



Why Architecture Matters

Paul Goldberger

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Why Architecture Matters is not a work of architectural history or a guide to the styles or an architectural dictionary, though it contains elements of all three. The purpose of Why Architecture Matters is to "come to grips with how things feel to us when we stand before them, with how architecture affects us emotionally as well as intellectually" — with its impact on our lives. "Architecture begins to matter," writes Paul Goldberger, "when it brings delight and sadness and perplexity and awe along with a roof over our heads." He shows us how that works in examples ranging from a small Cape Cod cottage to the "vast, flowing" Prairie houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, from the Lincoln Memorial to the highly sculptural Guggenheim Bilbao and the Church of Sant'Ivo in Rome, where "simple geometries...create a work of architecture that embraces the deepest complexities of human imagination."

Based on decades of looking at buildings and thinking about how we experience them, the distinguished critic raises our awareness of fundamental things like proportion, scale, space, texture, materials, shapes, light, and memory. Upon completing this remarkable architectural journey, readers will enjoy a wonderfully rewarding new way of seeing and experiencing every aspect of the built world.

Why Architecture Matters Details

Date : Published November 3rd 2009 by Yale University Press (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780300144307

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Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Architecture, Nonfiction, Art, History

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From Reader Review Why Architecture Matters for online ebook

Mario Gonzalez says

Great Book. Even for inspiring architects and anyone interested in architectural/art theory. I found Paul Goldberger to bring up very interesting topics mostly in a time when architects and arch students are faced with the constant debate of whether or not architecture is art [silly, i know]. serves as a great guide to respond to these people who see buildings as square boxes for one to shelter from weather and nothing more. READ IT

Aescling says

A brilliant account of modern architecture. Filled with personal impressions yet strangely up to the point in terms of both science&history.

Christian says

An engaging and readable introduction to one of those subjects that everyone is sort of interested in, but often seems intimidating or off-putting to try and learn about. Lots of nice (black and white) photos interspersed with the text are invaluable as examples of the author's various points. Very broad, not very deep, lyrical rather than technical. This book won't make you an expert, but it may allow you to tell a Le Corbusier from a Mies van der Rohe, which is probably good enough.

Artur Llinares says

No se debe esperar una historia de la arquitectura. En este libro se encuentra una disquisición de la arquitectura en aspectos muy variados, tomando como ejemplo preferente la arquitectura contemporánea (entiéndase desde el s.XIX hasta la actualidad). Innegable la calidad pero tal vez no cumple con lo esperado; no es una lectura recomendable para principiantes, es importante tener asentadas múltiples ideas sobre la arquitectura (como arte) previamente.

Richard Zaslavsky says

I think it's a great book for those who want to understand architecture better, see the bigger picture.

Albina says

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Ryan says

Earlier this year I read "Building Up And Tearing Down," a series of essays by Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic for the New Yorker. "Why Architecture Matters" is the other book he authored in 2009.

Divided into seven main themes (Architecture as Memory, Challenge and Comfort, etc.), this book takes a thoughtful journey through architecture from several distinct perspectives. Structurally and thematically, it reminded me a bit of a less poetic and more academic version of Alain De Botton's "The Architecture of Happiness." In some ways, that sense of this being a lesser version of another book became a cloud over "Why Architecture Matters" as I read it.

However, Goldberger's strong background in architectural criticism was a nice compliment to De Botton's perspective as a philosopher and cultural observer. There are some spectacularly great moments here on art versus function, purity and restraint versus fashion and exuberance, and historicism versus modernism. With occasionally brilliant writing and clear subject-matter expertise, Goldberger makes a great case in that architecture has to be a balance of these seemingly opposite forces.

Recommended for architecture or city nerds.

Marcos Bytterbier says

A nuanced exploration of some of the most compelling examples of architecture, although it sometimes remains superficial and leaves you hanging.

Gweneth says

This book did not live up to my expectations. The author presents the book as an introduction to architecture, but rambles about buildings, architects and cities in a way that only knowledgeable architectural historians can familiarize with. The examples of buildings chosen seem to be mainly American and little thought is given to non European or non American architectural works. There were virtually no references to women architects, city planners or writers. I think Jane Jacobs was mentioned once. Goldberger's world is definitely a man's world.

