
Rematerial belongs to that class of architecture books whose glossy pages offer professional architects, students, and general readers a gallery of projects on a given theme. But in this case the pages are made from 100% recycled fibers and, rather than loft apartments or exclusive shops, the theme is reusing waste products as building materials. The advantage of this type of publication lies in the chosen theme and the authors’ selection of projects that may not be covered in great detail elsewhere. Such is the case here, where the concept is novel and the works selected range from a simple shelter made of tires in Cape Town to a classroom space with a recycled cardboard structure in Essex and an architectural office housed in a converted barge in Ghent.

In the introduction, authors Alejandro Bahamón and Maria Camila Sanjinés advocate for a reappraisal of what the world chooses to throw away as trash and express their hope that the architecture profession will come to embrace the reuse of such materials in order to offset the environmental impacts of both construction and garbage. Throughout the rest of the book they demonstrate how waste materials have been recycled by up-and-coming young designers and established architects to create projects that also work within the local environmental and social context. The types and reuses of materials in the featured projects are diverse, including both natural and manufactured materials and lesser and greater degrees of recycling, and the built designs range from basic structures to sophisticated buildings.

Multiple color photographs and a plan, site plan, elevation, or preliminary sketch are included for each project. There is also a two-page diagram for every design that details how waste materials were recycled and used, from the railroad ties used for the façade of the Azkoitia Municipal Library in Spain to the components of an old freeway that became part of the Big Dig House in Lexington, Massachusetts. A bibliography and a list of the architects whose work has been featured, along with their contact information, completes the book.

As one of the few books on its topic Rematerial stands out in the field of sustainability and design publications and it would be a good addition to any collection that covers this territory. Building with Reclaimed Components and Materials by Bill Addis would be a logical companion volume as it provides the technical and how-to information not covered in Rematerial but lacks the color photographs and range of projects that are Rematerial’s strengths.

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