

# Jack Fisk

## traps Sean Penn in glass



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Images [Twentieth Century Fox](#)

Director Terrance Malick's Palme d'Or-winning *The Tree of Life* is framed against the birth of the universe and early life on earth. It centres on Sean Penn's portrayal of Jack, a middle-aged architect. Torn by his upbringing and spurred by the death of his younger brother, he ruminates on childhood memories of 1950s' Waco.

As the eldest of three sons – their father played by Brad Pitt – Jack experiences childhood as stern preparation for the harsh realities of life, which is to culminate in the success his father is unable to attain. His mother, however, actress Jessica Chastain, is a gentle and graceful soul who fosters her sons' appreciation of the world's beauty.

Production designer Jack Fisk's authentic period locales feature an openness to nature that is seized upon by cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, who has a

penchant for filming with available light.

As an adult, Jack works in what was originally an eight-storey former bank lobby, which has a glass wall and ceiling. The Houston office used as the film set actually belongs to architecture and engineering firm PageSoutherlandPage. Jack's home bears a resemblance to Philip Johnson's Glass House. Trapped within glass-encased surroundings – a stark contrast to the nature-filled days of his youth – Jack appears mentally adrift.

*The Tree of Life* is an existentially reflective experience that, like many paintings, invites interpretation. The film's criticism of the modernist glass box can be seen as an indication that the salvation of architecture lies in nature, the environment of Jack's youth.

The path to such salvation is one that practices such as Aranda/Lasch and Zaha Hadid Architects have embarked on through parametric design, in which algorithms are used to compute complex shapes and

spaces that mirror patterns in nature.

Malick's fascination with nature – a bird's nest, for example – has been mimicked in architecture; Herzog & de Meuron's culturally symbolic Beijing National Stadium, another 'Bird's Nest', takes its name from the seamlessly twisting steel sections that form its underlying geometric structure – a structure of countless elements whose dense complexity could be realized only through the use of parametric design.

Malick and Fisk depict nature as heavenly. When art follows suit, it often gives birth to innovative movements, such as those represented by Gustav Klimt's paintings (including his 1909 *Tree of Life*) and by nature-inspired parametric design in architecture. Coincidentally, avant-garde designer Luigi Colani said that his work is '90 per cent nature and 10 per cent Colani – at the most'.