

Books

Designing Ways
July

Guadí: 1852 – 1926

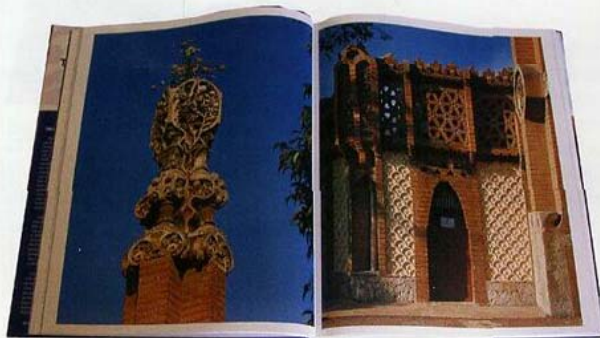
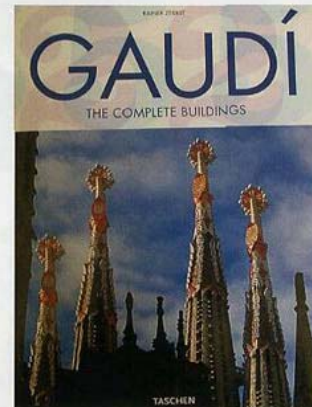
A Life Devoted to Architecture

by Rainer Zerbst and published by Taschen

with 240 pages with hard cover, priced at R134.95 ISBN 3 8228 4072 6

Gaudí or is that gaudy? Master or madman? Mention Gaudí, and you are bound to get a mixed reaction. Some refer to his work as strange or even mad, others profess how amazing or incredible his creations are. If this is the reaction people have to his work now, one can only imagine what a furore his work must have caused at the time it was built.

That must be one of Gaudí's most incredible achievements. Not only did he design these bold organic buildings and with complex structures, but he actually got them built in the most intricately detailed and elegantly crafted manner. What makes his works even more extraordinary is when you consider just how simply they were made. Gaudí seemingly had a knack for extracting the most value from the most basic of materials. Gaudí employed a similar tactic throughout his designs though, always aiming to get the most from every component. For instance in Guell Park, which looks like a great place to go for a Sunday stroll, columns are not only structural but funnel rainwater into a huge cistern and sculptures that first seem ornamental actually become overflow valves for this system too.



As is generally the case, pictures can never fully do justice to buildings, and although I have not yet visited Gaudí's work, as I have learnt more about his approach to design, I believe his intention was always for his spaces to be used and experienced, not merely looked at. I believe this beautifully assembled book allows the reader to access the dramatic spaces, textures, colours and moods of his work. Gaudí's entire career is documented in depth in this book; so one can easily follow the progression and evolution of his thinking and style.

While examining Gaudí's creations, what became apparent to me was his influence on two well-known contemporary Spanish architects. One can trace strains of Gaudí's impact in the flamboyant organic style and use of colour in the late Enric Miralles' work.

Santiago Calatrava's work on the other hand echoes Gaudí's use of broken ceramic tiles as decoration, parabolic arches and nature's influence on his structures.

After paging through and delving deeper into the works and life of Gaudí one has to respect his mastery and his unrelenting commitment to architecture. If, like me, you have not yet made it to Barcelona, this book is bound to make you want to get there soon and for those lucky enough to have already visited some of his works, the details revealed might just draw you back again. Gaudí certainly walks the fine line between genius and delirious, but that line is indeed a sensuous and beautifully crafted one.



Rob Serman