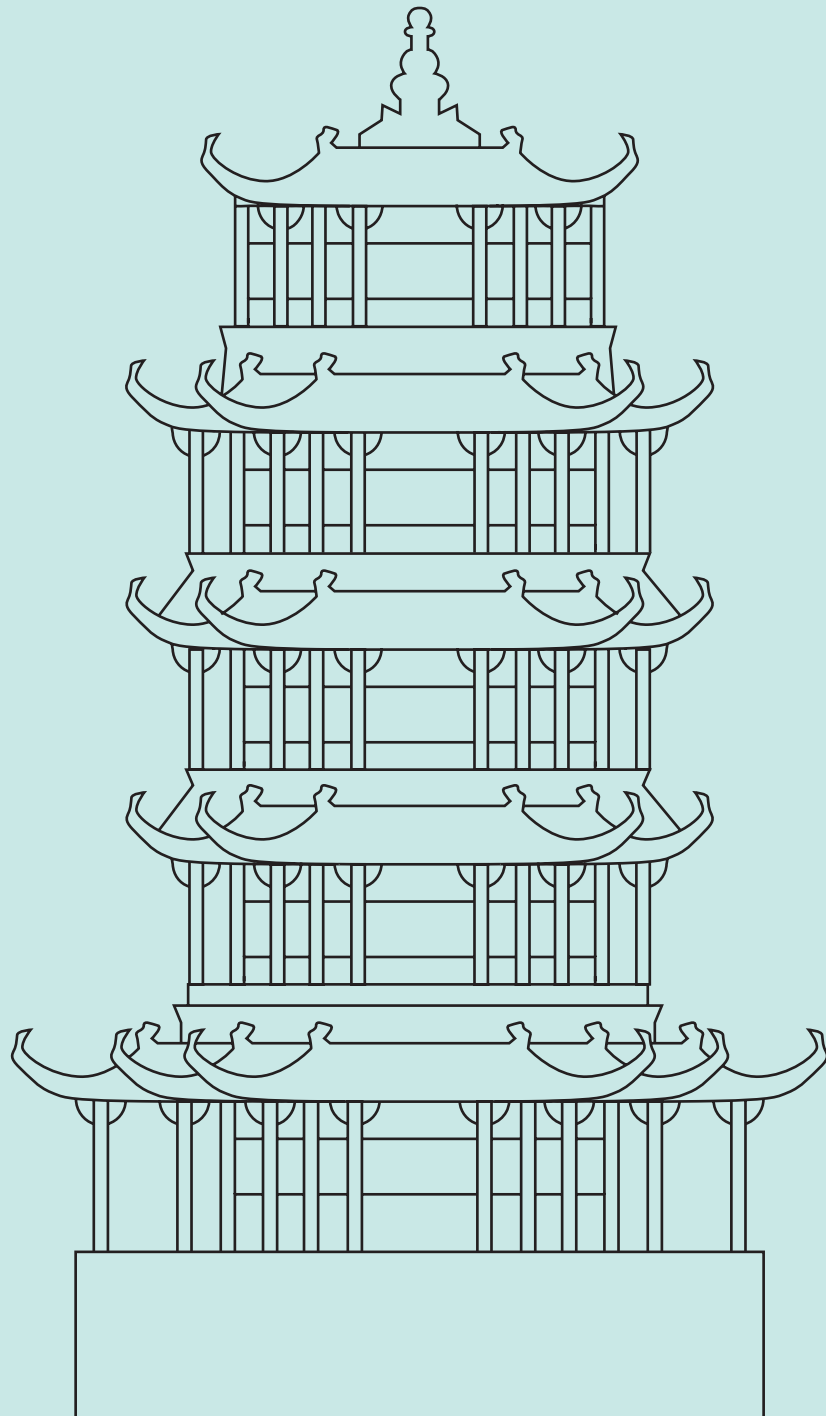


What Adults Don't Know About Architecture



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An Introduction to Architecture



You're an architect!

Architecture is the business of designing buildings: houses, streets, towns and cities. If someone asked you, "Are you interested in architecture?" you might feel unsure what to say. But, probably without realising it, you've been interested in architecture for a long time. Maybe one day at the beach you built a great sandcastle with towers at each corner.

A sandcastle on Morro Strand State Beach, California, USA



Or perhaps when you were little you made a cottage using red and black bricks. Or maybe you did a drawing once of your dream house, with a pool and a slide instead of stairs.

