



The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World

By Deyan Sudjic

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The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World By Deyan Sudjic

From one of the world's premier architecture critics, a groundbreaking dissection of how the colossal egos of the powerful and wealthy determine what actually gets built--of the real reasons why we build.

Architecture critics most often write about buildings as a form of art, promulgating an "auteur theory" of architecture that focuses on the dazzling brilliance of the big names, such as Rem Koolhaas and Frank Gehry, and underplaying the role of the wealthy and powerful in forcing the architects' hands. Deyan Sudjic puts forth a boldly contrarian view. Architecture must be understood as an expression of power and as a weapon, or form of propaganda, that is used in ways both subtle and grandiose as a means of achieving and maintaining power--of carving a legacy out of glass, steel, and stone.

While most architecture books focus on a certain building or a specific architect, *The Edifice Complex* takes a wide-angle look at a fascinating range of buildings and large-scale building schemes--both the impressively effective and the disastrously ill conceived. In a lively and wonderfully accessible narrative style, Sudjic takes readers behind the scenes of the stories of the great political manipulators of architecture in the twentieth century, from the great dictators of fascism--Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin--and their megalomaniacal plans for rebuilding Berlin, Rome, and Moscow, to power-broker businessmen such as Nelson Rockefeller; and from the "theme park" propaganda of the presidential libraries to the vainglorious symbolism of Saddam Hussein's Mother of All Battles Mosque. While some leaders have used architecture as a means of consolidating control over a nation, others have employed architecture to shape a new national identity, as Ataturk did to a large degree of success in Turkey and the shahs attempted and failed to do in Iran.

But what of the architects? Sudjic also examines the role they play in lending their talents to these efforts, from those who have all too willingly aided and abetted, such as Albert Speer, to those who have courted the powerful while remaining true to their art, such as Mies van der Rohe.

The Edifice Complex offers a brilliant reinterpretation of the role of buildings in our lives and of the age-old question why we build.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Everything is political, especially architecture, Sudjic demonstrates in this provocative consideration of the world's most notable architectural triumphs and the masters who commissioned them. From Stalin to Mitterrand to Saddam Hussein, argues Sudjic, "architecture is used by political leaders to seduce, to impress and to intimidate." The evidence is all around us, he says, even in the attack on New York City's Twin Towers, which he views as "a literal acceptance of the iconic power of architecture." Zipping through pre-Partition Pakistan, Nazi Germany, modern-day New York and back, Sudjic shows how buildings are employed to demonstrate a state's power, to build a nation's cultural identity and to assure leaders that their legacies are both admirable and memorable. As for the architects who design such iconic structures—from Hitler's confidant Albert Speer to ground zero's "therapist" Daniel Libeskind—Sudjic reveals that they often have motivations that are startlingly distinct from those who hire them. Sudjic's research is thorough, and his prose lively and sharp. But his accounts can be meandering and chaotic, jumping in one instance from Malaysia's Petronas Towers to the background of a September 11 suicide bomber. Architecture connoisseurs will appreciate the gossipy histories and the original lines of thought, but readers less familiar with the subject may feel dizzied by Sudjic's erudite collages. (Nov.)

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From Booklist

Starred Review Sudjic, the architectural critic for London's *Observer* matches an electrifying writing style with an invaluable international perspective and a shrewd understanding of the politics of architecture to create a unique and revelatory history of modern architectural excess, the bitter fruits of what he calls "the edifice complex." Tyrants are especially prone to this syndrome, including Saddam Hussein, who was inspired by Hitler and his architect, Albert Speer, and Stalin, who also built self-aggrandizing monstrosities based on a "pathological obsession with size, symmetry, and a blatantly literal iconography." Sudjic switches to less-brutal forms of architectural follies, such as Nelson Rockefeller's deplorable Albany Mall, and takes architects to task for other monumental projects in which "form no longer follows function--it follows image." Sudjic writes with particular vigor about the unparalleled building boom in Beijing. And in his lively critiques of trendsetting architects Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, Yung Ho Chang, Rem Koolhaas, and Daniel Libeskind and the controversy over the World Trade Center site, Sudjic astutely parses both the psychological and political dimensions of architecture, a timely subject given the sure-to-be heated debate over how to rebuild the hurricane-ravaged Gulf states. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

Intellectually robust look at the delicate relationship between profound design and filthy lucre. -- *Kirkus Reviews*, October 1, 2005

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dolores Wade:

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