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Sustainable Skins

Facades that shade, display, and generate.

by David Selvick

By some estimations, the roofs are responsible for 34% of a building's energy consumption. Sustainability-minded designers and manufacturers are responding with innovative building skins and materials that not only generate energy but also heat, moisture, and light in such a way as to minimize energy usage.

Tracking the Tokyo Sun

Shading and insulation are key to reducing operating loads on a building's mechanical systems by as much as 95%.

In the architectural world, the Japanese are the masters at utilizing the power of light. The Kansai University Library in Osaka, for example, boasts a curtain wall system that is designed to change its hue during the day in response to the sun's position. The system uses a combination of high-performance glass and a shading system to reduce the building's energy consumption.

In the United States, the Chicago-based studio Studio Gang Architects has designed the 888 S. Lake Shore Drive condominiums, which feature a facade that changes color based on the amount of sunlight it receives. The facade is made up of a combination of glass and metal panels that can be adjusted to change color depending on the time of day.

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