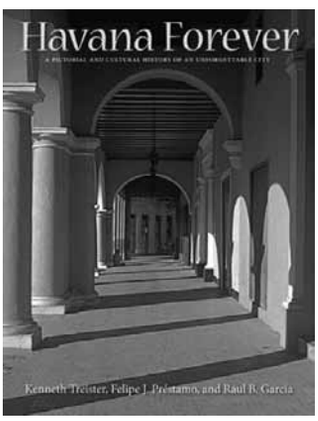
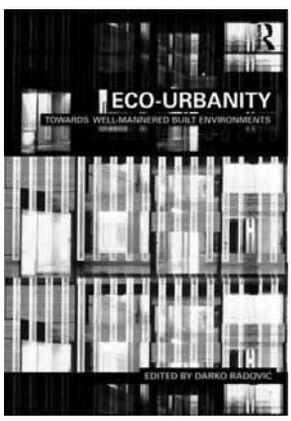
The amphitheatre from origins to the Colosseum

Urban design and eco-urbanity



Havana Forever: a Pictorial and Cultural History of an Unforgettable City
By Kenneth Treister, Felipe J. Préstamo and Raul B. Garcia
University Press of Florida
Gainesville, Florida, USA
336 pp.
ISBN 978-0-8130-3396-9
£42.50 rrp (hb)

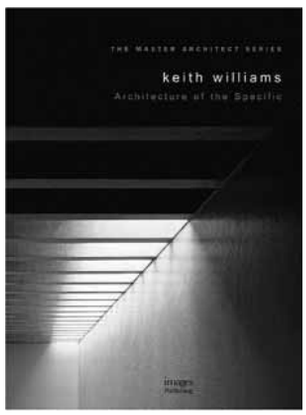
Havana Forever offers a survey of the city's architecture with some historical observations on the city's development. It is copiously illustrated with general shots of the city and includes some interesting archival material – old postcards, maps, old photographs. The book may provide a useful starting point for someone planning a visit. A chapter entitled 'The Cuban Zest for Life' is focused firmly on the dancers in fish-net and thong costumes and has not much to say about the space of the dance. The saving grace of the book is that the authors clearly love the city. Do not expect in-depth presentation or critique. It has a bibliography.
JAO



Eco-Urbanity: Towards Well-mannered Built Environments
Darko Radovic (ed.)
Routledge
Abingdon, UK
264 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-415-47278-4
£27.00 rrp

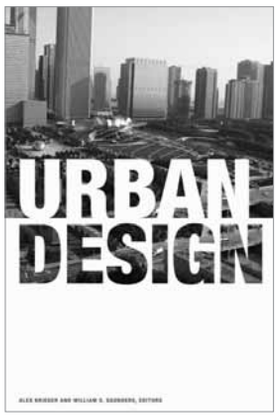
The introduction to *Eco-Urbanity* carefully places the constituent sixteen writings in the context of environmental and cultural sustainability. These works, produced by leading and notably culturally diverse practitioners and academics as a result of a symposium in 2007, provide historical and cultural context for a range of case studies. This work explores the specific in context while providing debate and critique to many, broadly Western, interpretations of sustainable solutions to city living including compact cities, density, transport and greening, representing the 'eco'; while throughout, a strong reasoned argument for cultural specificity in the emerging language of urbanity is reinforced. Through the voices of the contributors, multidisciplinary perspectives on what might be simply described as environmentally and culturally responsible or even, appropriate, urban design are provided. Central to this theme is an attempt to reaffirm the role of local, regional and cultural specificity in the development and design of the urban realms relevant to these specific economic, environmental and social regimes. This represents a written, direct and vehement response to the global, general homogeneity of existing and emerging global cities. While it is unlikely that this book would compel its readers to follow its narrative from cover to cover, particularly as some of the papers are of less academic merit than others, a number of the case studies in particular offer a useful range of reference materials to the field.
JG