On a better note, the bibliography is fabulous (if that can be said about a biblio.). This book highlights the best of the best architectural theorists and historians, and names their most prominent works. I would not recommend this book to those who are not passionate about architecture or urban development. For those who are, I would be happy to lend it to you.

Wouter says

This book is quite alright, except for the disastrous Chapter 5. I'm not sure why the author felt the need to quote at length from books by famous novelists to make a point about architecture in literature, but I could not appreciate it. Also, I thought the book as a whole didn't feel as urgent as it should have been, since it is called 'Why Architecture Matters'. The main problem is that its overall argument is not as powerful and concise as it might have been, because of a lack of focus.

Kristine Morris says

I most enjoyed the discussion of architecture and time. How a building like the National Gallery of Art in Washington is so beautifully designed and engineered for the purpose of showing art that and because it is so extraordinary it transcends its disfavoured style (in this case it is a classically designed building which people in 1941 thought to be looking to the past and not looking forward towards modernism). Also, how buildings need decades to be appreciated. The Brutalist Paul Rudolf Hall at Yale built in 1963 was detested and it wasn't until 2008 that it was fully restored both the exterior and interior to its original design. Lots of other interesting terms introduced in this book, such as blob architecture - this refers to the organic forms of some buildings today that are only possible by computerization.

Luke says

Why Architecture Matters is a fantastically written book on appreciating architecture. I was only able to read half a chapter at a time because every paragraph really made you think about what it said. This book made me look at buildings in a whole new way, and not in a super analytical way either. More than I think more on what purpose does the building serve, who does it serve, and the like. I really like this book because it also talks about architecture from across a wide range of time. And each chapter focuses on important aspects architecture, some I wouldn't have even thought of. There is an entire chapter about how buildings change over time. And about how good buildings remain beautiful throughout time. How sometimes you can let an old building go for something great and new, but to also appreciate old buildings and preserve great landmarks. This book offers great insights into architecture and it is great for anyone even if they don't care much about architecture. I highly recommend this book for all kinds of people ages 14+ simply because it is very dense and could get boring to younger kids.

Ariel says

I've enjoyed Goldberger's essays for the New Yorker but I don't think his writing is strong enough or descriptive enough to sustain a book-length piece. (There are also some shockingly bad nonsensical descriptive sentences: the CCTV building in Beijing is "less a tower than a square version of a donut, upended, with its top pulled out into a startling cantilevered corner" -- uh, what?)

Still, there's a pleasingly workmanlike quality to his summaries. I was very disappointed by the chapter on

Architecture and Memory, which seems to do with nothing very much at all, besides his nostalgia for Yale, and New York City in the good old days. However, the bibliography and his commentary on it is very useful.

Alex says

Highly recommended for the general reader and definitely! for anyone who writes about buildings, landscape or cities.

Goldberger steps back from his criticism to explore the basic questions: what do buildings do, aesthetically, culturally, economically, physically? How? Why?

He's deeply familiar with the architecture academy's answers to these questions, but you wouldn't know it from the writing. He's clear, concise, concrete. (He's sympathetic to the Jencks/Scott-Brown critique of modernism - though it led us to Postmodernism, which he thinks (as I do) was a dead end but a useful detour.)

Not all critics have the ability to identify and address the big questions in their fields. And when so much architecture discussion is either deeply theoretical or else just picture galleries, this is very useful.

There's an offhand takedown of Rem in here that is a keeper.

Diane says

This book is part of a series on Why X (e.g. Architecture) Matters, intended to be brief, inexpensive introductions to a topic. I enjoyed it although it probably could have been about 40-50 pages shorter - Goldberger tends to fall into "architecture-speak" at times. But all is forgiven because of Chapter 5: Architecture and Memory. He talks mostly about his own early architecture memories which made me start musing on mine and he talks of architecture in film, photography, art, and literature - wonderful long quotes. Because of the approach there are not enough pictures - I was okay with the cheap, black and white ones and wished there were more. I read this while traveling so couldn't jump on Google Images to find more and better pictures.
