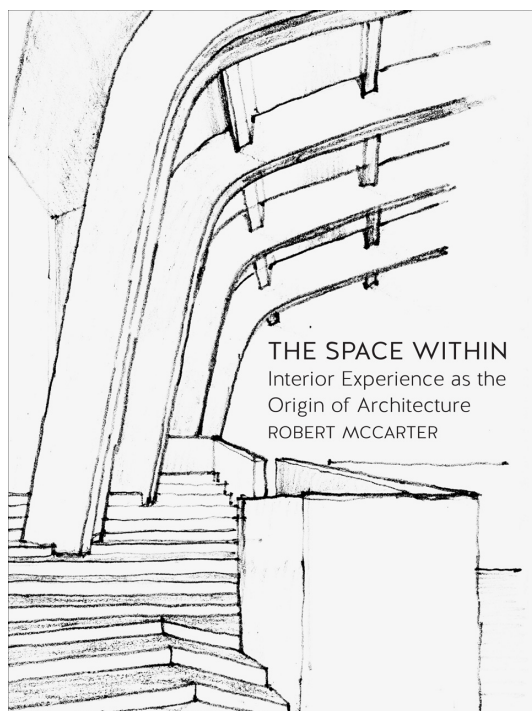


## The Space Within: Interior Experience as the Origin of Architecture

by Robert McCarter. Reaktion Books, December 2016. 176 p. ill. ISBN 9781780236605 (h/c), \$25.00.

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Robert McCarter has a long-standing interest in the experiential qualities of interior space. He has written extensively on the subject for decades but until now, he had not dedicated a full volume to this important topic. In *The Space Within: Interior Experience as the Origin of Architecture*, McCarter argues that, in order to really understand architecture, one must experience it directly. "In the end," he writes in his introduction, "the most important 'function' of any building is to enrich the experience and enhance the life that takes place within it."

McCarter is wary of an ever increasing "ocularcentrism" both in architectural design and criticism. He invites the reader to overcome "our obsession with exterior views and external forms in the representation of architecture" and presents a variety of ways to rediscover the richness and importance of experiencing interiors.

Although he argues that abundant examples of architecture can be found throughout history, the author mostly discusses the work of modern architects and dedicates a full chapter to the "conceptions of interior space" of Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier. As the book progresses, McCarter discusses the buildings and writings of these and other architects, including Alvar Alto, Carlo Scarpa, Aldo van Eyck, Louis Kahn, and Peter Zumthor. He also incorporates ideas from architects like Juhani Pallasmaa and Theo van Doesburg, and philosophers and other writers as varied as Gaston Bachelard, Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Walter Benjamin.

The book is illustrated with twenty halftones of the author's own sketches that reflect his interest in expressing what he understands as ineffable; experiencing a space. This device, however, is sometimes limiting not only in number. It is often true, that, as Loos believed, photographs cannot truly represent a space, particularly a complex one, but by not providing a quick visual aid, he forces the reader to rely on memory of plans and photographs seen elsewhere. Nonetheless, his arguments are rich and engaging and their relevance to current practice and discourse make this book a worthwhile read.

As a practicing architect, professor of architecture, and prolific author, McCarter exhorts fellow designers, students, and scholars to design, study, and celebrate not simply photogenic buildings but interiors that offer spatial experiences that are meaningful and memorable.