The Young Architect Library

15 Influential Books about Architecture and Career

By Michael Riscica
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Architects & Their Obsessions with Books

Certainly the subject matter is not the same for everyone, but the notion that everyone has a guilty pleasure usually rings true for the masses. Mine happens to be books, actually exclusively architecture books. I will always have the time and money for great architecture books. They have always been fundamental to my growth, learning and successes as a Young Architect.

My love for books started at a very young age. My mom and I spent countless hours at the library when I was young, pouring through the stacks as if they were all going to be taken away at some point. Whether it was trains, magic, fishing or even picture books of monsters, books were my escape and my educational resource at once.

As the world leans in to technological advancements, physical books are going by the wayside, and quick, easily resourced web pages are replacing my educational encounters. Is it necessary to read the entire book, when I can get the virtual cliff notes in a moment’s time? Truth be told, the internet is great for a lot of things, like how to learn the ins and out of your new smartphone in less than an hour, and exactly which order those ingredients should be placed in a pot to make the perfect beef stew. The internet exceeds our expectations daily, and without it the seemingly endless supply of electronic devices I have purchased would practically be rendered useless.

Certainly we can all agree that when it comes to finding the perfect (fill in the blank) for your (fill in the blank) it is found much easier on your tablet than it is in a library. There is absolutely no question that things like research information, dieting and even brain exercises can all be completed from the comfort of your own home, with the glare of your laptop leading the way, better than a stroll through the library can accommodate. The difference is, that does not ring true for every subject, and architecture is one where physical books will always provide the edge.
This “edge” exists on a number of levels. First, the beauty of photography can really come to life within the pages. As your fingers move from building to building, you brush over the pages with a gentle understanding of the genius upon the page. Electronically, that feeling does not exist. Sure, there is beauty in digital images, but nothing like that of a large, gothic building staring up at you from a heavy, glossy page in black and white.

I have always felt that books are real.
Sure, the Internet is cool, but it’s just not real.
The old adage, “you are what you eat” couldn’t be more true. The way you feel after a meal is a direct indication of what you ate, and I honestly believe that is the case on all levels of your existence. **You are what you eat. You are what you think. You are what you believe.** All of these things that happen in your day to day life are a culmination of the things you ingest physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Certainly we cannot always make the best decisions, all of the time. However, when you consider what you are taking in, it is easier to weed out the bad with a simple glance. Food is usually easier, as you absolutely know that eating fast food is going to make you wish you were dead an hour later. Television is another easy example, as it is literally possible to watch programming that makes you feel less smart. Books and reading, in my mind, are the very same.

“Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.” - Gandhi
The Young Architect Library

This E-Book began as a laundry list of all my favorite architecture books, but after a lot of writing, I realized that compiling an Ebook around my favorite books was becoming a never ending story. I decided to change the direction of my goal and share with you my most influential books about architecture and career. By most influential I mean that these books have directly changed the course of my thoughts, actions and life.

This ebook was written for:

- Young Architects .....Yep, and the old ones too!
- Architecture Students
- All the badass’s taking the Architect Exam.
- The guy that always wanted to be an Architect, but...

The goal in writing this E-book is to point you in the direction of some very powerful information. These books have changed my life only for the better and I hope that they do the same for you.

This eBook is available for free to anyone who wants to download it from my blog. All I ask in return is that you share with me your favorite architectural influences too.

You can leave a comment on your thoughts regarding the eBook, or deliver a completely new list for others to see! Let’s share the beauty of this amazing career and help others begin to love it more – or again – just as much as we do! Here goes nothing!
Architecture: Form, Space, and Order by Francis D. K. Ching

This is the quintessential educational book about architectural design. So much so, in fact, that it has been referred to as “a cookbook of architecture.” Professor Ching breaks down many different types of architectural problems, solutions, elements, including types of spaces and the overall relationship of elements. The fundamentals of architecture are delivered through simple diagrams and illustrations. Professor Ching enhances the education through drawings of historical buildings to demonstrate how time-tested architectural ideas apply in the bigger

Who is it for?

Anyone who designs anything or thinks about space. It is an excellent resource for finding similar problems to the design my currently be working on. This book has draftically shaped you perceive the built environment.

Major Takeaways

Spatial relationships have long been difficult to explain, let alone provide solutions for, and this book defined the otherwise unknown qualities of examining space within space.

Buy at Amazon
Unbuilding by David Macaulay

In this fictional tale that would awe anyone who has ever even seen the Empire State Building in an image, let alone in person, David Macaulay spins a story of dismantling the landmark after it has been sold to an Arab Prince. The building must be taken apart and shipped to the Middle East, its new home. The book provides a detailed account of the building’s history, along with the schematics of deconstructing such a large building to move it elsewhere. The book includes drawings that paint an amazing picture of the undertaking of deconstructing the Empire State Building.

Who is this book for?

This great fictional tale is perfect for anyone who is interested in the Empire State Building, New York history or who is captivated by cityscapes.

