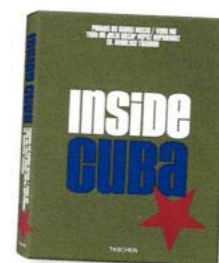


There is no stopping Taschen. Wave after wave of simply brilliantly conceived books just keep rolling off the presses and once their attention turned to the best in world photography - combined with Taschen's uniquely irrelevant themes and cutting edge design - it was clear they had their finger on the pulse of the new society born to visual excitements.

the country's other industries were nationalised by the Castro regime. Fidel's grip on the nation has been absolute. As a result of his isolationist policies, time stood still and the grand edifices, some dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, lived on or otherwise slowly crumbled. Old Cuban Baroque rubs shoulders with modern homes of the wealthy, and faded *palacios* are juxtaposed with the kitsch Americana of the former casino-hotels.

The Cubans are a resolute and resourceful people. They maintain an array of 19<sup>th</sup> century Havana houses in a manner that New York decorators can only dream of. The patina and the years of fading lime wash make these interiors - quite accidentally - the height of shabby chic. That is not to say there is an absence of grand dwellings or truly striking architectural features. The Moorish influence in the Spanish tiling in the Perez house is truly extravagant. Gianni Basso's lens captures these stimulating interiors with a wonderful attention to detail and it is not hard to see why Cuba is high on the list of essential tourist destinations. There is the Caribbean spirit forcing its way through the overpowering Spanish tradition that makes Cuba something special. This large format book captures it rather well.



#### INSIDE CUBA

Images: Gianni Basso

Text: Julio César Pérez Hernández

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## A FADED PARADISE

**I**N *INSIDE CUBA* is no different to the winning Taschen formula of expert 'insider' writing and great images and graphic design. Milan based photographer, Gianni Basso, founded the Vega MG photography agency in 1989. One of his specialisations is the tricky business of interiors, and it is put to good use in Cuba. The text, by award winning writer Julio César Pérez Hernández, has all the authority expected of an adjunct professor at the School of Architecture in Havana, and a former Loeb Fellow at Harvard Graduate School of Design. He has written and lectured widely on the

specifics of Cuban architecture. And what are the specifics of Cuban architecture? A rich soup of many style sources derived from various foreign influences on the island, beginning with the Spanish incursion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and occasional short lived control by France and Britain. A close proximity to the United States has meant that Cuba has had to put up with continual political conniving by the Americans to annexe the island. In 1848, Spain was offered \$100 million for the Cuban territory by the USA - it was declined. Ironically, growing poverty in Spain itself resulted

in much migration to Cuba of Spanish people. Cuban political history is long and convoluted. Roosevelt, who had served in the 1898 Spanish-America war over Cuba, sympathised with the independence movement and granted a sort of freedom in 1901. But it was not until the famous revolution and rise of Fidel Castro in 1959, that Cuba became almost autonomous. A situation that has survived to this day in spite of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Castro's long term ally and financier. Cuba's corrupt Batista government and American Mafia activities were wiped out overnight and much of