

in this book are based on contextual understanding. The focus of each case is not limited by a single plot but enriched by the urban fabrics covering the complexity of the spatial structure, and characterized by both the analysis and graphics highlighting the relationship between a single building and the wider urban structure. The book bridges scientific research on one side and architectural aesthetics on the other.

Issues relating to conservation and development and historical and contemporary approaches are presented side by side. The contemporary examples selected by the authors are not simply a repetition of the traditional, but are clearly linked through typological analysis. Although the quality of the urban fabrics and housing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are featured, the authors seem to suggest that innovation in the design of individual architects is inevitable in contemporary society.

The authors did not intend to provide a particular argument or thesis but rather allow readers to draw their own conclusions by discovering the message in the text, graphics, and composition of the book. Each essay focusing on a particular architectural case can be read as an independent piece as well as a comparative part related to the others. The analysis is balanced with graphics, which are selective, well reproduced, and carefully arranged in the book. Architectural drawings, plans, sections, photographs, aerial views, and archive material are all used. Importantly, the book will appeal to different audiences who want to discover more. This is certainly consistent with the objective of the authors, who state that the book is written for a variety of audiences, academicians, architects, urban designers, and even private aficionados from a wide range of professions associated with the building industry.

There are, however, weaknesses in the book that are worthy of mention. From an academic point of view, the methodology based on types seems more an organizational tool in compiling the selected cases rather than driven by the need for deeper research on the interrelationships of varieties of urban fabric. Apparently a high level of analysis in research is not the main objective in the writing of this book. Another impression left by the pairing of traditional and contemporary examples is that the pairs remain 'apart' except in the similarity in the type of floor plan. The analytical framework based on urban fabric (as applied to traditional houses) seems to contradict or was not applied to the representation of contemporary examples, which seem to be isolated pieces of works by designers

without clear strategies. Some of the sectional drawings and plans of the historical buildings are not precise and do not reveal the structural and material properties, which are observable in the drawings from contemporary examples.

Finally, it is helpful to refer to the bibliography which shows the concepts, thinking, and methodology of several writers. The classical and most prominent works on urban history are found here. They include the works of Spiro Kostof, the core writings of Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei from a typological school in Italy, and the book, *Über Wohnbau / House-ing* by the influential contemporary architectural office, Baumschlager Eberle.

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Great public squares: an architect's selection by Robert F. Gatje, W.W. Norton, London, England, 2010, 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-393-73173-6.

Great public squares is a study of 40 urban spaces in Europe and North America. Considering environments formed in both the pre-industrial and industrial eras, it seeks to build upon 'three great books about urban space' (p. 9), namely *Der Städtebau* by Camillo Sitte (published in 1889), *The American Vitruvius* by Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets (published in 1922), and Paul Zucker's *Town and square* (published in 1959). To achieve this lofty goal Robert Gatje considers matters of utility, integrity, and delight (p. 11), namely standards for judging spatial design established by the Roman architect Vitruvius, so as to determine the qualities of urban spaces in the Western world.

In selecting his case studies Gatje employs simple criteria: they are all in use today, are admired, and are well-known. This therefore excludes many of Europe's 'great spaces', such as the forums of Rome, and the agoras of Ancient Greece. Nevertheless an ample assortment of urban spaces is included. Although some of the cases discussed have been hitherto written about on a great many occasions – for example, St Mark's Square in Venice (Italy), Place Stanislas in Nancy (France), and the Circus in Bath (UK) – what is apparent about Gatje's approach to investigating

urban space is his intention 'to provoke and enhance your judgement of urban spaces by comparing one with another so that they can be enjoyed, appreciated, and preserved' (p. 13).

So that people can augment their knowledge of urban spaces Gatje relies heavily upon two features: first, visual sources, including coloured maps (at 1:1000 scale) and photographs – of which there are 300 in the book; secondly, the provision of numerous short written texts containing details of the historical background, design influences, and design meaning of spaces, in addition to presenting statistical data often lacking in similar publications – for example, plan dimensions, the maximum height of surrounding buildings, and the ratio of height to width and area. The clarity of the illustrations is outstanding. This combined with the quality of the writing provides readers, especially students of urban design, with the opportunity to grasp the origins, form, and meaning of urban spaces, and the elements that make them work successfully.

Critics might suggest that *Great public squares* is yet another work that adds to the already bloated corpus of literature on international and historical urban design. However, as Gatje, emphasizes in the opening pages of his book, it is a means to record his lifelong vocational observation of urban space, a surveillance and analysis borne from practising as an architect. With experience in Marcel Breuer's and Richard Meier's office, and educated by renowned US urbanist John Reys, Gatje puts forward a distinctive assessment of the form, furnishing, entry/exit points, and enclosure of urban spaces. Whilst he examines the nature of many spaces that could be classified as the 'greats' of urban history and its development, he also seeks to understand the form of 'near great' spaces – for example, the Piece Hall in Halifax, UK, and Old Town Square in Telč, Czech Republic. Yet it is the selection of spaces such as the Piece Hall that can be criticized. Arguably there are better choices, for example the Frederiksgade in Copenhagen, the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, and Chamberlain Square in Birmingham. However, the choices of case studies are well-explained. Thus with regard to the Piece Hall in Halifax, what other industrial-age urban spaces exist within Britain on the model of the ideal piazza design as suggested by great Renaissance men such as Leon Battista Alberti and Andrea Palladio?

Though a great deal of literature already exists on urban spaces, in terms of the illustrations provided, few books published this year on any element of urban studies will match the quality of

those in this book. Both text and pictures give students a new opportunity to comprehend the design of what Gatje calls, the 'outside rooms' of civilization. Ultimately, does *Great public squares* build upon the works of Sitte, Hegemann and Peets, and Zucker? Maybe not, but it is a valiant attempt to do so.

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O concurso de Brasília: sete projetos para uma capital by Milton Braga, Cosac Naify, São Paulo, Brazil, 2010, 292pp. ISBN 978-85-7503-896-3.

Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Brasília, Brazil's capital city, *O concurso de Brasília: sete projetos para uma capital* analyses the seven successful entries in the 1956 national competition for the commissioning of the settlement's layout. Lucio Costa (first prize), Boruch Milman and his team (second prize), Rino Levi and his team and the Roberto brothers' team (joint third prize), Henrique Mindlin and Giancarlo Pianti, Vilanova Artigas' team and architect Milton Ghiraldini and his team (joint fifth prize) designed the successful entries. These are shown in the book to feature common general principles: the urban ground as public property, functional city-zoning, the creation of neighbourhood units and super blocks, the diversion of traffic into specialized roads – leading to a separation of pedestrians and motorways and the removal of the traditional street – and dense geometric rational urban forms dispersed as a park-city. As modern architecture was fairly widespread in Brazil at that time, and the impact of *Charte d'Athènes* urbanism was becoming all the more apparent, the compilation of the awarded entries depicts how Brazilian architects and engineers translated modernist ideas into inventive urban forms. Other possible Brasília's are thus unveiled in this book.

While largely ignoring the controversy that surrounded the results of the competition (for jury member Oscar Niemeyer and first-award-winner Lucio Costa had had previous close professional associations), the book endorses the decision of the jury, for whom the new capital should be a 'functional city' and have 'its own architectural expression'. Indeed, Costa's entry, despite its poor