Major Takeaways

The story of the building process (or “Unbuilding” in this case) is just as fascinating as the design process. It is also a great reminder that there is a story behind every building or design.
Building Codes Illustrated: A Guide to Understanding the International Building Code by Francis Ching

Love it or hate it, but International Building Codes are a HUGE part of who we are as architects, and this book provides the best educational resource for understanding the details: Illustrations, Graphics and Diagrams.

Who is this book for?

This book is great for visual learners, which most architects and engineers are. This helps avoid confusion or intimidation when dealing with the mysteries of codes.

Major Takeaways

Reading and understanding building codes is not as complicated as you think. This exceptional book provides easy access to the information you need to design and build without pulling your hair out.

*Disclaimer - IBC Illustrated is a learning tool not a code book. Make sure you designs meet your local applicable building codes.

Buy at Amazon
The E-Myth Revisited by Michael E. Gerber

E-Myth dives directly into what is causing so many small businesses to fail throughout the United States: Owners. When entrepreneurs are plagued by the idea that they are the ONLY person who can make their business successful, they spend too much time micromanaging others, while burning themselves out in the process. They also often recreate the situation they were originally fleeing from.

Who is this book for?

Anyone who has said “...someday I would like to have my own business and be my own Boss.” Yeah! Great idea! You can definitely do it, but read this book first.

Major Takeaways

There are a number of exceptional takeaways in this book, including time management skills, creating and delivering good work, hiring good people, and creating systems within the business that will support you – not make you work harder.
Condemned Building by Douglas Darden

Darden was a theoretical architect and professor, who died shortly after the release of this book. His projects are ominous, often cryptic and sometimes include sexual undertones. Darden himself describes these projects as “the underbelly of canonical architectural principles and forms”. His inspiration for each project are outlined and the drawings and models are absolutely beautiful, giving this book top billing in the architectural category.

Who is this book for?

This book is for Designers, Artists or anyone with a deep appreciation for great work. This book has singlehandedly been revisited by me more than any of the others, and it is an invaluable addition to my architectural library.

Major Takeaways

Architecture is not always nice. This book will either scare you or give you a breath of fresh air, while inspiring you at the same time. The drawings and models from this book are gorgeous and highly inspirational.

Side note: Of all the books I have on architecture, this one is the most amazing. In fact, Darden’s work spanned so many avenues of architecture that his dark genius only became more of a draw. In this book Darden introduces a project he did for a sex shop in New York City, but does not show the project due to its explicit nature. After his death, the project was discovered hidden in his studio and was later published in the “Journal of Architectural Education, Volume 58 Issue 2.” You should look it up.
Precedents in Architecture by Roger Clark and Michael Pause

Precedents in Architecture takes the historic buildings we all know and love and systematically break them down into simple diagrams. Once they are listed simply, the diagrams are used to illustrate the following elements: circulation, solid/void, structure, natural light, plan to section, geometry, symmetry, balance and parti.

Who is the book for?

Students, Designers and People who want to understand these great buildings spatially.

Major Takeaways

Architecture is a series of layers and systems working together. When you can analyze these systems and layers independently, the educational factors shine through.

Buy at Amazon
The War of Art by Steven Pressfield

The War of Art defines the obstacles that disarm many highly intelligent people during their creative process, allowing them to breakthrough to their fullest artistic expression. Pressfield calls this “resistance” and the other identifies his craft and overcoming this resistance as a variable of war. Once the resistance is beaten, the book examines the creative genius that takes place when an artist has achieved a fluid, uninterrupted workflow.

Who is this book for?

This book is for anyone who struggles with creative barriers, and even those who have trouble finishing a project at all. In the end, the book is about discipline and how having it will help you conquer every task in front of you.

Major Takeaways

This book explains how being part of the process through natural attendance is half the battle, and that doing the work is the easy part. This book will open your eyes to resistance and rewire your discipline.
Experiencing Architecture by Steen Rasmussen

Experiencing Architecture is a primer on architectural design written for a beginner or someone with very little design experience. The book looks at a number of buildings, objects and artwork to teach about space, color, scale, rhythm, texture, lighting, color and acoustics. Rasmussen does a wonderful job of helping the reader see and understand the poetry of architecture.

Who is this book for?

This book is literally for everyone. I first read this book when I was 20 years old, and was only thinking of becoming an Architect. Having the fundamentals so beautifully presented, I became inspired to proceed forward.

Major Takeaways

Striving to masterfully demonstrate the fundamentals of the details behind architecture is the essence of any successful project.

Buy at Amazon
The Artist’s Way by Julia Cameron

The Artist Way is the go to book for artists who feel stuck or blocked in their creativity. In fact, it is also for those who simply are not tapping into their fullest potential as artists. The Artist Way has proven exercises to help you move past the creative block that is keeping you from getting started, or moving forward.

Who is this book for?
Creative people who are not producing at the level they enjoy, and those who would like to begin using their creative side more.

Major Takeaways
The takeaway for everyone will be different, but for me it was journaling to get the unfiltered stream of consciousness out of my head. This frees up the necessary space in my brain to actually DO the work.
Architect Registration Exam Review Manual by David Kent

Ballast

It pains me to put this book on the list. It is hard to read, and I hated every second of it, but it is an incredibly important tool for success in taking the Architecture Registration Exam. The ARE Review manual contains all the divisions for the ARE in a single resource. There is so much technical information contained inside this book I frequently use it in the office to reference information that I learned during the exams, that carries over to real world architectural projects.

