

Suspending Modernity: The Architecture of Franco Albini

by Kay Bea Jones. Ashgate, December 2014. 370 p. ill. ISBN 9781472427281 (cl.), \$129.95.

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A summary glance at the cover photograph of this revealing new scholarly examination of the architecture, urban planning, and designs of Franco Albini will be enough to draw interest from fans of Modernist architecture. The image of the Piazza Fiume façade of La Rinascente Department Store in Rome shows a site specific playfulness that nods thoughtfully to tradition while bringing a refreshing buoyancy to spatial treatment. The interplay of colorful elements and unique, carefully-crafted construction details is keenly representative of Albini's architectural output in close partnership with collaborator Franca Helg. Outside of Italy, Albini is better known for his furniture designs, including the Luisa armchair and Infinito shelving units produced by Cassina, but this is something Kay Bea Jones, Associate Professor of Architecture at the Knowlton School of Ohio State University, and longtime student of this Rationalist master's work is setting out to change. Indeed one goal of this publication is to bring

much greater critical attention to all of Albini's achievements on the international stage.

Throughout the entire body of work, Jones highlights Albini's considered attention to context, and she frequently shines a light on the architect's demanding approach, which invariably treated each new design inquiry as an entirely new paradigm, guided by its own set of implications, settings, and context. Interior spaces are especially interesting in this work, and show Albini's tendency toward dividing rooms with screens, staircases, and shelves, creating subdivisions of larger rooms while retaining a feeling of openness and light. The spaces often feature an interplay of suspended features against transparent and diaphanous forms. A feeling of weightlessness prevails. Whether describing large public commissions such as the Fabio Filzi Housing complex or private residences like Villetta Pestarini (both in Milan), Jones offers a

thoroughly-researched, expertly-deconstructed analysis, all through the lens of an architect's eye, carefully attendant to details of craft and form.

While Albini's work, produced between 1930 and 1977, is gaining more attention outside of Italy, he's not widely credited on the same level as famed coevals of Modern architecture. Most actually know his design work, publicized in Giampiero Bosoni's outstanding work on Albini from the Minimum Design series, published in 2011. While *Suspending Modernity* offers a superior level of research and scholarly rigor, the Bosoni catalog shines in a crucial area that is sorely lacking in this new publication from Ashgate: photography. This is likely to limit the audience for this book and exposure to Albini's oeuvre. The photographs are often alarmingly poor and quite insufficient on the whole, both in scale and quality. Many lack contrast and critical focus, and sadly, the only color image is on the cover. This is an unfortunate facet of an otherwise stellar publication. Hopefully the diligent efforts by Jones will garner enough attention that another coffee table piece with a wider scope will eventually be produced to serve as a companion.