life is probably second to last on the list. He's not interested in having his picture taken. He doesn't have that need. For Foster, the high comes from design, and the main preoccupation is how to make the next design a little bit better. So how do you keep up with someone who's going from country to country faster than you can keep up with and who's not going to wait to make sure you get a good shot. That, and to spend time traveling together in close quarters knowing that the person in front of you would probably be happier if you weren't holding a camera – that was the main challenge and in the end he was great, very generous.

**What do you find more difficult: working with people or working with buildings?**

**NLA:** Filming architecture is very difficult. I started the shooting with one premise: "Let's shoot like no one has ever done before" so what we first did was understanding the building to be able to explain it without any words, caressing every part of it with the care and detail to make the audience not only feel but understand.

**CC:** Rather than having actors hit a mark, for me the hardest thing is being invisible when you're working with a camera. It's something close to impossible. The minute there's a camera, and I don't care if it's a home movie, people change, they become self-conscious. And if you become a nuisance with the camera, it's over. An actor is someone who is trained to work with a camera; they know where to stand, when to speak. In a documentary, the filmmaker has to take on that responsibility. You have to hit the mark and capture the moment when it happens. There is no rehearsal, no "take two." And that's exactly what makes documentary filmmaking exciting.

**The aesthetic of this film is impeccable – the images show the buildings from privileged and unusual angles. What have you wanted to show from the buildings in particular? What shooting techniques have been used? Has this affected the shooting plan?**

**NLA:** We looked for different emotions from each building: from flying to finding spirituality, or risk.. I dealt with buildings as if they were characters, with conflicts and virtues.

**CC:** It was obvious from the start that this film had two very distinct and very different needs. On one hand, the filming of the architecture deserved a cinematic approach, with all the equipment, time and care that this implies. On the other, the filming of the characters had to be quick, lightweight. So a lot of the time, when I was with Foster, I was with a small hi-def camera or else we simply would not fit into the car. As far as the

architecture was concerned, I think Tito knew early on that he had to choose a selection of buildings to tell the story. I remember him saying, “I want to be able to caress those buildings, to show the poetry intrinsic to them.” For me, the thought of making a film about huge structures that don’t move is terrifying. And that’s where I think Tito and Valentín Alvarez, the director of photography, have done a spectacular job because they’ve managed to create a dance between the audience and the buildings. They make you fly.

**How would you describe Norman Foster after spending so much time with him?**

**NLA:** Norman Foster is a man who never gives up, he knows what he wants. He never feels fulfilled with his creations because he thinks that everything can always be improved.

**CC:** I consider myself fortunate to have been able to work with some remarkable people, but I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone so driven, so passionate, and so dedicated to his art as Norman Foster. Foster is a man who loves beauty and who likes to share that beauty. In my opinion, that what a good architect does because a building is not like a painting in someone’s living room. A building is something that many people have to live or work in and that everyone sees. At the same time, I think Foster is a great teacher. He likes to share his knowledge. He’s not someone who comes from a privileged family. He has worked, fought and risked for everything that he has achieved and I think he has also inspired everyone who works with him. I can honestly say that even my way of making films has been influenced from the year or so I’ve spent with him.

**What side of Norman Foster have you highlighted on this documentary?**

**NLA:** I wanted to become Norman’s mirror. The best thing was that in the latest edition of the documentary Norman said, “This documentary is me”. This has been my main challenge.

**CC:** Foster’s background encompasses a wide variety of works. In all of them there is a lot a lot of thought, but also a lot of heart and soul. This is what we want to show.

## **Q&A with the Screenwriter**

**Why did you choose this question “How much does your building weigh?” to be in the title?**

**Deyan Sudjic (DS):** I was very struck when Norman told me about the day he took Buckminster Fuller to see the Sainsbury Centre, the art gallery that was his first big hit. It’s like a very sleek, gleaming temple. Fuller looked him in the eye, and asked him the question: “How much does your building weigh”? And I knew that was going to be the title. It asks us to look at architecture in a different way.

**What can architecture lovers find/discover in this documentary?**

**DS:** Film is the best way to appreciate architecture without going to see a building. And this film captures them in the most beautiful, powerful way, some of the most extraordinary and compelling buildings in the world. You get to see what its like to move through and around them. You are taken in a flight over the amazing Pont Millau Bridge, up the Hearst tower in Manhattan and through the departure hall of Beijing’s vast new airport.