Who is this book for?

Anyone who is taking (and wants to pass) the Architect Registration Exam

Major Takeaways

The key to passing the architect exams is using a number of different resources to ensure your bases are covered: This is one of those resources.

Check out the Ultimate list of ARE study Materials for an inclusive list of information used for taking the ARE.

Buy at Amazon
Ornament and Crime is an essay arguing the “against” theory using ornamentation that adds absolutely nothing to the architectural validity. Loos argues aesthetics should be an expression of the function, rather than aesthetics being applied as an afterthought. Loos makes the connection between tattoos (ornamentation) and criminals (it was written in 1908 when only criminals in jail typically only had tattoos) and uses this to present his case against useless decoration. It is a fundamentally interesting take on ornamentation.

Who is this book for?
Anyone seeking to understand early modernist thinking, and how it applies to architecture

Major Takeaways
This essay will either annoy you, offend you, or change the way you look design and question if having that ____ (fill in the blank) is really necessary to the integrity of your design or its just there to look pretty.
Lebbeus Woods is practicing architecture in another dimension or even possibly the future. This book is almost a comic book of his gorgeous renderings. I’m not sure I could tell you what this book is about besides a collection of some extremely intense renderings. This is the rarest Lebbeus book and in my opinion the best.

Who is this book for?
If you are ready to be wowed by renderings you never thought possible – or dreamed existed – this book is for you.

Major takeaways
A breathe of fresh air.
I found this book at a time when I was buried in writing specifications, long hours of drawing construction drawings and needed to be reminded that sometimes practicing architecture and making money can be 2 very different things.
Education of an Architect by John Hedjuk

This vivid architectural collection of student work from Cooper Union School of Architecture opens your eyes to all of the things new and exciting about architecture, while reminding you that it is a very specific, science and math focused profession. This book is a collection of talented works, studies and thesis projects from students ranging over a 12 year period. In addition to the student profiles and proficient projects submitted within, it also provides a glimpse of the spirited staff and the teaching roles that delivered such spectacularly talented students.

Who is the book for?

This book is for any and all architecture students who want to know exactly what to strive for in their educational years.

Major Takeaways

It takes more than a will, or a want to become an architect to make it so. The education, the drive, the sacrifice and the interaction of the staff makes a huge difference in how you succeed in this profession.
**Mastery by Robert Greene**

The goal of pursuing any profession – architecture included – is to become the master of your trade. In *Mastery*, Robert Greene taps into some of the greatest minds of past masters of their trade, including the lives and times of Charles Darwin, Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, and Leonard da Vinci. Not stopping with historical figures, Greene goes onto interview nine contemporary masters that include tech guru Paul Graham and animal rights advocate Temple Grandin. The book stands to debunk society’s myths about what leads to greatness in any field, while handing readers the text and information to create their own mastery.

**Who is this book for?**

*Mastery* was written for anyone who believes that great roles were destined for great people, instead of those who believe they can become the masters of their field. This book provides the tools necessary to look within and develop a masterful mind in your trade.

**Major Takeaways**

Life is too short to depend on others to take the lead and create success. You can carve your own path and become the leader just as quickly.
Architect? A Candid Guide to the Profession by Roger K. Lewis

With the very title of the book posed as a question, you know that you are in for a real eye opener with Architect? This book tells the inside story of architectural education and practice in a realistic and insightful tone. The unvarnished approach delivers candid quips about what people believe an architect does versus their realities. In addition the book explains and critiques architectural education from admission to workload and post degree expectations.

Who is it for?

This book is everything. It should be read by every aspiring architect or anyone who is in their first years of major discovery, with architecture on the radar. Since most people have no idea what to expect from their degree in this field – as you are not going to design the newest wing of the Guggenheim the day after you graduate, despite your wildest dreams – this book will enlighten you. Thanks to its candidness, that enlightenment may be more than you possibly hoped.

Major Takeaways

The main takeaway in this book is that reality gets in the way of the architectural profession. The creative thinking process combined with the education training you receive can be used in many different capacities, even if being a traditional architect is not the end profession for you.
Sharing Your Influences & Inspirations

At the end of the day, whether you are a college student or master of architecture, we all have something to share. In my case, I chose these books as a way to pay homage to my influences, and the writings that kept me sane in what can be an extremely chaotic field.

Each of these books brings something different to the table, whether it is a candid look at architecture or an ominous display of how all of our minds work differently, even when we are talking about a structured and organized field.

I am absolutely in love with architecture, and could not be happier to be practicing my passion. What I want to know is, what about you?

What are your most influential books about Architecture or career?

What books kept you going when 80 hours of work each week was enough to seemingly break you?

What books inspired you to stay the course or changed the direction of your life?

I would love to hear your top ten (or twenty!) list, so please feel free to share them in the comments. Our architectural community has always depended on each other to derive success, and I am certain some of you have read better books than me. Let’s hear it!

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Michael Riscica