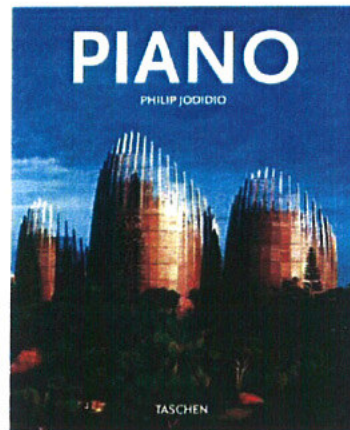
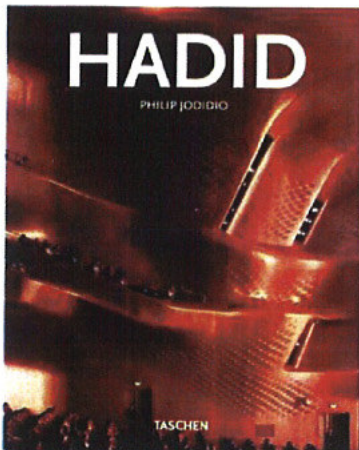


Book Reviews

The latest architectural publications



HADID; PIANO

Both books by Philip Jodidio; Taschen (distributed in New Zealand by New Holland Publishers); 2012; \$24.99

The supply of architectural books was a bit thin on the ground for this issue and I'll admit that I was a little sceptical about these handbag-sized books about so-called starchitects, Zaha Hadid and Renzo Piano. What, not more dumbed-down, glossy coffee-table versions of much more complex stories? And while, to some extent, this may be true and the content is certainly compact, these books are surprising enlightening, mainly due to author Philip Jodidio's architectural knowledge, superb photography of key projects and, crucially, the revealing personal interviews with the architects. I actually like the fact that the books are transportable; I've been carrying mine around with me, picking them up and down at will, being 'wowed' by a plethora of exciting projects and the architects' imaginations. The bonus is that you don't need a crane to hold each one up while reading in bed and, at under \$25 each, you can't really complain.

Hadid is amazing; while I'm not 100 per cent bowled over by her work, probably because I find the scale and cave-like spaces to be too overwhelming in some instances, you have to really admire Hadid's guts, invention and skill. And many of the works are beautiful, streamlined forms that introduce complex layering into the field.

The interview is the most interesting: while Hadid's forms rely heavily on advances in computing, when she is asked by Jodidio if she regrets that computers have taken over, she responds, "I don't think that there is any site analysis now. Context and site analysis are no longer part of the topic. There is no longer a discussion of context; they are mostly just objects that land there. The issue is not so much about computing or not computing. The problem with computing is that it isolates the object. It is inward-looking as opposed to outward-looking... I am actually quite critical of it. We used to distinguish between the object and the field and I think it is because of technique that we

don't anymore. There is no longer plan analysis."

The practice is interested in a kind of natural computing, her partner Patrik Schumacher explains: "There are millions of natural objects and each has its own coherency. It is open ended. If you have geological layers shifted against each other, there are always continuities. This is a form of natural computing if you want. The incident sits within a series of incidents where it makes sense. The way vegetation that runs up a mountain makes sense. We are trying to bring this kind of logic into architecture. There is a sense of eloquent beauty and intuitive understanding that enters into the matter."

My fondness for Renzo Piano starts with the Pompidou Centre: a building that has blown many architecture-lovers, of a certain age, away. His designs, such as the Nasher Sculpture Center and the Zentrum Paul Klee, are inspirational. My appreciation continued quite recently when my young son became obsessed with watching the piling being laid down on The Shard at London Bridge over many months, and its subsequent evolution into one of Europe's tallest buildings at 66 storeys high. The Shard is somewhat controversial among architectural critics, mainly for its incredible impact on the neighbourhood but, as a regular visitor of the area for at least 15 years, I believe it adds another layer to this exciting part of London, rich in its history and architecture. The Shard is a light and elegant spire-like form that is, I have no doubt, being retained in the memories of its visitors.

It was interesting to learn about Piano's thoughts on the Pacific: "I was 50 years old when I discovered the culture of the Pacific. It is a culture of lightness and of the ephemeral. Although I grew up in Europe, I feel much closer to the Pacific, where lightness, or the wind, is much more durable than stone. This is due to the ritual repetition of gesture from generation to generation." Talking about his approach to new work, he explains, "Architecture is slow work. Having a good idea at the outset is one thing. Keeping it right up to the end is another." **Justine Harvey**