

SUPERSIZE MODERN

**THE A-Z OF MODERN
ARCHITECTURE**

(Two volumes in slipcase.) Edited by Peter Gössel. Cologne: Taschen. 2007. £160, €200

Does size matter? Clearly it does for Taschen whose monumental two volume *Modern Architecture A-Z* edited by architect Peter Gössel and a distinguished group of contributing editors has just appeared housed in a handsome stout slipcase. It follows on from Taschen's big art and architecture book explosion which began with a splendid but expensive volume on the West Coast *Case Study Houses 1945-66* a few years ago and was followed shortly afterwards by the impressive complete works volume on *Richard Neutra*.

With a thousand odd pages incorporating some 600 entries and over 5000 illustrations, *The A-Z of Modern Architecture* presents the work

of individual architects and named practices together with surveys of the 'isms' and other movements of twentieth-century architecture. The first volume covers Aalto to Kuma, the second Labrouste to Van Zuuk. The books also include designers whom Hitchcock would have referred to as pioneers, including engineers, utopians and classical architects (including Labrouste, Howard, Paxton and Schinkel, and so on) many of whom set the tone for the emergence of twentieth-century Modernism.

The importance of those included is implied by the number of pages allocated to them and their work and the extent of illustrations. As you would expect, all the big names are here: Foster, Meier, Gehry and Hadid get maximum coverage, but are paralleled by a similar emphasis on the life and works of the masters of the Modern Movement from Wright and Niemeyer to Gropius and Le Corbusier.

Beautifully crafted and printed, the book provides a splendid record of architecture from the nineteenth century to the present day, but this visual richness is let down by the short descriptive texts accompanying each entry. These, it must be said, are not so impressive and often turn out to be little more than perfunctory statements with a list of projects, dates and bibliographical references. Clearly it is a product of our times, with text subsumed by stunning images.

You can enjoy playing 'guess and chance' games by simply flicking through the book's alphabetical sequences and searching out which architect/engineers are included or omitted and then coming up with your own nominations. I am still playing the game, but one thing will be quickly apparent – the plethora of lesser known architects from German speaking countries and a shortage of South American architectural personalities. And though any biographical and encyclopaedic work of this kind will never be exhaustive, in this case there are several curious omissions including the famous Berlin architect and AA teacher Arthur Korn, Belgians René Braem and Antoine Pompe, the Swede Lars Wahlman as well as (astonishingly) Ted Cullinan, John McAslan and Mozambican maestro Pancho Guedes.

Yet from a publishing, printing and editorial point of view this still is a magnificent production. If you have a pocket big enough to afford it, or a table strong enough to support it, or know how to screw four legs into its stout slipcase, then this heavyweight is not to be missed, in any language. DENNIS SHARP