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The Architecture Of The Barnes Foundation: Gallery In A Garden, Garden In A Gallery



Synopsis

A comprehensive description and behind-the-scenes look into the architectural evolution of the Barnes Foundation's new building in downtown Philadelphia. In 2007, Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects received the commission to design the new Barnes Foundation building, an enviable project that was surrounded both by controversy and the excitement of increasing access to one of America's premier collections of post-impressionist art, amassed by Dr. Albert C. Barnes in the early twentieth century. The book presents photographs and drawings highlighting the new building's sensitivity to the ideology of Dr. Barnes and the creativity of Paul Cret, who designed the foundation's gallery in Merion. In the new facility, the Merion galleries are faithfully reproduced at the same scale with similar materials and are seamlessly integrated into the larger new building—a refined modernist masterpiece surrounded by grounds designed by landscape architect Laurie Olin.

Book Information

Hardcover: 176 pages

Publisher: Skira Rizzoli (November 27, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0847838056

ISBN-13: 978-0847838059

Product Dimensions: 9.8 x 0.8 x 11.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #152,364 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #43 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Museum Studies & Museology #82 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Individual Architects & Firms #151 in Books > Arts & Photography > Collections, Catalogs & Exhibitions

Customer Reviews

Architecture is one of my main hobbies: I read books, visit buildings in the US and Europe, and had the pleasure to get two of my projects built. In my view this is an outstanding book: lucid prose, clear presentation of the architectural problems and solutions, straightforward illustrations. The authors (and architects) describe the planning of a relocated museum, reconstruction of the old gallery rooms in a new building, in a completely different environment, new visitor and museum functions, improved lighting, and new landscaping in plain language, easily understandable, without fuss. What

is even better is that Williams and Tsien did not wreck the Barnes Collection. The Barnes Collection in Merion was on top of my list of museum favorites: A superb collection of paintings, shown in Barnes' idiosyncratic presentation, interspersed with hardware beyond imagination, and backed by a private park. After every museum visit, we relaxed in the park, strolling and recovering from the effort of experiencing the many masterworks. Why this jewel of a museum had to be moved to Philadelphia is still incomprehensible to me. William and Tsien state at the outset that they were not familiar with the Barnes Collection. Swallowing the requirement to recreate the same rooms, with the same arrangements for artworks, in a new location, must have been one of the oddest tasks an architect could face. Understanding the function of the arboretum (a place to come down to earth, after viewing all the masterpieces), and recreating it in an urban setting, is to me a sign of sheer genius.

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