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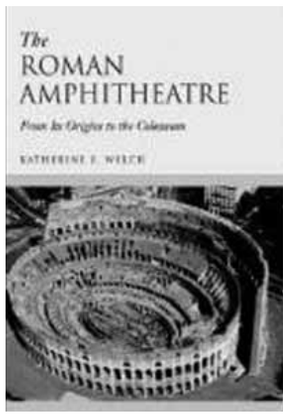
Architecture of the Specific
By Keith Williams
Images Publishing
Victoria, Australia
224 pp.
ISBN 978-1-86470-235-4
£35.00 rrp (hb)

In the interview with Sandra O'Connell that prefaces this collection, Keith Williams notes Arne Jacobsen, and works such as the Town Hall at Aarhus, as an influence; certainly there is a strong vein of Nordic rationalism and romance, civic presence and gesture, in the pre-eminently public projects of a practice which emerged out of Pawson Williams (co-founded 1987) in 2001. This is a strand of Modernism that enjoys conspicuous mass, as in the four engaged volumes of Athlone Civic Centre (2001–4). Here, and in many of the other projects, one can only wonder at the Jacobsen-like regard for detail; in the bespoke fittings of the Athlone Council Chamber, for example, in a building where the architects patented a new range of door furniture – projects like these seem descendants of another era of procurement. The publishers claim this book as a monograph, but the reader should not expect the detailed critical study the term implies. The book belongs to a growing genre in which an introductory essay leads to a portfolio of practice work, illustrated well, but briefly described. In that sense it is a useful presentation of a growing corpus of work, some of which is impressive.
SK



Urban Design
Alex Krieger and William S. Saunders (eds)
University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis, USA
368 pp.
ISBN 978-0-8166-5638-7
£46.50 rrp (pb)

This book might instead be called 'What is Urban Design?' – because that is its primary question. It is a reader organised in six sections. The first two look back, to the legacies of an 'influential' Harvard conference in 1956 which, the dustjacket claims, 'established urban design as a distinct architectural and planning practice'. Here, the book audits 'the urban design sensibility' and reviews half a century of urban design practice. The middle sections examine the territories of contemporary urban design and the concluding sections look forward – mostly with optimism – to the consolidation of an academic discipline, a democratic future and the 'postmetropolis'. The essays attempt to peg-out a theoretical ground for the academic discipline of urban design. They are offered, explicitly, as the view from Harvard. Surprisingly, this view surveys little of China or India, where cities are being built at scales and speeds almost inconceivable to those of us in the West. This shortsightedness is the book's most profound weakness. Its strength is in some of the gems it collects, including Denise Scott Brown on a lifetime's teaching and practice, and Edward Soja on the dangers of concentrating on a well-meaning simulacrum of urbanism, rather than the actual problems of urbanism.
AS



The Roman Amphitheatre. From its Origins to the Colosseum
By Katherine E. Welch
Cambridge University Press
Cambridge, UK
378 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-5217-4435-5
£28.99 rrp (pb)

As the setting for gladiatorial fights, the amphitheatre is still popularly understood as the quintessential expression of the 'breads and circuses' view of Imperial Rome. Katherine Welch's revisionist study offers a far more nuanced perspective. She traces the amphitheatre's origins to public displays in the Roman Forum, whose rectangular shape conditioned the subsequently monumentalised oval arrangement of temporary seating, and a long appendix is devoted to little known amphitheatres of the Republican period.
Built over Nero's Domus Aurea – which she convincingly argues was a quasi-public place – the Colosseum's role was as a representational type embodying Rome's militaristic culture. Echoing the synthesis of Greek orders on the upper two storeys with the Roman Tuscan below, a new form of public spectacle was devised. Drawn from violent and/or titillating Greek myths, it involved the real, and often grisly – and for women, sometimes pornographic – deaths of numerous condemned prisoner-actors: a chastening reminder for the populace of Roman civic values.
RW

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135510000175 Published online by Cambridge University Press