

ARCHITECTURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

PHILIP JODIDIO

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Each volume of Taschen's new hardback series brings the light touch of critic Philip Jodidio to bear on the architectural milieu of a single country. So far, four have been given the art publisher's familiar glossy treatment: Japan, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK. In his survey of Britain, Jodidio sticks to the usual suspects, with a few interesting exceptions. The fantastical tour de force that is the Butterfly House by Laurie Chetwood stands out for its sheer inventiveness and virtuosity. Equally idiosyncratic, if better known, are the products of Will Alsop's fertile mind. Now branded as the-buildings-on-stilts-guy, we see another side to Alsop here, evident in his fun, but eminently practical Fawood Children's Centre. The reigning 'Lords' of British architecture are, of course, much in evidence, with buildings like Foster's 30 St Mary Axe and Rogers' timber-framed Mossbourne Community Academy set out in lavish detail. Nicholas Grimshaw, not yet a Lord but a Sir nonetheless, is represented by the iconic Buckminster Fuller-esque Eden Project and his sensitive redevelopment of Bath's spa quarter. Jodidio's introduction is informative and pleasingly tongue-in-cheek. This is not an edgy work, and it's hard to shake off the impression that we've seen it all before (possibly in books by Philip Jodidio – he seems to have single-handedly cornered the market in coffee-table architectural guides). That said, his sharp editorial eye and Taschen's impeccable production values represent a winning combination. Gorgeous, inexpensive and unashamedly accessible, these books deserve the wide audience they get.

DAVID SHARIATMADARI