Maybe one day you tried living in a blanket fort for the afternoon (it was a good idea until you tried to stand up), or perhaps you dreamed about the perfect tree house:



The perfect tree house, Quebec, Canada

Without quite knowing it, you have designed buildings: you're an architect!

You already understand the most important thing about architecture: You know the kinds of buildings you like and the kinds of buildings you don't like.

Perhaps one time in the countryside you saw an interesting house like this one. It seemed like a lovely place to live. It would be fun to sleep under the thatched roof, and nice to come home in winter knowing how cosy it would be inside.



Selworthy, Somerset, UK, early 19th century

But thinking about living in this house made you feel a bit sad:



A suburban house in Belgium, 19th/20th century

Or you went on holiday to Greece and saw a street like this:



Mykonos, Greece

It's the little street you walked down to get from the hotel to the beach. Although it was very sunny, the street was nice and shady. There was a tiny shop around the corner where

they sold ice cream. In the evenings the people who lived on the street would sit out on their balconies or walk up and down chatting to their neighbours.

Then imagine that at another time you had to come here:



Athens, Greece

It was crowded and noisy, and even a bit scary. It wouldn't be a nice place to walk around in the evening.

And perhaps once your mum or dad showed you an old photograph of where they lived in Europe before you were born. They were living in a top-floor flat on a street like this:

Vienna, Austria



It was quite busy but there were lots of trees and interesting shops and they said it was fun living in the centre of the city near all their friends. They could walk everywhere in a few minutes. All the buildings are packed together, but if you look at them carefully each building is quite beautiful.

But then they showed you another picture from a time when they were away on a work trip:

New York, USA



They said there were hardly any attractive buildings (and none at all near their hotel), and there was no point even trying to cross the road, as it would take so long. You couldn't really walk anywhere, in fact. You had to take a taxi and then it would get stuck in traffic.

In other words, you realise that some places are much nicer than others.

And sadly, most buildings are not very nice and only a few buildings and places are really lovely. That's deeply unfair and unnecessary.

In this book we're going to talk about what makes some places lovely. We're not just doing so for the sake of it:

We want to understand how to get more good architecture into the world.



Kyoto, Japan

But we don't only want to understand. Understanding how to make nice buildings and places is the first step to actually making more nice places. That's the real goal. We can't do it on our own. We're going to need your help! Together we will build a more beautiful world.

Why is architecture important?

Does it matter what a place looks like? If most people have somewhere to live and work, and they can get about and there are shops and hospitals and schools, isn't that enough?

We think that what a place looks like matters a lot.

One of the reasons why what places look like matters a lot is that buildings speak to us about things. Not actually by talking, but metaphorically — by sending us messages.

When buildings are beautiful, it is as though they are speaking about lovely things, like kindness, hope and trust. And when they are ugly, it is as though they are speaking about hatred, aggression and nastiness. Imagine a place you were in was speaking to you. What might it be saying?

Your favourite street in Greece might say something like this:

I am very gentle, playful and sweet. I care about you. That's why I want you to have a lovely balcony where you can sit and have a really interesting conversation. I want you to be able to stroll down the street without having to worry that a car is going to bump into you.

I have got soft sides. I believe in friendship. I like it that anyone can wave to you from their window. I think calm is important. That's why I wear soothing colours: I don't want you to feel agitated. I hope you'll be happy here.

Whereas the place your Mum went on a work trip might say something like this:

I care more about cars than about you; I care a lot about advertising, so I am going to make you look at a huge sign every single day of your life, even if you never want to buy the product it is selling. I am often in a bad mood. Your little sorrows and pains don't matter to me. Life is tough and I don't care. I don't know who you are and I don't ever want to know.

You may not be consciously aware that streets are beaming messages at you all the time. But the messages sink deep into your brain nevertheless.

Like a person, a building or a place can be friendly or hostile, kindly or uncaring, generous or mean. If you spend time in these places it eventually has a big impact on your sense of who you are. An interesting person* once put it like this:

**We shape our buildings and afterwards
our buildings shape us.**

* The 20th-century British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.

How buildings are like people

It is not just streets that speak to us — every building has a personality. Let's meet some different types of building and think about what they might be like.

What kind of personality do you think this old building has?

Sackville House, East Grinstead, England, c. 1520



It's gentle and cosy, a bit like an old teddy bear. It's not very adventurous, but it's lovely when you're feeling tired or a bit sad. It listens quietly to your troubles and it is always there — reassuring and comfortable.