**How did you make the selection of Foster’s projects for this documentary? Why these buildings and not others?**

**DS:** We wanted to show the most important landmarks, of a long and rich career. There are modest scaled projects from the early days, as well as skyscrapers, feats of engineering, and designs of huge symbolic importance, such as the German parliament in Berlin.

**Making documentaries is always the same as resolving a great puzzle without seeing the final photo before. Could you explain us about the preparation process in this case?**

**DS:** We began with a lot of talking about how to capture architecture on film, but also how to capture the essence of a gifted, talented individual, and how he works with his team. We wanted to make a film that wasn’t just for specialists. It’s a human story, as well as an architectural one.

**How would you describe in general terms Foster’s architecture?**

**DS:** Perhaps the best way to understand Foster’s architecture is in the clarity of his vision.

**From high tech to the sustainability architect, how does this documentary describe Foster’s evolution and artistic process in this line?**

**DS:** The remarkable thing about Foster is that though he has established a large and successful office, and seems very businesslike, there is also a utopian streak to his personality, even before he met Buckminster Fuller, the guru of the space ship earth idea, Foster was thinking about making the most of precious resources.



**In this film we discover a portrait of Foster concerned by the environment and the future development of the cities. Could we talk about Foster as a compromised architect? In which sense?**

**DS:** It's true that in the course of a 50 year career, Foster has moved gradually away from operating at the scale of the individual building, and understanding architecture at the larger scale of the city of which it is part, and the spaces between buildings. It's a choice between making a few exquisite individual objects, and having an impact on the way that the world is developing.

**You are the author of many publications and you're one of the most prestigious architecture critics, but we can see that, at the same time, you have a deep friendship with Foster. What has it meant for you to portray Foster's human/personal side and not only his professional side in this film?**

**DS:** I have always wanted to understand not just what architects do, but how, and why. This film gave me a chance to do that.

**By the way, we know that you have finally been the narrator of this story. Is it your cinematographic debut?**

**DS:** Initially I wasn't going to be a narrator, but as we started filming, I found myself gradually becoming a voice in the film. It was a bit unexpected. It's a very different experience from being a writer, where you can hide behind a book. This way around, you have to think a lot harder.

**Could you tell us some anecdote from the shooting?**

**DS:** The day I remember best was watching Foster, and the artist Richard Serra, working out where to put a vast sculpture, by getting a team to move wooden posts staked out in the ground back and forth. They both knew what they wanted, but they were both being very respectful of each other. It felt like being in the middle of a moment of art history.

## **Filmmaker Bios**

### **Norberto López Amado – Director**

Tito López Amado has been working for the past 20 years as a filmmaker on diverse projects in cinema, television, and advertising. Born in Orense, Spain and based in Madrid, he studied law and film direction. In 1989, he joined the Spanish EFE news agency as a correspondent, covering diverse stories around the world such as the first Gulf War. He moved into the field of cinema directing a number of documentaries and short feature-films. His first full-length feature film, *Nos Miran*, was a commercial success and was well received by critics worldwide. He is currently considered one of the leading directors of episodic television in Spain. Lopez's second feature film, *Zig Zag* is in pre-production.

### **Carlos Carcas – Director**

Carlos Carcas is an independent documentary filmmaker based in Madrid. Born in Miami, Florida in 1968, he began working in film production after graduating from Boston University's College of Communication. He worked for several years for the international press agency Worldwide Television News (WTN) as a freelance cameraman and news producer in Peru, Haiti, Bosnia, Liberia and Spain. He has collaborated with Spanish director Fernando Trueba on several projects. Among them, Carcas shot and edited *Blanco & Negro*, which won the Latin Grammy in 2006 for the best long-format music video. Carcas also worked with Trueba on *The Miracle of Candeal*, winner of the Spanish's academy's Goya prize for best documentary. In 2008, Carcas released *Old Man Bebo*, his first feature length documentary, which he wrote, directed and edited. With this work, he was awarded the prize for best new documentary filmmaker at the Tribeca film Festival in 2008.

