



The Classical Language of Architecture

John Summerson

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The author's purpose is to set out as simply and vividly as possible the exact grammatical workings of an architectural language. Classical architecture is a visual "language" and like any other language has its own grammatical rules. Classical buildings as widely spaced in time as a Roman temple, an Italian Renaissance palace and a Regency house all show an awareness of these rules even if they vary them, break them or poetically contradict them. Sir Christopher Wren described them as the "Latin" of architecture and the analogy is almost exact. There is the difference, however, that whereas the learning of Latin is a slow and difficult business, the language of classical architecture is relatively simple. It is still, to a great extent, the mode of expression of our urban surroundings, since classical architecture was the common language of the western world till comparatively recent times. Anybody to whom architecture makes a strong appeal has probably already discovered something of its grammar for himself.

In this book, the author's purpose is to set out as simply and vividly as possible the exact grammatical workings of this architectural language. He is less concerned with its development in Greece and Rome than with its expansion and use in the centuries since the Renaissance. He explains the vigorous discipline of "the orders" and the scope of "rustication"; the dramatic deviations of the Baroque and, in the last chapter, the relationship between the classical tradition and the "modern" architecture of today. The book is intended for anybody who cares for architecture but more specifically for students beginning a course in the history of architecture, to whom a guide to the classical rules will be an essential companion.

The Classical Language of Architecture Details

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Uaba says

I read it in Portuguese. It's the best book about Classical Language on Architecture. It's clear, succinct and easy to read. It goes from the first civilizations to use that form of expression, to the latest.

Scott Abercrombie says

A refreshingly unpretentious history of architecture overview, focussing primarily on Anglo / Italian exemplars. Would have been a 5-star review had it not been for the authors dismissal of the Greek Revival in Architecture, which was only allowed a couple of pages, and also happens to be my favourite of the styles!

Mana H says

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Magdalena says

Summerson's six radio lectures about architecture is a short read, very easy to follow. It guides the Orders through the Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Neo-Classical, and Modern architecture, briefly explaining some of the greatest works and architects form these periods. The premise being that classical values lie in the harmonious relationships of parts, it is important to know why and how this ideal has sustained itself over time.

The book seems to skim over the surface of the matter, but still required background familiarity with the Orders (Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Composite/Italian). The book works well as an introduction to classical architecture and its values and shifts over time, but it is by no means a stand-alone kind of book. Also, probably since these lectures were broadcasted by the BBC, there is a lot of emphasis on British architects and buildings.

Three stars. I will never understand books on architecture that have tiny greyscale images, all pushed to the last pages of the book. Thank the heavens for Google Images.

Alper says

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Lukas says

i think this good book

Jason Copenhaver says

So far out of my depth.

Maryam Shahriari says

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fran says

I read this for my history of architecture course, and despite the eurocentric view, it's just a fun read (if you're an architecture student who is fond of classical architecture and hearing it be described to you floats your boat).

Othelie says

A surprisingly witty book about architecture. Very British, both in language and in the buildings chosen for comparison to other European buildings.

Anibal says

La arquitectura es un lenguaje que no se oye, sino que se ve. En este libro se te habla sobre la esencia

(simetria, orden, columnas, innovadores clasicos y modernos...) del clasicismo, uno de los dialectos mas puros de la arquitectura.

Ally says

Really useful for the course I was studying in classical architecture.

Guo says

an comprehensive introduction to the architecture between renaissance and late Baroque

Constance says

This is a good intro to classical architecture. However, it's a little too Brit-centric, which is forgivable since it was originally a BBC radio broadcast. Sometimes the author forgets that he's addressing a non-architectural public, so those college days sitting in an architectural history course definitely came in handy. But, with google images nowadays, I think a novice could work through this book and walk away with a keener eye for classical motifs.

Tomas says

O livro só peca pela constante necessidade de trocar de página para observar as figuras que o texto faz referência. O movimento moderno é avaliado muito precocemente o que torna seu texto pobre, além de cometer o erro de tentar estabelecer relação entre a linguagem classica e moderna, tendo a felicidade de não cometer o mesmo erro com o gótico.
