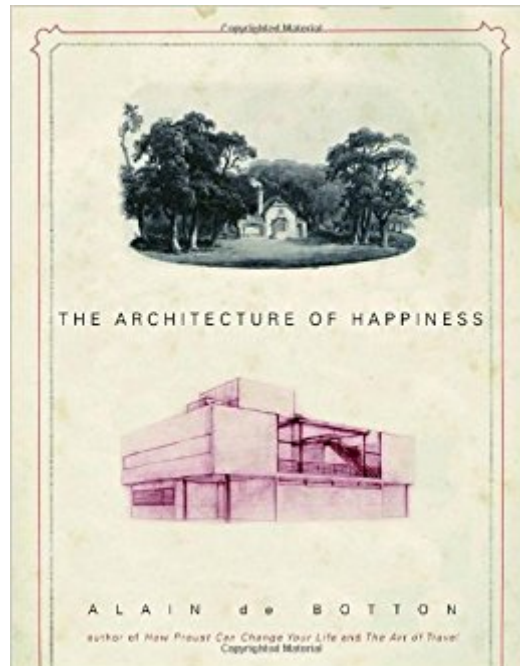




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# The Architecture Of Happiness



## Synopsis

One of the great but often unmentioned causes of both happiness and misery is the quality of our environment: the kinds of walls, chairs, buildings and streets that surround us. And yet a concern for architecture and design is too often described as frivolous, even self-indulgent. The Architecture of Happiness starts from the idea that where we are heavily influences who we can be, and it argues that it is architecture's task to stand as an eloquent reminder of our full potential. Whereas many architects are wary of openly discussing the word beauty, this book has at its center the large and naïve question: What is a beautiful building? It is a tour through the philosophy and psychology of architecture that aims to change the way we think about our homes, our streets and ourselves.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With this entertaining and stimulating book, de Botton (How Proust Can Change Your Life) examines the ways architecture speaks to us, evoking associations that, if we are alive to them, can put us in touch with our true selves and influence how we conduct our lives. Because of this, he contends, it's the architect's task to design buildings that contribute to happiness by embodying ennobling values. While he makes no claim to be able to define true beauty in architecture, he suggests some of the virtues a building should have (illustrated by pictures on almost every spread): order combined with complexity; balance between contrasting elements; elegance that appears effortless; a coherent relationship among the parts; and self-knowledge, which entails an understanding of human psychology, something that architects all too often overlook. To underscore

his argument, de Botton includes many apt examples of buildings that either incorporate or ignore these qualities, discussing them in ways that make obvious their virtues or failings. The strength of his book is that it encourages us to open our eyes and really look at the buildings in which we live and work. A three-part series of the same title will air on PBS this fall. (Oct. 3) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Alain De Botton, author of *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, *The Art of Travel*, and *Status Anxiety*, among other books, takes a humanistic approach in *Architecture of Happiness* and explores the ways in which our built environment affects us. He occasionally overindulges in florid prose, but critics agree that his more general observations of architecture are sound and interesting, if not entirely novel. The average reader will find much of interest in the broad range of eras, places, and styles that de Botton discusses. Well-placed photographs illustrate each point in the text. The book is so visual, in fact, that the BBC is making a three-part television series based on it, to air on PBS this fall. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

An enthusiast is, I think, the perfect guide to an interesting subject of which we know little. Alain de Botton is one such doцент and *The Architecture of Happiness* is a delightful overview of the eponymous subject. This is not a history of architecture but rather a meditation upon why it matters: how it impacts our lives and affects our moods; what are the component parts that make it a success or failure? There are general observations about the classical tradition and Gothic styles and the radical break of modernism. So radical was it that even professionals had difficulty, for a time, distinguishing between engineering and architecture. The author considers all styles worthwhile and seeks out the best within them. De Botton writes beautifully and passionately with helpful photographs or renderings that compare and contrast what he is extolling or criticizing. The final two chapters ("The Virtues of Buildings" and "The Promise of a Field") are particularly fine. In them, he discusses (among other things) order, elegance, balance, and coherence. The promise of a field is a paean to the spaces we occupy that were once either uncluttered or naturally beautiful in their own right. De Botton argues that if we are going to plop down a structure in the midst of nature (which already contains natural order, elegance, and balance) let us at least make it a 'best effort'. Put thought and consideration into the process rather than just utilitarian or worse, adding another scar on the landscape. Let's make cities like Edinburgh or Bath--conceived, planned and executed with purpose, not the awful sprawl of London or Los Angeles. I couldn't agree more. Very worthwhile.

Botton captures the essence of why we build what we do and dives into the reasoning of where our most treasured landmarks come from. This is a must read for anyone connected with the field of architecture and certainly a page turner for those who wish to be. The writing is very well articulated but can get a little dense at times. Not bad, just a lot of information. I found it best to take this book section by section with periods of contemplation between allowing myself to digest the content better. In my opinion, this is not a book to pick up for a quick read and easy discard. There are some very well thought out concepts within these pages and it is well worth the time to read it more than once. This book has found a place on my small shelf of essential reading.

This book approaches architecture from outside the field and begins to answer questions that architects have recently forgotten to ask. (What is beauty in architecture? What is style and in which should one build?) Required reading for architects and anyone considering buying or constructing a building.

The title is misleading, suggesting the book is about the structure of happiness. Familiar with some of De Botton's other works, though, I was eager to read this one too, and to learn why I am so viscerally impacted by my surroundings. I found the answer in this elegant phrase: "An ugly room can coagulate any loose suspicions as to the incompleteness of life, while a sun-lit one set with honey-coloured limestone tiles can lend support to whatever is most hopeful within us." I understand myself better through this book, and am consoled.

This book asks a question that has interested me for a long time -- what makes some buildings beautiful? Unfortunately, the author does not provide much in the way of answers. He does discuss some interesting ideas, notably the fact that ideas of beauty in architecture change over time. But he passes over this to go on to more timeless issues -- balance, elegance, etc. It all sounds very nice -- Mr. De Botton's prose is unfailingly elegant, sometimes irritatingly so. It just doesn't add up to much.

This is a thoughtful reflection on the history of architecture and the impact of architecture and design on us - how we react to a church, office block, home etc. It also looks at how and why we make personal choices related to design, decor, materials etc. I very much enjoyed the exploration of the philosophy behind Japanese design. On occasion, I felt De Botton drew a long bow. A good read though.

Wonderful! A book that is a joy to read if you are a lover of architecture and vital to read if you don't understand it.

Took a while reading this as I frequently paused for thought ... to consider the examples presented, study the pictures, and allow the lessons to sink in. This edition of the book 'The Architecture of Happiness' was let down by poor quality control of the Kindle edition. Obvious OCR slip ups were only a minor quibble - the most significant fault being that numerous images are missing. This contributed to the delay in reading as I had to frequently turn to Google and Wikipedia to fill in the blanks. And the book is poorer for it, as it took away from the text. Otherwise a good read.

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