

MODERN LIBRARY

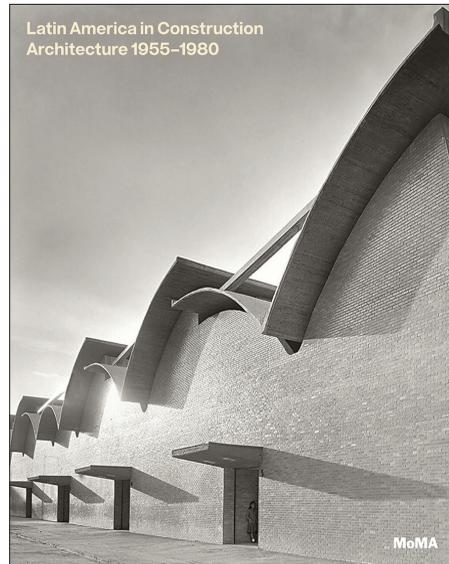
LATIN AMERICA IN CONSTRUCTION: ARCHITECTURE 1955–1980

*Edited by Barry Bergdoll, Carlos Eduardo Comas,
Jorge Francisco Liernur and Patricio del Real*

Museum of Modern Art, 2015
320 pages; 560 images (238 color, 322 b/w)

For too many of us, Modernism in Latin America begins and ends with Brasília, the absurdly futuristic city built in three-and-a-half short years in the interior of Brazil. Pressed to name a significant architect of the region other than Oscar Niemeyer it's likely Luis Barragán might surface after a long pause. *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980* opens up a whole other world, or continent, of Modernist experimentation. Published by the Museum of Modern Art to accompany its 2015 exhibition of the same name, the book is a visual encyclopedia of the region's significant postwar architecture. The featured projects range from massive state-driven development projects in capital cities, not least Brasília and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, to remote religious buildings, such as the highly abstract Iglesia de San Pedro in Uruguay, and private residences that are practically altars for nature. Special attention is given to housing projects, and rightly so considering that the shortage of affordable shelter in urban centers is as dire now as it was then.

The introductory essays provide helpful context for a complicated epoch. However they are not required reading to grasp the uniqueness and diversity of Latin America's modern architecture. A casual perusal of the chapters, which are organized by country, presents innovative formal and programmatic solutions executed almost exclusively by architects native to the country the projects are in. While one can detect European influences in the collection—Corbusian formalism here, Miesian order there, it is difficult to point out any as canonical International Style examples. Instead, the reader finds regional interpretations of the movement adapted for particular climates, the *genus loci* made more palpable



through materiality. This is perhaps what is most revealing about the book. Foreign architects were not parachuting in, as in so many megacities today. Rather, local hands with an intimate understanding of their country's past and desired future deftly intertwine the principles of Modernism with art, archaeology, and the landscape, often producing neo-indigenous yet profoundly idealistic structures.

Resuming where Henry-Russell Hitchcock's 1955 landmark survey, *Latin America Architecture since 1945*, left off, the book provides socio-economic context for understanding the region's architectural output. Industrialization at an unprecedented pace triggered a mass exodus from the countryside to urban centers severely ill-equipped to support such population growth. In response, state governments adopted "developmentalism" as their *modus operandi*. New highways, vast housing complexes, monumental government buildings, and whole cities materialized seemingly overnight. In many instances, this autocratically-driven change provoked national upheavals during a time when the contest between capitalism and communism reached peak intensity. Such context is essential, because, as Barry Bergdoll makes plain in the preface, "Architectural modernism has almost always allied itself with the larger forces of modernization." Many of the works presented are as much about political statement-making as they are about addressing urgent needs.

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CLOG: WORLD TRADE CENTER

CLOG, 2014

168 pages, 68 illustrations

The World Trade Center towers are terribly familiar to us all, first as the paired pinnacles of the Manhattan skyline, then as the site of an unparalleled tragedy. How long has it been since we've thought about the complex as a remarkable work of architecture and engineering?

A monograph in the CLOG series on architectural subjects leads us through the huge project's design process and its reception by the design community. Like all CLOG publications, this one is assembled as a series of essays and "conversations," interspersed with graphic presentations of data, historical documents, and photos. Altogether, these fill 167 small-format pages that range from routine to revelatory. Forty contributors are listed.

The Trade Center's architect, Minoru Yamasaki, was never as much of a hit in the architectural community as with the broader public. He appealed to clients for a number of corporate headquarters, airport terminals, and institutions including Princeton and Harvard. For those unfamiliar with Yamasaki, he was born in Seattle, 1912, practiced mainly out of suburban Detroit, and died in 1986, his firm surviving well into this century. His own variety of Modernism, with attenuated arches and brightly white or metallic surfaces, paid apparent homage to the Mughal architecture of India.

