



Review of 'Tadao Ando. The Complete Works'

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ANDO COMPLETE WORKS

Editor: Philip Jodidio

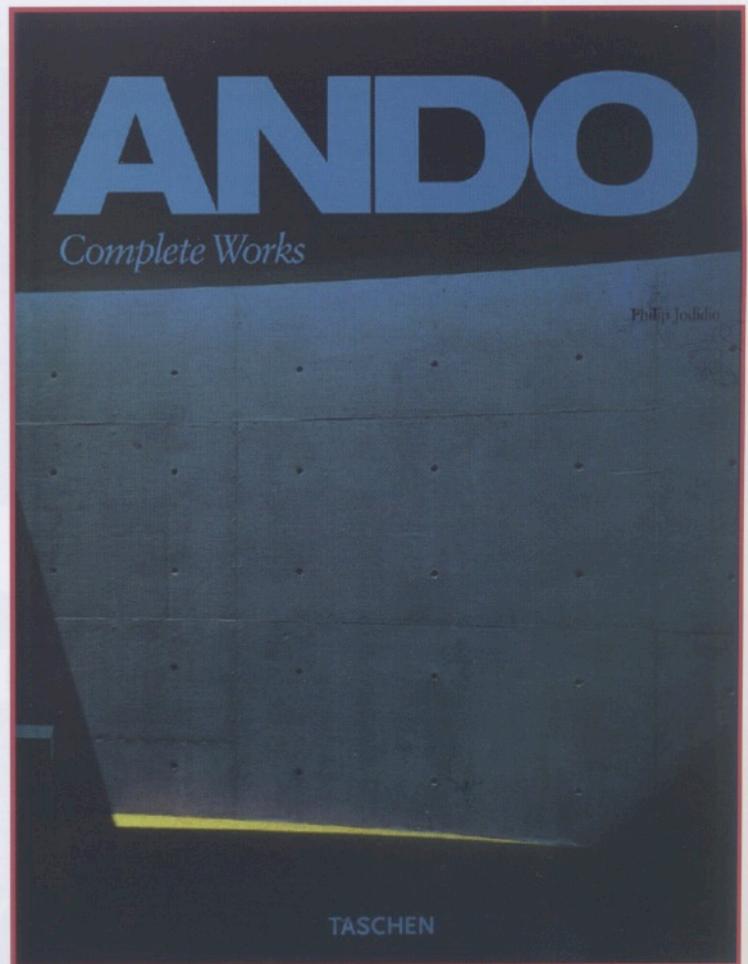
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In 1976 a small concrete house was built in Sumiyoshi, Osaka. Set between traditional Japanese wooden row houses, the 'Azuma house' -with its blank façade- has only four rooms and a courtyard. The unusual thing about this house is that in order to move between the rooms, you have to go outside. Each time the courtyard is crossed, the changing light, the weather and the shifting seasons are experienced. This small house is a declaration of belief by its architect that we must restore our connection with nature. Known now to architects all over the world, the 'Azuma row house' is the first project featured in the new book ANDO Complete Works.

Over the last thirty years, amidst the excesses and deconstructions of architecture, Tadao Ando has remained resolute in his approach. Typified by the 'Azuma house', he believes, "the role of architectural space as a spiritual shelter is crucial." Thirty-six buildings -the majority of which are of Ando's recent design- are shown at length out of the architect's enormous output of almost 200 buildings and projects. From the tiny 'Azuma house' to the current wave of international museums, Ando's work is expansively documented and illustrated.

Selected by Ando, the featured projects use numerable sketches, drawings, models and photographs that reveal the diverse variety of locations, briefs and clients that Ando has worked with over the years. The XXL format gives the closest impression you will get of what an 'Ando building' is like, without visiting them. But visit them you must.

Relatively ignored outside Japan during the 70's, Tadao Ando was first championed by Kenneth Frampton in the mid 80's as part of what he termed 'critical modernism'. There is now a very large selection of publications and magazines covering Ando's work -all of which are listed in the detailed appendix of this book.



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ANDO Complete Works catalogues the output of Ando's office from 1969 to today. The opening essay 'The Simplicity of Perfection' traces Ando's thoughts and projects throughout his career, from his small early domestic projects in Osaka to his current international profile.

Ando grew up in Osaka in the wake of the destruction of World War II and was brought up by his maternal grandmother -who's name he has adopted. Living opposite a wood workshop, he spent time there as a child discovering the nature of wood and how to shape it. With no formal education in architecture he is self-taught. Travel and such inspirations as an early encounter with a second-

hand book by Le Corbusier "...traced till the pages turned black", guided his personal journey.

