

READING BUILDINGS: A PRIMER

What does it mean to “understand” buildings? From the outside, as we first confront them? From the inside as we experience them? We can understand buildings in simple, pragmatic terms—how they work for what they are supposed to do—and we can understand them as architecture. This is a brief introduction into the logic of architectural form and space—the phenomena, the principles, characteristics, geometries, and themes at the basis of making and understanding architecture—irrespective of time. It will seek to define the “define-able” while acknowledging that much of the soul-stirring power of architecture eludes definition.

Works of architecture are supposed to embody inherent relationships between outside and inside. Yet, between inside and outside, between form and system, between idea and realization, there are as many contradictions and conundrums as there are clarities. These contrasts make architecture endlessly fascinating and endlessly challenging to understand—and some buildings simply defy understanding . . . for different reasons.

This course will explore a number of questions. Can we understand the inside of a building from the outside and the outside from the inside? What are the types and characteristics of architectural space? What compositional and organization strategies have been used in architecture throughout the ages? Most significant—what is the singular distinction between historic and modern architecture that enables the radical nature of some of today’s architecture on the “cutting edge”?

Reading: Colin Rowe. “The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa.” Article 1946. Nothing to purchase. (This will be distributed electronically. It is the only reading.) Written in 1946, when Rowe was 26 years old, this article transformed architectural thinking and analysis. It is very dense and difficult to read, but, once a few key insights are grasped, a world of understanding opens. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Rowe

Classes:

1	Reading Buildings: Looking, Thinking, Seeing – A Few Fundamentals	March 4
2	Architecture & Structure: Millennia of Masonry; Centuries of Steel; Structure the Enabler; Colin Rowe article “The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa” discussed	March 11
3	From the Outside In: Reading – Is it Possible? Façades – Types and Characteristics	March 18
4	Elevations and Façades: Types and Characteristics	March 25
5	Elevations and Façades, continued	April 1
6	From the Inside Out: The Logic of the Plan; the Logic and Characteristics of Shapes	April 8
7	The Plan’s the Thing: Planning Types & Organizations	April 15
8	Contemporary Buildings, Issues and Problems: A Few Great Buildings; a Few of my Favorite Things	April 22

LEADER: Alan Chimacoff is an architect and photographer. He taught architecture at Cornell and Princeton Universities for thirty years and has designed buildings for campuses across the nation. In 2019 he received the New Jersey American Institute of Architects Michael Graves Lifetime Achievement Award. His photographs have been shown in galleries across the U.S.

LOCATION: Zoom

FRIDAYS: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks beginning March 4 through April 22

MAXIMUM: Unlimited