The issue's narrative begins in 1962 with the Port Authority's choice of the architect—from a list of 12 finalists that ranged from the design stars of the time (Mies, Johnson, Pei, et. al) to the more pragmatic specialists in office building design (Welton Becket, Kahn & Jacobs). Most of them were busy with other major projects, and Yamasaki was the one who aced the question "Would the key principal devote his full attention to the project?" The New York pragmatist firm teamed with him to execute the 15-million-square-foot project was Emery Roth & Sons.



The issue goes on to explore the complexities behind the rather bland geometries and surfaces of the twin towers. Innovative strategies were applied to achieve high percentages of flexible office space. One crucial device, novel at the time, was the structural tube concept, with support concentrated in the building's core and its exterior walls, replacing the prevalent grid of interior columns. Wind effects on the proposed shafts were subject to intense studies that advanced that whole field of research. An early use of computers made it possible to distribute structural steel of several different strengths depending on stresses at given points, thus optimizing structural efficiency. The tower's designers also pioneered the use of express elevators to "sky lobbies," where passengers transferred to reach the highest of the 115 floors. CLOG's texts and graphics—including reproductions of actual working drawings—explain these technological refinements in detail.

While the twin towers inevitably became iconic, representing the city in many movies (listed in CLOG), critical reactions to their architecture were rarely positive. When the designs were unveiled, reigning critic Ada Louise Huxtable of *The New York Times* published a mixed reaction: "...could be the start of a new skyscraper age or the biggest tombstones in the world." But her elder in design

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ANDREW GELLER: DECONSTRUCTED

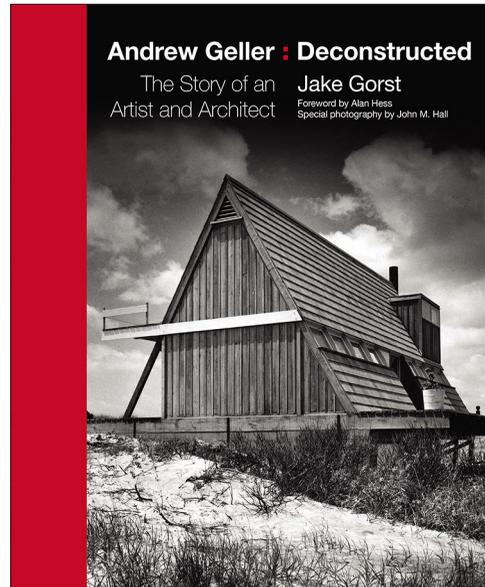
By Jake Gorst

Glitterati, 2015
200 pages

Andrew Geller (1924–2011) is best remembered for low-tech, high-energy beach houses across Long Island that revealed “how far a little plywood and a lot of guts will take you.” We got a taste of Geller’s work in Alastair Gordon’s *Beach Houses: Andrew Geller* (2003). Like all great performances, Gordon’s elegant little volume left us wanting more. Jake Gorst, Geller’s grandson and archivist, expands upon Gordon’s opening salvo with a personal account of his grandfather at work and play. It is the story of a gentle idealist finding his way in a sharp-elbowed field.

To offset the creative limitations of his corporate gig with the office of Raymond Loewy, Geller began moonlighting as a beach house architect in 1953. But the resonance of these houses owed much to Geller’s day job, where he designed everything from logos to camera housings to exhibition spaces. None of his gadget-like escape pods looked alike, but all of them exploded the box with splayed, rotated, and spiky contours—anything to leverage maximum affect at minimal cost. Cheeky pet names (often supplied by Geller’s wife Shirley) like “The Grasshopper,” “Raspberry Baskets,” and “Reclining Picasso” veiled their radical domestic agenda. To live in a Geller home was to sign up for an artful form of camping. However inadvertent, they were instantly recognizable triumphs of branding. The public and the popular press loved them.

His professional peers largely held their applause, at a time when International Style modernism was at its doctrinaire height. As Alan Hess writes in his



fine foreword, “Andrew Geller never seemed to fit in.” Jake Gorst pulls no punches in cataloguing the professional slights that accompanied Geller’s long and sometimes precarious career. In 1983, with prospects drying up, Geller applied for a position with the Store Planning and Construction division at Lord & Taylor. Their rejection letter prominently bore the logo that Geller had designed. He turned increasingly to painting in his later years. Despite many behind-the-scenes struggles, a contagious playfulness permeates his life and his architecture. The owners of the bow-tie shaped Pollack House (1960) hung a tire-swing inside its butterfly roof. Footprints on the ceiling attested to its vigorous use.