Not serving the traditional architectural apprenticeship, he describes himself as previously unemployable due to his "stubbornness." What is less known is his talent as a championship boxer, with winnings from his time in the ring funding his early architectural travels.

His Atelier in Oyodo in central Osaka, is converted from one of his early houses (Tomishima House) and is shown filled to capacity with models, drawings and a huge library. This is Ando's 'inner sanctum' and the

► powerhouse of his prodigious output. Light plunges deep into the studio space from above, like one of Ando's favourite Piranesi drawings.

As the stunning photographs in this book show, a wall in Ando's hands becomes something remarkable. Caught in oblique light, the concrete walls reveal the subtleties of the pouring process: the gentle curves of the shuttering, captured like a frozen moment of a rippling shoji screen.

The beautiful Buddhist water temple at 'Hompuku-Ji', illustrates Ando's intimate and detailed knowledge of traditional Japanese architecture. The subtle geometry and spatial sequence carefully engage the site and the traditions of the Buddhist rituals. The water lilies floating on the surface of the elliptical pool as delicately poised as Ando's building is, on the hillside over-looking Osaka bay.

Some of the projects recall Ando's childhood encounter with wood. 'The Japan Pavilion at the Seville Expo', 'The Museum of Wood at Mikata' and the dark stained raw textures of the

scaffolding timbers used in 'The Church of Light' in Osaka, all show the sensitivity and empathy the architect feels for this material.

The UNESCO meditation space in Brussels is a small concrete cylinder raised above the existing ground and surrounded by granite slabs irradiated by the Nagasaki bomb. The slabs are continually washed in a fine film of moving water, while inside the 'Angle of Nagasaki' - a piece from the ruined church of Urakami - is enough to focus the visitors attentions on the horrors of war.

The World Trade Centre project, a giant earth tumuli the shape of a partly embedded sphere 1/30 000th that of the earth, registers our shared place together on the curvature of the earth, and warns us about the dangers of conflicting cultures.

Sometimes the concrete homogeneity of Ando's buildings belies a programmatic complexity. The commercial building in 'Shibuya-Ku', Tokyo is typically a hybrid programme that is skilfully resolved in inter-

connected geometry and independent circulation systems. Often partly below ground, Ando's buildings break with modernism in the sense that they bed deep into the ground more like earth works than buildings.

As the projects in this book show, Ando has remained true to his ambitions and has made his work "...into a long continuously developing investigation."

Like his hero Le Corbusier (after whom he has named his dog) Ando approaches architecture with a deep affinity and knowledge of tradition. Citing the Pantheon as one of his key inspirations, it reveals that his architecture is as much about darkness as light. ANDO Complete Works shows us in an age entranced by the virtual, that there is poetry in such simple things as materials and shadows. ●

Paul Clarke

ANDO Complete Works

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As a sucker for a good church, I awaited the publication of this new volume on contemporary places of worship with some anticipation. Unfortunately, while the book has several strengths and while it includes a few genuinely striking buildings, on the whole, for me, the book disappoints. The inclusion of a few slightly ropery pictures aside, this disappointment has little to do with the quality of the book itself - it is, as ever from this publisher, stylishly designed, well written and impeccably presented. Rather, the anticlimax comes from the buildings themselves - to me they do not appear to be very spiritual places, nor would most of them really inspire me to make pilgrimage - architectural or

religious - to them. So, in essence, my gripe is that if this book represents a cross section of the best in contemporary ecclesiastical design I'm not overly impressed.

I think the main problem is that I like a church/temple/mosque to look like a place of worship: different, other ... aspirational in some way perhaps. It shouldn't look like a corporate office block, or an art museum or a gate- lodge, however swish, differentiated only by a religious symbol (in the Christian tradition usually the predictable, lazily applied cross). And, for me, I'd hope to see in an ecclesiastical building - even in a quiet retreat building - some obvious indication of communal, shared

space, somewhere able to provide possibilities for collective congregation and worship. It disturbs me at some niggling level if contemporary church architecture seems to be often about bare, empty, minimalist spaces - OK, so they might evoke a contemplative state of mind but they might equally lead to feelings of isolation rather than collective joy. The cover of the book seems to be emblematic of this problem: Takashi Yamaguchi & Associates' albeit beautiful Glass Temple in Kyoto, Japan, looks for all the world to me like a John Pawson minimalist living room. And even if the Glass Temple is a bad example to start criticising as it would appear from the text to be more visitor ►

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