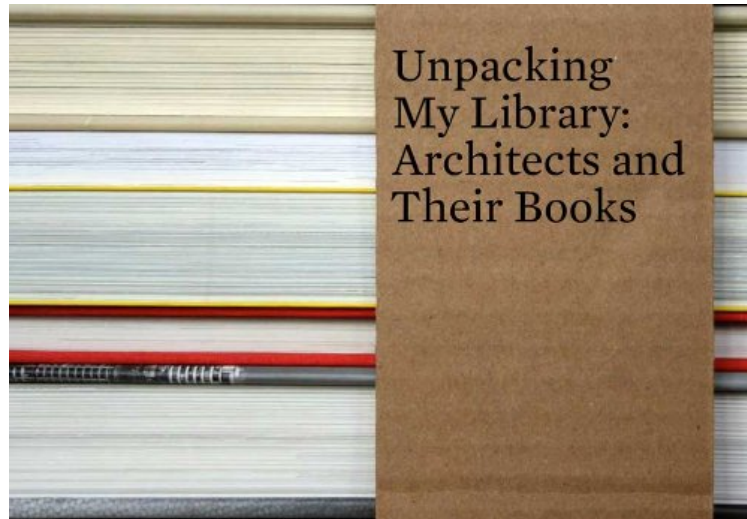


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Unpacking My Library: Architects and Their Books

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From Yale University Press : Unpacking My Library: Architects and Their Books before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unpacking My Library: Architects and Their Books:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Settimo VilardiNeat!30 of 30 people found the following review helpful. A boon for book fetishists and architecture buffsBy Philippe VandebroekIf you are one of those people who steers clear from the small talk at dinner parties and instead heads straight for your hosts' library to nose your way up and down the shelves, then this book is for you. Jo Steffens had the opportunity to peek into ten famous, largely New York-based architects' libraries - ranging from 750 to over 6000 volumes - and filled a book with snapshots from some of their shelves, short conversations about the meaning of books in their practice, and a top ten list of each. The experience is predictably labyrinthine. No surprise that we often bump into the likes of Corbu, Mies, Loos and Kahn. A strong showing, also, of key (proto-)postmodernist thinkers (as opposed to builders): Benjamin, Foucault, Derrida, Bataille, Deleuze. Rem Koolhaas' S M L XL is probably one of the few books to show up in all libraries, although it never makes it to the top 10 (his Delirious New York does, once). Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction is another fixture of the postmodern architectural scene. There is not an awful lot that refers back to older, pre-modern architectural practices (Michael Graves' library is an exception). And surprisingly little in terms of monographs on contemporary European colleagues (I don't think I saw anything referring to work by Rodgers, Piano, Herzog De Meuron, ...). There is, on the other hand, quite a bit of fiction on those shelves - a lot of which reminds us of the fractured, the layered, the tectonic: Finnegans Wake, Gravity's Rainbow, Moby Dick, The Man Without Qualities all figure in top 10 lists. Then again very few poetry books. Only one - Celan's Last Poems - show up, in Steven Holl's final selection. The overlaps fascinate, but so do the differences. Stan Allen betrays himself as a systems thinker, Michael Sorkin as a political activist. Tschumi's kinetic, cinematographically oriented aestheticism contrasts with Holl's more quiet, contemplative disposition. Eisenman, as an arch-postmodernist, provides a counterweight to Michael Graves' penchant for solidity and monumentality. And then there is the way in which these architects arrange their books, the types of shelves they choose, the kinds of ordering they impose. I love Henry Cobb's classic, meticulously designed embedded bookcases. But I am also mesmerised by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien's home

library, where books, in no particular order, are surrounded by mysterious objects. The conversations are very short and serious and point to graver questions about the nature of the architectural practice in a world that is dominated by the computer, the virtual. Graves: "I want to know where we've come from. And I see students now being excited by the way they can make an object turn in space, inside out and upside down, using the machine. That in itself has become the moment of discovery. But it doesn't engage human concerns, or the myths and rituals of the origins of architecture. I don't see the interest in books and literature, not necessarily books, but the literature of architecture, as I once did." Inevitably, one cannot escape the temptation to peruse this book as a kind of catalogue, disclosing significant tracts of unknown bibliographic repertoire. But this requires patience. There is no index of all the books shown, nor is there the ease of automated search as ians are used to. The only accommodation is that his little book can be easily turned to 90 degrees so as to facilitate the navigation of this fascinating and comforting landscape. 15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Building a library By Robin As I've been a fan of cut-down trees all my life 'Unpacking my library' would seem the ideal addition to add to my shelves in the book jacket and design section. Architects are the obvious choice as the book's subject, by their nature they are tidy folk and the professional and personal titles they own are sure to be in a photogenic format. The only other creative people I can think of who could be the subject of a similar book are graphic designers, artists in their studios would probably have books scattered everywhere. The ten featured architects are all presented in the same format: a general shot of their library (oddly these are all in black and white) and a nice touch, I thought, were captions about the shelving dimensions, manufacturers, materials and the number of books. Bernard Tschumi has the most at six thousand. An interview follows, which I found mildly interesting then close-up color photos of some books on the shelves so spines can be read by turning the book sideways. These shots are number keyed into the black and white overview photo. Finally the ten nominate their Top Ten Books, presented on a spread as cover thumbnails and what is the only book that pops up five times: Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, so no surprise there. Reading the spines reveals no great surprises either, a mixture of architectural titles (several have a copy of 'S,M,L,XL') and culture. (Are the real revealing titles in another room?) Liz Diller and Ric Scofidio share a copy of 'Jocks nerds', books on cars and highways. Bernard Tschumi has a copy of Philip Nobile's 1974 'Intellectual skywriting' and quite a few movie and photo related titles and obviously copies of his own books. Stan Allen has 'Facts about Finland' and 'Mart Stam's trousers'. Peter Eisenman has 'The Sun Records collection'. Should I be pleased that I found a handful of titles that I have on my shelves, well, maybe. Overall a quirky and fun book about books. The landscape format works well as does the design which was by Pentagram. Could the next book be 'Unpacking my library: novelists and their books'? ****SEE SOME INSIDE PAGES by clicking 'customer images' under the cover.

What does a library say about the mind of its owner? How do books map the intellectual interests, curiosities, tastes, and personalities of their readers? What does the collecting of books have in common with the practice of architecture? Unpacking My Library provides an intimate look at the personal libraries of twelve of the world's leading architects, alongside conversations about the significance of books to their careers and lives. Photographs of bookshelves—displaying well-loved and rare volumes, eclectic organizational schemes, and the individual touches that make a bookshelf one's own—provide an evocative glimpse of their owner's personal life. Each architect also presents a reading list of top ten influential titles, from architectural history to theory to fiction and nonfiction, that serves as a personal philosophy of literature and history, and advice on what every young architect, scholar, and lover of architecture should read. An inspiring cross-section of notable libraries, this beautiful book celebrates the arts of reading and collecting. Unpacking My Library: Architects and Their Books features the libraries of: Stan Allen Henry Cobb Liz Diller Ric Scofidio Peter Eisenman Michael Graves Steven Holl Toshiko Mori Michael Sorkin Bernard Tschumi Todd Williams Billie Tsien Peter Eisenman's Recommended Titles: Robert Musil, The Man Without Qualities Le Corbusier, Vers une Architecture Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology Andrea Palladio, The Four Books on Architecture Walter Benjamin, Illuminations James Joyce, Finnegans Wake William Faulkner, Light in August

About the Author Jo Steffens is director of Urban Center Books and editor of Block by Block: Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York City.