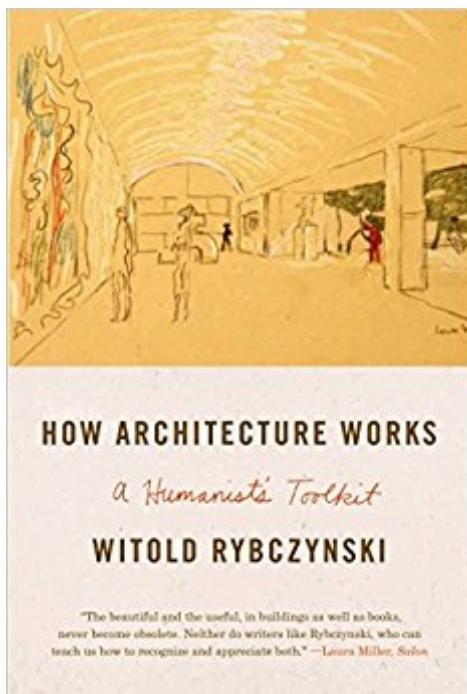


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# How Architecture Works: A Humanist's Toolkit



## Synopsis

An essential toolkit for understanding architecture as both art form and the setting for our everyday lives. We spend most of our days and nights in buildings, living and working and sometimes playing. Architecture is both the setting for our everyday lives and a public art form—but it remains mysterious to most of us. In *How Architecture Works*, Witold Rybczynski, one of our best, most stylish critics and the winner of the Vincent Scully Prize for his writing on architecture, answers our most fundamental questions about how good—and not so good—buildings are designed and constructed. Introducing the reader to the rich and varied world of modern architecture, he reveals how architects as diverse as Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano, and Robert A. M. Stern envision and create their designs. He teaches us how to "read" plans, how buildings respond to their settings, and how the smallest detail—of a stair balustrade, for instance—can convey an architect's vision. *How Architecture Works* explains the central elements that make up good building design, ranging from a war memorial in London to an opera house in Saint Petersburg, from the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., to a famous architect's private retreat in Princeton, New Jersey. It is an enlightening humanist's toolkit for thinking about the built environment and seeing it afresh. "Architecture, if it is any good, speaks to all of us," Rybczynski writes. This revelatory book is his grand tour of architecture today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Prize-winning architectural writer and University of Pennsylvania emeritus professor Rybczynski (*A Clearing in the Distance*) follows in the spirit of Steen Eiler Rasmussen's

classic *Experiencing Architecture* to supply an ideal layperson's handbook on the fundamentals of modern and contemporary architecture. Focusing on the functional and aesthetic considerations that define a building, and often calling upon his experience as an architect to illustrate major concepts, Rybczynski vividly explains particulars such as how to read architectural plans and how sunlight figures into designs, as well as discussing issues of style, history, and taste. While the book tends to address structure after structure at a speedy clip, the upshot is a commanding view of the field for beginners. An especially rich example is the walk-through of several designs submitted to the competition for the National Museum of African-American History and Culture: this not only illustrates how different architects respond to constraints, but also how such competitions function. Rybczynski is not a polemicist, but he effectively argues certain basic principles, and makes a cogent analogy to typography to show how the past always influences the present. Here, architecture is treated as craft executed with prudence and conviction. The author doesn't care much for theories, or buildings that fail to be practical, but welcomes a variety of design approaches, all of which make him a model teacher. 140 b&w illus. (Oct.) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

\*Starred Review\* "Architecture, if it is any good, speaks to us all." • With this maxim, the first of many clarifying observations in this conversational and invigorating treatise, Rybczynski deepens our understanding of all that goes into the design and construction of buildings. An architect, emeritus professor, and outstanding and prolific architectural writer, Rybczynski takes palpable pleasure in throwing open the doors to reveal the complex, often contradictory demands of architecture, illuminating "the practical as well as the aesthetic." • His "toolkit" contains 10 fundamental topics, from ideas to structural matters, the difference between a building's setting and site, and the importance of such seemingly prosaic details as balustrades. As he instructs us in the implications of the fact that "new buildings almost always have old neighbors," for example, he describes how Frank Gehry dealt with this challenge in funky Venice Beach, and the diverse approaches taken by top architects competing to build the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the Mall in Washington, D.C., and a new ballet-opera house in St. Petersburg. With fluent analysis of buildings by architects ranging from Louis Sullivan to Louis I. Kahn, Mies van der Rohe to Renzo Piano, a sweet absence of "isms," and an invaluable glossary, Rybczynski's expert, holistic, down-to-earth guide awakens us to architecture's profound humanness. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This book is an excellent survey of the various aspects one should consider when looking at works of architecture, and very satisfying and interesting, too. There are photos to illustrate most of the examples discussed, which is good, but not all, which is the reason for the 4 (rather than 5) stars. That said, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in a non-ideological discussion of architecture.

Good ! It helps me make principles and concepts of architecture clear.

Personal observations enlightening anyone interested in architecture

good book, as expected

On architecture for the layperson, there is none better than Rybczynski. He analyzes architecture in a way that encourages further study. You'll never look at a building the same again.

the evenhandedness, clarity, and organization of the material demonstrates the author's intent; explaining how architecture works and how we can evaluate it. ,

I wanted to dip my toes into architectural education and this was a great primer. Easy to read, but certainly not dumbed down. Accessible and interesting.

Arrived on time and was exactly as described.

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