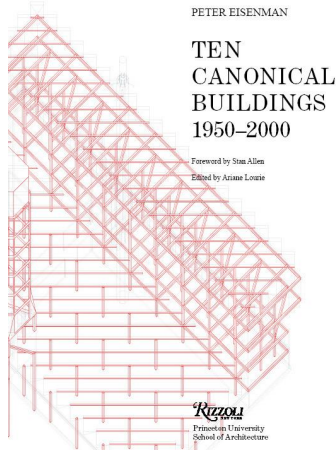


Ten Canonical Buildings, 1950-2000 / Peter Eisenman.—New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., July 2008.—304 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-8478-3048-0 (cl., alk. paper): \$60.00.



Providing an interpretive look at ten post-World War II European and American buildings, Peter Eisenman introduces the book as an exclusively theoretical treatise on a set of buildings he regards as canonical—buildings that bear multiple meanings, that are multivalent in nature, and that cite external references. In his introduction he emphasizes the value of “close reading,” that is, looking forward to what the building inspired and backward to its references, with a regard for “before and after.” He distinguishes between the great building, one that may not rely for its richness on external references, and the canonical building, one that acknowledges the past, breaks with that past, and provides a link with the future. Thus, he regards the canonical building as historically significant in its being “a hinge as well as a rupture.”

In his quest for canonical buildings—those that allow for dialog with the past and the future—Eisenman has omitted buildings he considers great (and not referential), such as Frank Gehry’s design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. These ten he has anointed as canonical by virtue of their historical resonance: Luigi Moretti’s Casa “Il

Girosolo,” Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House, Le Corbusier’s Palais des Congrès-Strasbourg, Louis I. Kahn’s unbuilt Adler and DeVore Houses, Robert Venturi’s house for his mother, James Stirling’s Leicester Engineering Building, Aldo Rossi’s Cemetery of San Cataldo, Rem Koolhaas’s Jussieu Libraries, Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum, and Gehry’s Peter B. Lewis Building at Case Western Reserve University.

Although the introduction sags under the weight of excessive post-modernist theoretical language, the chapters—one is devoted to each of the buildings—provide illuminating analyses and descriptions, such as the “disruptive symmetry” of the Farnsworth House, which is the author’s interpretation of this modernist icon’s order, explored in the shortest chapter of the ten. In tracing the three-year evolution of the Vanna Venturi House, the author provides the most comprehensive analysis of the floor plan and its geometry available in print.

Intended presumably for practitioners and critics engaged in architectural dialectics—Eisenman is particularly attuned to Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1977)—this book, owing to its isometric projections, made expressly for this publication, will also be of considerable value to architectural design students interested in parti analysis. The author, in addition to his provocative architectural designs, is an accomplished lecturer and writer, employing language that is usually intelligible, if not always original.

Meticulous in its design, the book employs large-face type for the initial chapter pages, ample black-and-white illustrations on substantial, coated paper, and as mentioned above, highly informative isometric projections. Bibliographies correspond to each chapter, and the index is useful. Regrettably, the text makes few references to figure numbers, reducing the utility of a well illustrated volume.

Other than the two unbuilt works by Louis Kahn, each of the buildings selected for inclusion is already in the canon of modern architecture as established by most histories of the period. Nevertheless, *Ten Canonical Buildings*, with its careful verbal analyses and stunning diagrammatic material, belongs in all architecture collections.

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