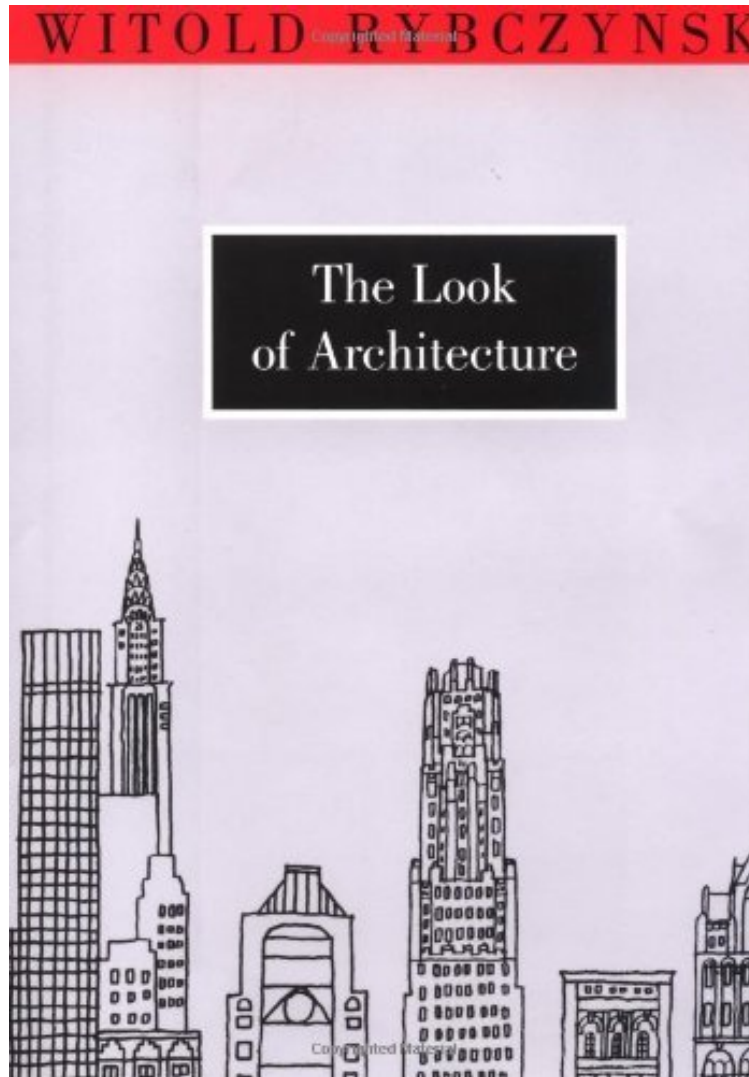


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The Look of Architecture (New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities)

Witold Rybczynski

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Witold Rybczynski : The Look of Architecture (New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Look of Architecture (New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities):

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Why architects hate the "s" word By Charles S. Houser This book consists of three lectures given by Professor Rybczynski at the New York Public Library (lectures he admits to revising for publication based on the need to respond to challenging questions from his audience). While not as innovative in topic and scope of inquiry as his books "Home" and "Waiting for the Weekend," there is much here that Rybczynski's loyal readers will recognize and appreciate--the author's love of his subject, his deep and broad

knowledge of the history of architecture, his high regard for the minutia others tend to dismiss, and his confidence in his own opinion. The three essays--"Dressing Up," "In and Out of Fashion," and "Style"--are an investigation, among other things, of architects' reluctance to speak of their work in terms of style. "Architects don't like to talk about style," Rybczynski says in his introduction. "Ask an architect what style he works in and you are likely to be met with a pained expression, or with silence." (p. xi). The lectures explore the differences between architecture and other art forms (including interior design, cooking, and the rag trade). Of the distinction between style and fashion, he says, "If style is the language of architecture, fashion represents the wide--and swirling--cultural currents that shape and direct that language." (p. 51) In the end, Rybczynski observes, "A suspicion of style is a heritage of the Modern Movement, which preached against the arbitrary dictates of style and fashion, while maintaining an unspoken but rigid stylistic consistency." (p. 109) He also attributes the reluctance to speak in terms of style to architects' fears (but I'll let you ferret out the provocative supporting quotations for yourself). The lectures are well-seasoned with aphorisms, and I found myself often lowering the book to my lap and pondering individual statements for minutes at a time as if in conversation with the author. I will leave you with just one more of these statements, "The role of details is not to complement architecture; details ARE architecture." (p. 94) All in all, I found "The Look of Architecture" to be a very enjoyable read. 6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Fabulous Book By A Customer Any book by Rybczynski is a delight to read and contains a wealth of information and fresh ideas. "The Look of Architecture" is no exception, and while it is not as groundbreaking as "Home," it is a carefully written analysis of Architecture that is chock-full of examples to illustrate what he's getting at (a few more pictures would be nice, though). 4 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful journey By Zhao Zheng While I finished the reading, the only thought in my mind is to read more references related to the writer's vivid-narrated lectures, as well as more books signed a name as "Witold Rybczynski".