A remarkable draftsman, Geller produced sketches evoking the spirit of the man who created them as much as his architecture. Alas, the photography and the overall book design are often less compelling. But readers will find plenty to like in this wistful recollection of an architect at close range. Andrew Geller deserves all of the attention that he can get.

— CHRISTOPHER RAWLINS

MIDCENTURY HOUSES TODAY

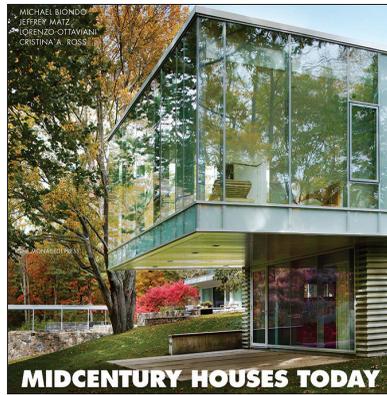
By *Lorenzo Ottaviani, Jeffrey Matz, Cristina A. Ross; Photographs by Michael Biondo*

Monacelli Press, 2014
240 pages; 200 color illustrations

As Modern architecture passed from newness into history, the term “midcentury Modern” came to describe the variant that accompanied America’s postwar economic boom. Authors Jeffrey Matz and Cristina A. Ross, presumably recognizing the label’s ubiquity, felt confident enough to drop the word “modern” altogether from their title. Whatever else was going on in American building culture at the time, *Midcentury Houses* is understood to mean *Modern* houses, in this case a special cache of them in New Canaan, CT. With photographer Michael Biondo and graphic designer Lorenzo Ottaviani the authors formed a collaborative, *Moderns on Modern*, to explore the challenges of adapting historically significant Modern buildings to current circumstances and carry forth the notion of Modern as a mindset, not a style.

In his introduction John Morris Dixon, former editor-in-chief at *Progressive Architecture*, lays out the unique confluence of geography, changing social patterns and professional migrations that helped establish New Canaan as an East Coast hotbed for the new architecture. The town eventually came to include over 100 Modern houses—many of them by internationally known practitioners such as Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, and Edward Durell Stone—of which about 90 still exist. *Midcentury Houses Today* presents 16 of these, chosen as “exemplary survivors,” with special attention placed on the challenges surrounding their preservation.

A small number of New Canaan’s Modern houses are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, though this provides little in the way of protection. Nor does special zoning the town enacted in 2004 to encourage alternatives to demolition. Most often their fates are bound to their owners’ willingness to act as guardians and cultural stewards. In the case of these 16, the enthusiasm of their owners for the design ethos, if not the stylistic specifics, of the original houses informed their



decisions when it came time to wield hammers and saws. Some of the houses underwent significant modifications, such as Breuer House 2, first built in 1951 and essentially rebuilt from the ground up and added onto by architect Toshiko Mori in 2007. Others remain almost unaltered, such as the Noyes House 2, of 1954, which today is essentially a time capsule, with even the interiors as they were when Eliot and Molly Noyes lived there with their family.

In each chapter one house is introduced through a timeline, brief description and small period photograph of the house in its original state. The timelines chart changes in ownership and successive alterations, listing the various architects involved. The project descriptions often include testimony from owners and architects past and present, recounting various challenges faced and decisions made. Original and current floor plans are included for each house, redrawn in a clear, consistent graphic style that makes it easy to spot the changes between the two. (The helpful inclusion of north arrows marks the authors as architects.) The primary content, however, is Michael Biondo’s new photography showing the houses in their current form. Most of the ten to 20 pages allotted to each house are given over to Biondo’s large, carefully composed images, many of them double-page spreads. Immaculately furnished and appointed with prominently displayed artwork, the houses are shown at various times of day, with New England’s diverse seasons ever-present in interior as well as exterior views thanks to that signature feature of midcentury Modernism, the very generous use of glass.

— TIM BUTLER

PHILIP JOHNSON AND HIS MISCHIEF: APPROPRIATION IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

By *Christian Bjone*

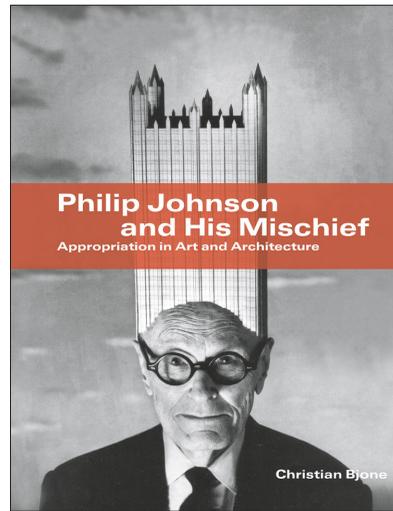
Images Publishing, 2014
96 pages, 94 color + 104 b/w illustrations

“Don’t worry about that. It’s only architecture.” That’s not the most important sentence in this book, but it sticks in the mind. The author cites it as one of Philip Johnson’s responses to feedback during client presentations. Literally accurate or not, it epitomizes Johnson’s sly commentaries on design.