### **Elena Ochoa – Producer**

Elena Ochoa was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles and Visiting Research Scholar at the Universities of Cambridge, Chicago, Kraków, Hamburg and Pennsylvania, amongst others. She was Professor of Psychopathology at the Complutense University of Madrid for almost two decades. She has also worked in the Spanish National Television, Spanish National Radio and as well as newspapers such as *El País*. Until 2001, Elena Ochoa was Honorary Professor at King's College London. She founded Ivorypress in 1996 and acted as the co-Editor-in-Chief during the making of the ten volume C Photo Collection. Since the beginning, Ivorypress has been devoted to producing artist's books and other publications related to contemporary art, photography, design and architecture. In 2008 Ivorypress opened Ivorypress Art+Books Bookshop in Madrid as well as Ivorypress Space, commissioning exhibitions of artists such as Miroslav Tichý, Ai Weiwei, Michal Rovner, Claes Oldenburg and Buckminster Fuller, among others. Elena Ochoa was Chairman of the Tate International Council and trustee of the Tate Foundation for five years. Currently, she is a trustee of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and is also the main advisor and trustee of the Art Trust Foundation. Elena Ochoa is the founder and current CEO of Ivorypress and Art Commissioners.

### **Antonio Sanz – Executive producer**

Antonio Sanz has an academic background in Art History. He began his career as professional photographer then moved toward cinema where he has worked as director of photography, screenwriter and director. In 2005, Sanz joined Art Commissioners, a London-based company focused on the commissioning and promotion of artistic works. He has curated art exhibitions around the world such as at the 2006 Biennale di Venezia, or the London Victoria & Albert Museum in 2008. He is the managing director of Ivorypress/Art Commissioners.

### **Deyan Sudjic- Scriptwriter**

Deyan Sudjic is the director of the Design Museum in London. Born in London of Yugoslav parents, he studied architecture at the University of Edinburgh, but decided not to practice architecture. Instead he became a writer, and critic, and has established an international reputation as commentator and curator. He was the founding editor of *Blueprint* magazine, and for four years was the editor of *Domus*, the authoritative Milan based architecture and design revue. He has been architecture critic for three of Britain's leading newspapers; *The Sunday Times*, *the Guardian* and *the Observer*. He is the author of a number of well-received books. *The Washington Post* nominated his *Edifice Complex* as book of the year, and it has been translated into six languages. His authorized biography of Norman Foster will be published in 2010. He spent four years in Glasgow, as director of the UK City of Architecture and Design project from 1996 to 2000, and was the director of the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2002. He has commissioned exhibitions in Istanbul, London, Glasgow, and Copenhagen.

### **Joan Valent – Musical Composer**

Valent was born in Palma de Mallorca 1964. In 1988 Joan Valent moved to Los Angeles where he studied music at the University of California Los Angeles. In 1993 Michael Douglas asked him to create and present the piece "Escape From the Century" (screened on TVE). In 1996 Valent relocated to Madrid. While accepting commissions from orchestras around the world he also founded the Ars Ensemble, with whom he recorded the live album "Ars." After the release of "Ars" in 2000, Joan Valent started to perform his music live and was nominated for the Spanish Premios de Música. American pop singer David Byrne included the string sextet Ars Ensemble during his tour of Spain and Portugal in 2001. In April 2002 his second album "Ensems" was released in Spain, Belgium and The Netherlands. Valent & Ars Ensemble took part in the XXVII edition of the prestigious Sfinx festival in Belgium. Since 2002 until the present, he has released several collections of symphonic, choral, and instrumental music, including 4 CDs with Montserrat Caballé (two of them Grammy-winners,) a DVD release ("Four seasons in Mallorca,") and many other recordings productions and arrangements for different pop, classical and flamenco artists. Valent is currently working on an opera, a new piano concerto, a new CD, and several movies scores scheduled to premiere this year.

**Credits**

**Producer** Elena Ochoa  
**Executive Producer** Antonio Sanz  
**Directors** Norberto López Amado & Carlos Carcas  
**Written and narrated by** Deyan Sudjic  
**Music by** Joan Valent  
**Director of Photography** Valentín Álvarez  
**Film Editor** Paco Cozar  
**Associate Producers** Imanol Uribe & Andrés Santana  
**Music performed by** Bratislava Symphony Orchestra  
**Locations** UK, Spain, USA, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, China, Saudi Arabia, Arab Emirates and Malaysia.

**An Art Commissioners production (UK)**

**In association with Aiete Ariane Films (Spain)**