What is style in architecture? "Style is like a feather in a woman's hat, nothing more," said Le Corbusier, expressing most modern architects' low regard for the subject. But Witold Rybczynski disagrees, and in *The Look of Architecture*, he makes a compelling case for the importance of style to the mother of the arts. This is a book brimming with sharp observations--that form does not follow function; that the best architecture is not timeless but precisely of its time; that details do not merely complement the architecture--details are the architecture. But the heart of the book illuminates the connection between architecture, interior decoration, and fashion. Style is the language of architecture, Rybczynski writes, and fashion represents the wide--and swirling--cultural currents that shape and direct that language. The two, style and fashion, are intimately linked--indeed, architecture cannot escape fashion. To set these ideas in sharp relief, he shows us how style and fashion have been expressed in the work of major architects--including Frank Gehry, Mies van der Rohe, Charles McKim, Allan Greenberg, Robert Venturi, Enrique Norten, and many others. He helps us see their works anew and ultimately to look afresh at our surroundings. Style is one of the enduring--and endearing--aspects of architecture, Rybczynski concludes. Furthermore, an architecture that recognizes the importance of style would not be as introspective and self-referential as are so many contemporary buildings. It would be part of the world--not architecture for architects, but for the rest of us.

From Publishers Weekly With his refusal to hide behind the jargon and hype endemic to the profession, and his ability to puncture its pretensions without mean-spiritedness, Rybczynski (*Home: A Short History of an Idea*) has become a leading writer on architecture. This concise survey of style in architecture is derived from three lectures the author gave in the New York Public Library, and the intimate, conversational tone he adopts manages to convey a lot of information in a very agreeable way. Indeed, Rybczynski's emphasis on style is itself provocative in a profession that has traditionally given such considerations short shrift. ("Style is like a feather in a woman's cap, nothing more," he finds Le Corbusier observing.) Add to this Rybczynski's referencing of interior design and fashion, and one has a book as iconoclastic as it is readable. Another great strength of the book is its delightfully discursive set pieces, including one on the buildings around Bryant Park this will have visitors to New York clutching this trim and portable book as they peer upwards at the rich mosaic of buildings so beautifully contextualized within. The range of the book is impressively wide, with many less familiar buildings (the Canadian Parliament buildings, the solidly elegant cottages of Alan Greenberg) given due consideration, and recent superstars such as Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim crisply observed. The author's deeply informed enthusiasm is infectious, and his removal of architectural writing from an airily theoretical discourse to the realm of practical experience is empowering for the lay reader. We all have to live in buildings, after all. (July) Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In his introduction, *New Yorker* and *Time* magazine contributor Rybczynski (urbanism, Univ. of Pennsylvania; *Home*) acknowledges that this book began with a series of three extemporaneous talks at the New York Public Library in fall 2001. Yet he still offers keenly observed and cogent commentary on the significance of style and fashion in architecture. Using anecdote, historical data, and descriptive prose to comment on Western architecture during the modern era, Rybczynski shows how the often dismissed discipline of apparel design finds its correlative in architectural fashion. An examination of three stair railings from Le Corbusier's Shodhan House, I.M. Pei's East Building at the National

Gallery of Art, and Bernard Tschumi's new Lerner Center at Columbia University interweaves a deep appreciation for how the materials of architecture are assembled with references to their diverse theoretical foundations. Illustrations are regrettably small and low in resolution. Even so, this book serves more ably as an architectural primer than James O'Gorman's *ABC of Architecture* (LJ 12/97) and should become a companion, if not a worthy successor, to Steen Eiler Rasmussen's *Experiencing Architecture* (1964). For all architecture collections. Paul Glassman, New York Sch. of Interior Design Lib. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

In three chapters adapted from lectures, Rybczynski discusses the ongoing relationship of architecture and style. Architecture, like style, mirrors the culture around it. In fact, the architecture of the day often explicitly mimics contemporary fashions. Rybczynski's exploration of architecture begins with definitions of it, among which Rybczynski prefers Renaissance critic Sir Henry Wotton's, and ends with laudatory remarks about Frank Gehry's revolutionary Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. Not that Rybczynski always praises the revolutionary or the dramatic. He scolds the so-called brutalists and indicts many moderns deemed great who won fame with the International style. He praises architects who build solidly, with style and flair but also with firm foundations, grace, and the public interest at heart. Rybczynski's engaging brief social history of architecture concludes that "an architecture that recognizes style . . . would be part of the world--not architecture for architects, but architecture for the rest of us. And that would not be a bad thing." Michael Spinella

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