In this slim but jam-packed book, Christian Bjone wisely makes no attempt at a comprehensive survey of this architect’s long and controversial career. As the title indicates, his focus is strictly on Johnson’s “appropriation”—his explicit re-use of architectural forms and features from diverse works of the past.

Bjone compares Johnson’s appropriations and those of artists such as Andy Warhol and Richard Prince. The comparison is apt for the period—roughly 1960s through 1980s—when the figurative and derivative returned to all the arts. But Johnson, as Bjone emphasizes, was ahead of the curve. He not only championed the work of Mies van der Rohe from the 1930s on, but imitated his designs openly as he launched his own practice in the late 1940s.

The book documents Johnson’s relatively widely known appropriations, such as the notorious Chippendale top of his 1984 AT&T Headquarters in New York, his homage to the 18th-century architect Nicholas Ledoux in his 1985 College of Architecture at the University of Houston, and his salute to Frank Gehry in the 1995 visitor center to his own Glass House compound in New Canaan, CT. And there are lesser known instances, such as the near-replicating of Burnham & Root’s long-lost Masonic Temple Building of 1892 in Chicago in his own 1987 office building, 190 South LaSalle Street, near the original’s site, and his recollection of the Edwardian brick front of the 1908 All Souls school in London on his 1992 Mathematics Tower at Ohio State University.



Included is a chapter on several of Johnson’s urban design proposals, including a 1964 scheme for a whole city of 150,000—none of which were executed or look very feasible. His firm’s thoroughly workable, executed, and admirable plan for the first-phase development of New York’s Roosevelt Island is not included—presumably since it imitates nothing identifiable. And Johnson’s 1984 PPG Place tower in Pittsburgh, which adopts the form of London’s Parliament tower, cladding it entirely in glass, is not mentioned—even though it appears, appropriated as a crown for Johnson himself, on the cover of the book.

Bjone writes about Johnson’s work and his related wry wit from an insider’s perspective, having worked as a project architect at the firm of Johnson/Burgee Architects, and while there leading the archival research and editing of four books on Johnson. For the 190 South LaSalle building, a drawing he had xeroxed at the Chicago Historical Society became the basis for the design.

In this idiosyncratic volume there are many insights into the thinking and design processes of this highly influential architect—with implications for the broader architectural narrative.

—JOHN MORRIS DIXON

PERLSTEIN, *continued*



M. HENRY CHERNAY BUILDING, c. 1967

new development in the borough. All the more reason to uncover the story of Jerome Perlstein, one of the unsung architects who helped give the vernacular architecture of Queens its midcentury Modern twist.

— FRAMPTON TOLBERT

Visit www.queensmodern.com to learn more about Queens Modern past and present.



BEAUTIFUL BEATRICE BUILDING, 1975



DO ALL EASTERN COMPANY, 1955

LATIN AMERICA, *continued*

That much of the content in *Latin America in Construction* is new information—some primary source material, obscure even to in-country researchers—speaks to the need for continued focus on the subject and broad dissemination of new scholarship. The book’s annotated bibliography offers valuable content in itself. For each country profiled it not only lists books, articles, and exhibitions that have emanated from the country, but also a helpful backstory about the local architectural discourses of the period and the dissemination of ideas or lack thereof. Arguably, this bibliography is *Latin America in Construction*’s greatest contribution, a foundation from which to bridge the gulf between Latin America’s modern heritage and a world that has much to learn from it.

— MARISSA MARVELLI

WORLD TRADE CENTER, *continued*

criticism, Lewis Mumford, called the designs “sheer disaster.” Huxtable’s views soon hardened, as well. After the towers’ completion, she dubbed them “blandly undistinguished.” She expressed the widely held view that Yamasaki’s treatment of the tower façades, especially the curvilinear transition between the lobby columns and the more closely spaced ones above, was overtly “Gothic.” The issue includes reproductions of the revealing letters the architect and the critic exchanged about her damning critiques.

As this CLOG makes amply clear, the World Trade Center is more fondly viewed in painful memory than when it actually existed.

— JOHN MORRIS DIXON