

We admire a building or a group of buildings because they express, however subtly, certain images and ideas we have about ourselves. In this riveting study, Craig Whitaker reinterprets the American architectural landscape as the manifest vision of our collective conscience. Asserting that the built environment is shaped largely by cultural values, Whitaker dissects American architecture by revealing its archetypes and analyzing their origins in the national psyche. The result is a superbly evocative essay on how Americans think and live, and how these spheres are combined in our architecture. On a grand scale, Whitaker examines the ways in which our architectural eclecticism is rooted in the democratic notion of individual liberty upon which this nation was founded. From New York to St. Louis to Los Angeles and all of the towns in between, these shared values have created a landscape that at first appears chaotic but is, in fact, remarkably homogeneous. The grid plan of most American cities, he argues, connotes equality and a refusal to acknowledge the hierarchies of the past, while issues of privacy and public display permeate the orientation of our homes and streets. And the open road has been raised to the level of a cultural icon, expressing ideas unique to this country--ideas of mobility and freedom, progress and communication. By continuously peeling away the layers of meaning that clearly signify national obsessions, Whitaker lucidly documents the way in which America has grown and developed, for better and for worse.

In a multidisciplinary fashion, drawing on art and literature, history and politics, film and advertising, he takes in the whole of American culture, high and low. Compelling and thought-provoking, *Architecture and the American Dream* is certain to give Americans a new perspective from which to define themselves in relation to their environment.

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