



Architectural Expressions

Tony and Peter Mackertich

Much of our enjoyment in travelling to other cities comes from seeing and experiencing buildings in all their many forms. The great and serious works of architecture which uplift the spirit and challenge the intellect are often well described, but humans are playful animals too.

Delight and sparkle in the built environment are a rare occurrence and there are few buildings that respond to our sense of fun. Tony and Peter Mackertich have provided a loving account in this publication of the buildings that make us smile, and sometimes makes us wince.

Of course, many are in the US, where people can respond to their fun side unencumbered by dour planners and strict legislation, especially on the freeways in the city fringes. Advertising roadside joints becomes a pop art form in its own right and is of an enormous scale, without the constraints of building galleries to house the works. Some of the work only lasts for a short time and is tacky, but it is all part of life today and is there to be enjoyed and celebrated. Tony and Peter Mackertich reflect this well in a book with stunning photographs of exuberant hamburger and donut bars.

Their book begins with some dazzling photos of art deco with UK examples of the lamented lost Firestone building and the beautifully restored Hoover frontage on the A40 - 'Bauhaus with bells on', as they describe that chapter.

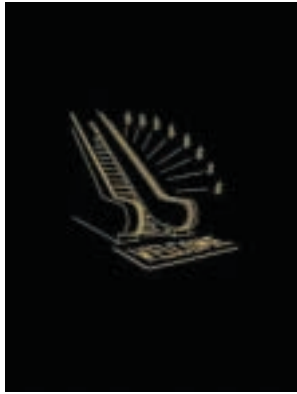
Then we get down to the real Architecture with a capital 'A' - when Modernism lost its monopoly and some architects became playful. 'Please don't give us a flat top,' said the AT&T client to Phillip Johnson, and in 1982 a new landmark emerged in New York: the Chippendale Highboy. Meanwhile in the UK, John Outram persuaded his water board client to have an outrageously stylised Egyptian temple for a pumping station in Docklands, which makes a rare treat amongst the serious money-making grey boxes of corporate capitalism.

The arch exponent of architecture that is serious yet fun is Frank Gehry, whose Aerospace Museum in Los Angeles is clear to all what it's about. His work is also beautifully illustrated in the Disney Ice building in Anaheim, California, with its swoopy roofs glittering in the everlasting sunshine. And his work achieves a grand climax in the Guggenheim Bilbao, beautifully illustrated here with dazzling photographs. 'They wanted a smile,' said Gehry, and we've got that plus a great deal more.

Back in the UK, Will Alsop is also putting places on the map for the first time with his Peckham Library. The architecture of this free expression is not only good for business if you want to sell donuts on the American Highway; it also gives people in Peckham and Bilbao a real sense of pride that someone has given them a strong new extra identity. The human animal needs more than simple shelter and pragmatic places - we need, especially in this secular age, to reflect our sense of fun as well as awe in creating our built environment. This book is a good introduction to all this.

Alan Baxter (Chief Executive, Alan Baxter & Associates)
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Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping

Rem Koolhaas (Editor)

This is a heavy, glossy, desirable tome, full of visual delights for architects, designers and their friends. Nearly 50 articles of varying lengths and styles, all lavishly illustrated, appearing in alphabetical order by title, give a first impression of *ad hoc*-ness. However as the reader moves from a detailed history of 'Disney Space' to a short piece on 'The Divine Economy' (the development of the mega-church), connections inevitably spring to mind. Pointers in the main text increase the impression of interconnections, of a school of thought from which all these pieces have emerged: for example, the Disney article refers back to 'Air Conditioning' and onwards to 'Gruen Urbanism' and 'Ms. Consumer'.

Koolhaas and company have settled on a way of thinking, and writing, about the world rather than about retail per se. It is assumed from the start that shopping and society are more or less interchangeable conceptually, and often co-located physically. Any public space has desire lines, key views and routes, environmental conditions that encourage visitors to dwell or to move on, and 'products' or 'experiences' for those visitors to buy or choose or react to. This book explores the technologies, theories and trends which lie behind the creation of public spaces of the past and present. Underscored throughout is the important role shopping plays in a history of public space and public life, from the Athenian Agora to the Crystal Palace to the Japanese *depato* and the Mall of America.

Pursued through anecdotes and images is the argument that if you want to know about society what you need to study is shopping. Like it or not, shopping is *the* primary form of public activity in developed countries and the residents of those countries understand the language of a retail street far more easily than the traditional signals of a church or a museum. When a public space is refurbished and rethought, shopping invariably gets more space, more prominence and a more dominant role in defining the 'sense of place' and motivation for a visit (e.g. any museum, airport or rail station you can think of). The lessons of the suburban shopping mall (despite the decline of the form) are drawn on to design an airport concourse, or indeed revitalise an urban business district.

We can draw a number of conclusions: a) that developers see an immediate return on R&D investment in the design of retail spaces and therefore shopping has recently (not for the first time) been at the leading edge of urban design; b) that shopping has become a major public pastime in the world's richer countries, considered by many adherents to be a critical form of self-expression ('retail therapy'), and the providers of a range of services and activities have recognised that people gravitate towards places where they can shop; c) that the blurring of the boundaries between shopping and activities such as museum-going has been accelerated by the growth of mail-order and on-line purchasing, making the shop itself a destination for brand-curious (and brand-loyal) visitors rather than necessarily/primarily a point of sale.

What does the future hold? More like Koolhaas' own conversion of the SoHo Guggenheim into Prada's New York flagship? Highly likely. Brand showcases (Niketown), urban mega stores (Barnes & Noble) and destination shops (Prada) - these are public spaces owned by retail brands. They offer events, experiences, art, food and drink, and much much more than shopping.

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