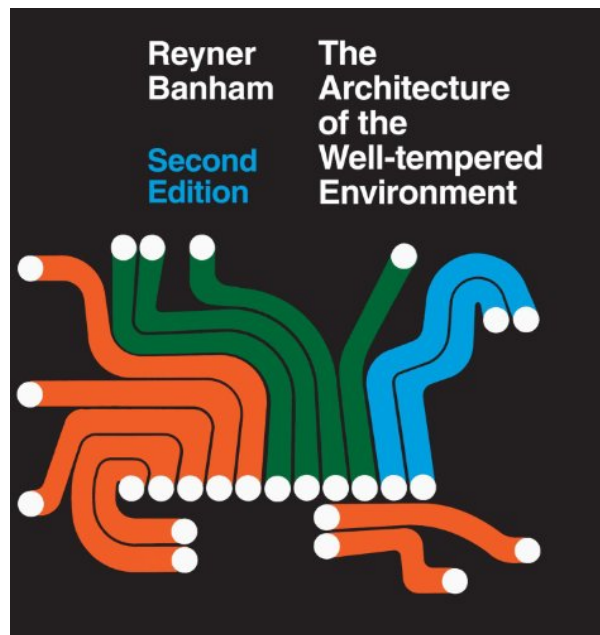
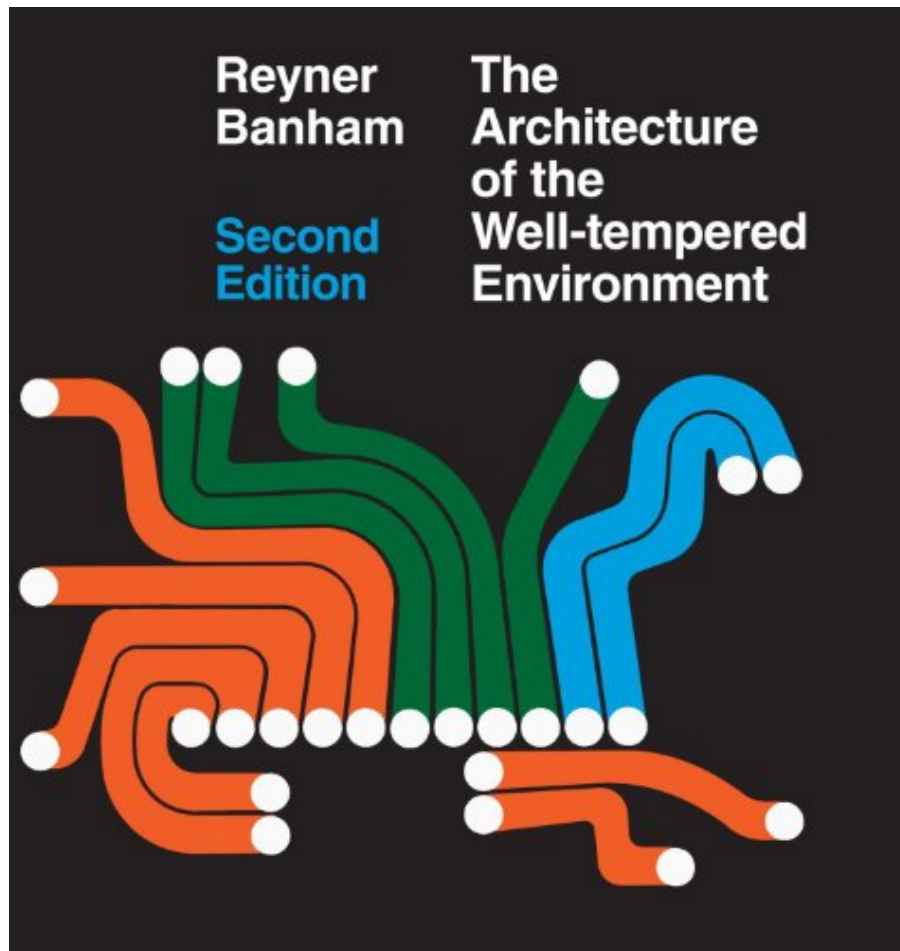


THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE WELL-TEMPERED ENVIRONMENT BY REYNER BANHAM



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This book is offered as a contribution to the history of architecture as normally understood and was produced by fairly conventional modes of architectural history writing. When the research for the present study was first put in hand, the intention was to write a purely architectural history; to consider what architects had taken to be the proper use and exploitation of mechanical environmental controls, and to show how this had manifested itself in the design of their buildings.

About the Author

Reyner Banham (1922-88) was professor of history at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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Reyner Banham was a pioneer in arguing that technology, human needs, and environmental concerns must be considered an integral part of architecture. No historian before him had so systematically explored the impact of environmental engineering on the design of buildings and on the minds of architects. In this revision of his classic work, Banham has added considerable new material on the use of energy, particularly solar energy, in human environments. Included in the new material are discussions of Indian pueblos and solar architecture, the Centre Pompidou and other high-tech buildings, and the environmental wisdom of many current architectural vernaculars.

