

Book Review: The Greening of Architecture: A Critical History and Survey of Contemporary Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design, by Phillip James Tabb and A. Senem Deviren

The Greening of Architecture considers how multiple strands of green design thought and practice have come to influence today's trend for eco-living and sustainable design. **Andrew Karvonen** finds that the most useful contribution of the book is the exposition of the multiple ideas and projects that have inspired and informed green and sustainable design approaches. By highlighting the complex and dynamic trajectory of green and sustainable design over the last half century, the authors provide inspiration for how these practices might evolve and expand in the twenty-first century.

The Greening of Architecture: A Critical History and Survey of Contemporary Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design. Phillip James Tabb and A. Senem Deviren. Ashgate. January 2014.

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Over the last two decades, green buildings and sustainable cities have become common currency in the design disciplines. Where did the drive for a greener built environment come from and how did it evolve from niche activities in the 1960s and 1970s to contemporary mainstream approaches embodied in green building assessment tools, demonstration projects, local and national regulations, multinational design firms, and high profile building projects?



In *The Greening of Architecture: A Critical History and Survey of Contemporary Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design*, [Phillip J. Tabb](#) and [Senem Deviren](#) present an expansive narrative that connects multiple strands of green design thought and practice from the 1960s to the present day. They argue that 'it is important to see the greening of architecture as an evolutionary process and cyclical ecology rather than simply a fixed set of strategies for a fixed period of time' (p. 2). The book is divided into eight chapters with a particular emphasis on the influence of architects in the evolution of green design and sustainability from the 1960s to the present.



After an obligatory introduction on the 'Origins of Green Architecture', the authors use subsequent chapters to explore the most influential thinkers, designers, and projects decade by decade. Many readers will be familiar with the ideas in the chapters on the 1960s ('An Environmental Awakening') and 1970s ('Solar Architecture') when notions of environmental protection were popularised and subsequently translated into design strategies. Meanwhile, the chapters on the 1980s and 2000s provide some new insights on how the notion of 'green' was gradually replaced by 'sustainability' and then became pluralised through the creation of multiple 'sustainabilities'.

In the 1980s chapter ('Postmodern Green'), the authors argue that postmodern design proponents provided inspiration for new conceptions of liveability and habitation by reviving vernacular architectural strategies as well as developing new approaches such as New Urbanism and Critical Regionalism. The authors write, 'where the greening of modern urbanism was initially focused on solar technology and housing developments in the last decade, new agendas were being hatched with postmodern influences in the 1980s' (p. 75). In effect, the language of modernism with its emphasis on clean lines, minimal ornamentation, and functionality was challenged by the embrace of social constructivism, the juxtaposition of different styles, and the celebration of difference and variety.



BedZED is the UK's largest eco-village. Credit: Tom Chance CC BY 2.

A wide array of designers and thinkers serve as touchstones in the 1980s, ranging from Glenn Mercurt and Sam Mockbee, to Christian Norberg-Schulz and Antoine Predock. Along with many others, they expanded the purview of green design by embracing aesthetics and appearance, particular geographic contexts, and human experience in addition to environmental performance. As the authors conclude, 'Postmodern urbanism in response to the placelessness of modernism and globalization began to promote concepts like romanticism, interdependence, self-organizing change, and the modesty of the everyday' (p. 76).

Likewise, the chapter on the 2000s ('Sustainable Pluralism') provides additional inspiration for green design practitioners. Whereas sustainable designers in the 1990s were predominantly focused on optimising building performance through the adoption of the latest technologies, design in the 2000s was influenced by a wide variety of disciplines ranging from physics and mathematics to biology, ecology, and climate science, as well as ecological economics, agriculture, geography, political science, and sociology. The authors argue that 'the greening of architecture after 2000 proliferated globally with more complex, larger programs and broader reaching considerations' (p. 134).

This resulted in a diversity of ideas of what sustainable architecture and design might be, as evidenced by high profile projects such as [BedZED in South London](#), [the High Line in New York City](#), [Findhorn Ecovillage in Northern Scotland](#), and [Masdar City in Abu Dhabi](#). In effect, sustainable design broke free of its roots in ecological modernisation to embrace resilience, hybridity, dynamism, connectivity, regeneration, integration, and social equity. In many ways, the emergence of multiple 'sustainabilities' in the 2000s mirrored the diversity that postmodern influence had on green design in the 1980s.

As a whole, the book lies somewhere between a textbook and an extended essay on green architecture and provides a general survey of the physical aspects of green and sustainable design. There is less of a critical perspective on the implications of these design strategies and how they resonate with and contradict the broader social, political, and cultural processes at play in the various decades. Moreover, the authors tend to emphasise thinkers, designers, and projects in North America and Europe (although the penultimate chapter by Deviren provides an all-too-brief global overview of green design) and the authors tend to favour the most well-known examples of green and sustainable design rather than introducing overlooked and forgotten examples from recent decades.

The most useful contribution of the book is the exposition of the multiple ideas and projects that have inspired and informed green and sustainable design approaches. The authors argue that 'a benefit of looking back in time is the ability to see the patterns and connections that may not have been originally visible' (p. 21). By highlighting the

complex and dynamic trajectory of green and sustainable design over the last half century, the authors provide inspiration for how these practices might evolve and expand in the twenty-first century.

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