

Education:
What is
Architecture

an Insight by Rob Adsett
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I have been practising it at a senior level for most of my life, and like many others, I still muse on just what constitutes Architecture and what is simply Building.

Many books have been written about this subject. It is akin to the debate over what constitutes Art and what is simply paint on a canvas.

My observation is that, for Architecture to occur, there needs to be a confluence of several things, but, preeminently...

There needs to be evidence of a MIND at work.

In other words even though the physical manifestation may resemble 'chaos', there is evidence of 'order' present in one form or another. This 'order' can take several forms.

"God is in the details!" shouted Mies Van der Rohe. Never a truer statement has been made. The easiest way to ascertain whether a 'mind' or designer is present is to observe the details.

Colour harmony or discord is also a strong indicator. Balance, harmony, repetition and relief also have their place. Perhaps this is why so many of the ancient buildings and structures that have survived from antiquity in Europe and northern Africa have an intrinsic quality about them...whether it be a simple structure as in say the Greek or Egyptian temples, or in more deliberate and ornate later church buildings.

Sometimes even the simple and necessary choosing of a local stone used in the construction of all sorts of small villages, with dwellings, fences, barns and the like exhibiting an "homogeneous" about them, can almost satisfy this criterion. A mind has been at work, because there has been a deliberate choosing of a material that has the effect of placing an influence by way of colour and detail over the finished result.

Mere Building, on the other hand, can often be the result of a slightly better than non-organised chaos. Materials and voids thrown together with or without much thought, tradesmen ad-libbing because no one has thought about tricky corners and odd pipes and conduits. Colour schemes produced by someone who has a liking for a particular colour or just because the paint is cheaper.



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Architecture can only occur when someone has stopped and considered the process, visualised the end result and then attempted to place a guiding hand on the outcome.

God is considered the Great Architect.

No one seriously denies this. Why? Simply because we see, in everything we do see, if we care to look behind the apparent randomness, DESIGN. Particularly in the details. If there is design there must be a DESIGNER. From the heavens above to the smallest molecule and DNA, we are confronted by the inescapable evidence of a mind at work.

In my opinion, unless we do see ample evidence of the architect's mind and influence at work in the finished product then our buildings will remain mere buildings and destined to be merely an agglomeration of building materials.

However, when we do see such evidence, we can then delight ourselves in tracking the process and the reasons why and the hopes and the aspirations that were attempted. Then and only then will the work become "special". Then, and only then can we truly have our spirits raised and experience that sense of the extraordinary that accompanies all great works of art and architecture.

Is it to do with the details? Totally.

What about the choice of materials? Yes, but probably more about the Control of them.

Is it colour? Or form? Or maybe trickery of planes and angles? Is it about making the building look like something else from some aspects? Is it interest? Drama? Contrast?

Is it harmony or discord? Good mannered or confronting? And so on and on. Yes yes yes, but more than that...if the finished work evidences a mind at work, everything is legitimised.

The result may be unsatisfactory to the beholder, it may cause upset and debate.

But it will be Architecture!

Rob Adsett

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