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Reyner Banham (1922-88) was professor of history at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Truly Insightful

By None

Fresh on the heels of reading his "Scenes of America Deserta" (SIC) I was prepared for some architectural pedantry and was pleasantly surprised to find a book provocative in content and full of wonderfully appropriate and obscure case studies. The previous review mentions some of the beneficiaries of Banham's writings e.g. Sir Norman Foster but another Sir worth mention is Sir Peter Cook of Archigram and his Archigram cohorts--as Banham's Wikipedia bio will note, he was a member of the Independent Group that

was also anchored by Alison & Peter Smithson, and whose work seemed to predate that of Louis Kahn, many Brutalists like Kenzo Tange and Paul Rudolph. Instead, they shared a kinship with autodidacts like Archigram, Superstudio, Archizoom, Cedric Price, and one should also mention their Situationist brethren, from Constant Nieuwenhuys to Vito Acconci. In sum, Banham was there and the caliber and accuracy of his writing betrays the depth of what his involvement must have been.

That said, this book provokes consideration of the development of conditioned environments in buildings--innovations either taken for granted, or swept to the side by conventional architectural historians (and consequently by architects, asserts Banham) Remaining decidedly British in his skepticism, the author favors neither the functionalists nor the aesthetes who would hide the sometimes messy mechanical systems in order to achieve purely sculptural aims--but Banham bestows praise upon those for whom the product achieves a hybrid goal of form and function, with neither favored. His examples, from the Royal Hospital in Belfast to the Rinasce department store in Rome would be lost to history (in my opinion) had they not been set to print in this book. Additionally, his reading of Frank Lloyd Wright's work with conditioned air systems and general architect's sensibility is a breath of fresh air in a day when Wright's name is synonymous with pious exclamations and little scrutiny. Also a delight is the Olivetti Factory in Argentina, with its precast concrete tubular systems and tacked-on ventilation system that achieves its own beautiful, industrial aesthetic.

It should be noted that Banham was a great fan of Los Angeles, the desert of the Great Basin, and saw tremendous hope in the New World (esp. in the West) as a sort of 'tabula rasa.' Banham's legacy can be seen in this video: "Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles" which is a 30 min. film currently on YouTube, which is a great testament to his lucid observation and keen imagination--his historical knowledge also seems to be without parallel, quoting the usual regimen of Western and British architectural precedents while balancing the rote with his larger archaeological understanding of historical precedence and context. An example of this is his prescient inclusion of the various "Green Movements" one of which is in full swing in 2009 and it is important to acknowledge the bigger picture relationship to architecture: Banham notes that the purely functional solution might grossly miss the mark on an architectural level (and on a cultural level) by merely serving to satisfy the latest "do gooder" platitudes. As a student of some of the Archigram founders, I can attest to their cautions that the "do gooder" mentality is often more damaging as a result of a failure to assess the actual problem and to set artificial limits on a specific project that achieve two-dimensional aims but provide a failed building. The 'beware of piousness' is a valuable warning that should not be taken lightly, whether the flag is waving for green architecture, Louis Kahn (sorry, the Richards Medical Labs didn't work), Le Corbusier (oops, should have had an operable window or two)--ironically, it's Frank Lloyd Wright who comes out the best of the self-promoters, having decades more experience than those like Corbusier or Rietveld who struggled with modern innovations--it can be considered that Wright was forced to confront passive conditioning and had some tricks up his sleeve that he was better able to incorporate/augment into his architecture without over-exaggerating or over-concealing the conditioning system.

It is worth it to add that the author also anticipates the current LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) by predicting a form of "energy budgets" that would allow for innovation in sustainable design. He is quick to add that much of the industry is geared toward marginalizing the mechanical components of designs as subsidiary components, but he only briefly touches upon some of the downsides of these innovations: sometimes extremely cold or dessicated interior conditions make for a miserable occupant, and he did not seem to note the "sick building syndrome" whereby these systems or the buildings' integral components (like wall assemblies) became infested with mold, mildew, or integral toxins. Still, it is brilliant how he assigns credit, and refrains equally so when he considers an innovation to be a redux of some historical/archaeological model. Read how he questions the success of certain vernacular architectures--hallowed by the reaction against the International Style--but maintaining their own flaws. The

landscape isn't simple, and Banham tirelessly confronts it. Admirable.

There is a lot in here to reacquaint the architect with the fundamentals from his/her training, as well as much consider for the lay person, though it is a lot to tackle for someone outside of the realm of architecture/engineering/construction. All in all, it is a superb book critical to any designer or design team, and is all the more relevant during this resurgent green architecture movement. I can only wish that Banham could live another 100 years to continue providing his readers/listeners with his keen mind and wit.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Enlightening, Eloquent, and Entertaining - An environmental designer's "Must read"

By Hal Levin

Banham was clever, curious, and creative.

He discovered that Wright's marvelous purportedly natural house got all sorts of technological help.

He discovered that the photos of the purportedly undecorated grain silos in Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* (Vers un architecture) were actually air-brushed to get rid of the ornament and support Corbu's philosophy/aesthetic sense.

He was dedicate to understanding and able to relate the motivations for new technologies to their evolution in a broader way than the narrower views of engineers who might focus on a single environmental control technology as though the environment (built or natural or both) could really be divided into such artificial and almost arbitrary compartments.

His acumen and wit were superb, unique, and are sorely missed as we face more urgent needs for understanding the built environment and its relationship to the larger one. He was a sort of early building ecologist.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

An Excellent Book

By A Customer

This is an excellent book. I read it in the early 1970's and it has to be a classic as it has stuck with me all this time. By suggesting that the mechanical and electrical apparatus of our modern dwellings is more important than decorative appearance it puts forward the seminal concepts that have driven the architecture of Sirs Norman Foster and Richard Rogers, and today's High-Tech Movement in architecture.

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