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Thinking Architecture, 2nd Edition



Synopsis

In order to design a building with a sensuous connection to life, one must think in a way that goes far beyond form and construction. In these essays Peter Zumthor expresses his motivation in designing buildings, which speak to our emotions and understanding in so many ways, and possess a powerful and unmistakable presence and personality. This book, whose first edition has been out of print for years, has been expanded to include three new essays: "Does Beauty Have a Form?", "The Magic of the Real, and "Light in the Landscape. It has been freshly illustrated throughout with new color photographs of Zumthor's new home and studio in Haldenstein, taken specially for this edition by Laura Padgett, and received a new typography by Hannele Gräf-Inlund.

Book Information

Hardcover: 96 pages

Publisher: Birkhäuser Architecture; 2nd edition (June 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 3764374977

ISBN-13: 978-3764374976

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.5 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #415,252 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #235 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Criticism #684 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Drafting & Presentation #688 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History

Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: German --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Peter Zumthor, *1943, gehört international zu den renommiertesten Schweizer Architekten. In Haldenstein bei Chur führt er eine kleine Architekturmanufaktur mit wenigen Mitarbeitern. Sein Bestreben ist es, Architektur sinnlich erlebbar zu machen. Zu seinen bekanntesten Bauten zählen u.a: Therme Vals, 1996; Kunsthaus Bregenz, 1997; Kunstmuseum Kolumba, Köln 2007.

Reading this book was like reading a long-lost secret manual of "How to become a 21 century Samurai..." I guess that sense of delusion rises because the content and the tone of book has this (quasi) idea of medieval perfection achieved through a repetition of hands-on practice. "I do not work towards architecture from a theoretically defined point of departure, for I am committed to making architecture," writes Zumthor. Moreover, a reader, at the back of her/his head, has those powerful images of Bath House in Vaals (tour de force of phenomenological experience) that intensifies the delusion. One would think, 'Zumthor must be a man from Mars to build architecture like that' and 'his writings must be a strong sleeping pill.' Usual Suspect !He writes extremely clear with extremely simple terms. This slim book tells us how an architect of such originality thinks and experiences daily life. It's a great pleasure to find out what kind of music (Mozart's piano concertos) zumthor listens; what kind of artists (Beuys and Merz) he likes; what kind of film he watches (Ettore Scola's film *Le Bal*); what kind of books (Calvino) he reads; and what kind of sayings ("the hard core beauty") in the radio show captivates him. A former cabinet maker, his book is carefully jointed, just like his buildings. Anyone who found this book fun/inspiring to read should also try Alvaro Siza's "Writings on Architecture"

In many ways, the reading of this book reminded me of the writings of Louis Kahn: both explicit and metaphorical reflections on the inner complexities of the apparent simplicities of daily life. The selections of almost inscrutable photographs, extreme close-ups of sections of Zumthor's house, act as another way to explore the intensity of the artist's and his art's soul. All along the book, and in a very poetical manner, phrases seem to be left hanging unfinished, as for one's own mind and sensibility to put together the pieces of and intriguing and inspiring puzzle that remains open and to be developed by the reader. While the voice of a master is always heard, the message is delivered with the subtlety of his work, as for the reader not to feel forced into a way of thinking, acting or perceiving, but invited to stay with eyes, mind and all senses open to enjoy the pleasures of life and the possibility to contribute to them by one's own minor but never meaningless actions.

This book is an excellent introduction to Zumthor's architecture. This book makes us think about what is essential in architecture, why and how you go about creating the "real" presence of built environments (at least, we get to appreciate Zumthor's perspective on it). Most importantly why that matters for us as well as for Zumthor. We think we knew and we think we understood. But, reading this book, I realized how much I have forgotten and how important it is to remind ourselves of some of the significant and yet, simple truths in thinking of built environment. He describes these in plain

but powerful words. For me, his view on the "real" presence of architecture was very appealing. In seeking 'factual truth' in architecture, Zumthor explains what matters to him in his consideration of "specific" contexts and issues. This book gives us some clues about why his buildings exude such extraordinary aura and how they might have been conceived. It is not about big abstract theories no one understands. It is not about complicated geometry or formal exuberance so many contemporary architects seem to be obsessed with. It is a relatively short but, very powerful book. It's highly recommended. Peter Zumthor, one of the real masters in architecture today talks about his desire to design a building that takes on its own life afterwards. To him, the real presence of architecture doesn't require any rhetoric or any further explanation. His architecture is not about form-making and certainly doesn't stem from digital processes. It is not about rhetorical/ critical diagrams as a point of departure. It is not necessarily about sustainability. His architecture doesn't seek to be showy and spectacular. It seeks to "belong", belong to the context, site, and surroundings, therefore to our presence. Creating the new but only in a way that enhances the existing. From another perspective, it is about "place-making": making a place/ spatial conditions that become part of our physical presence in this world. His pursuit of the real and the essential seems solidly grounded in modernism. And yet, he is capable of going beyond the capacity of modernist architecture the way we are familiar with. It has something to do with his focus on "atmosphere"-making. To him, making spaces always comes with a certain concept related to atmospheres. He explains his understanding of "atmosphere" in architecture in another book. Zumthor may be called one of the pre-eminent architects of the "New Modern", which differs from post-modern. It is unexpectedly refreshing to read his words. Just like anything else in life, doing basic things well is important and if you do, that alone could take you quite far. Such an admirable architect.... He once said 'Life is too short to compromise'..... Good for him. I wish I could be like that.....

This book single handedly got me through Architecture school. It taught my how to get into the design thinking mentality and to be able to converse with those around me. Written very thoughtfully yet complex, it really forces you to understand the core values of Architectural thinking and to learn how to apply those.

This shadow of the man is greater than our typical collective insights.

Gives serious thoughts on Design. Architecture in a different contest toward the 21st century. Read it.

Beacon Hill Books, the seller, was very cooperative in processing the transaction. The cost for this 90-odd page thin book was outrageous, but still less than that by other sellers that had the book available. The book was presumably available from specific sellers on at less than half the price I paid, but when I attempted to order, was informed that the book was out of stock and there would be a delay in shipment. The purchase exercise is still a mystery to me. Beacon Hill Books graciously replied to my post purchase e-mail justifying their costing.

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