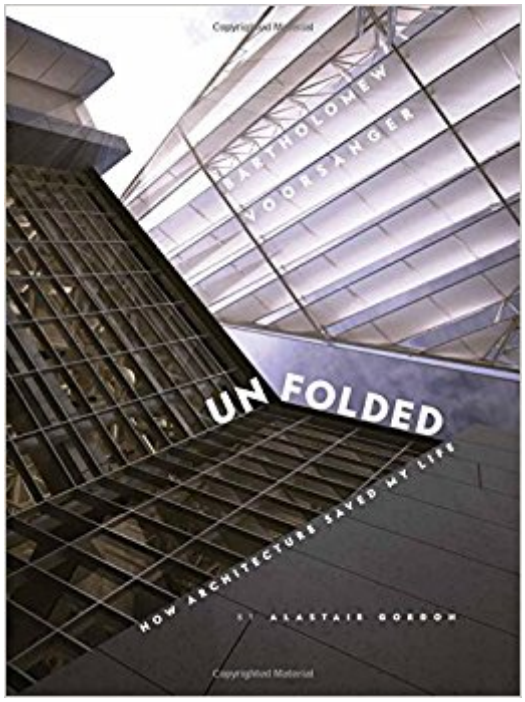
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UNFOLDED: How Architecture Saved My Life: Bartholomew Voorsanger



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Synopsis

"There’s a secret trapdoor, a kind of magic key into every project," says Bartholomew Voorsanger, whose life and work are chronicled in UNFOLDED, How Architecture Saved My Life". The book, by award-winning author Alastair Gordon, is more of a personal memoir than a conventional monograph, tracing as it does the architect’s picaresque journey from an orphanage in the Bronx to an adoptive family in San Francisco, to the ivied halls of Princeton and Harvard, to an apprenticeship with architect I.M. Pei and the establishment of an independent practice in 1978. A signature sensibility--minimal yet elegantly crafted, with a jeweler’s attention to detail--evolved through early commissions--a private barge on the Hudson River, a master plan for the Brooklyn Museum--in which he explored the inherent mysteries of form, scale, and light. A glass-and-steel addition for the Morgan Library (1992) was hailed by the New York Times as an artful "combination of intimacy and grandeur". For the Asia Society in Manhattan, Voorsanger created a luminous garden courtyard and a serpent-like staircase which was based, in part, on a Ming Dynasty flask that the architect found in the museum’s collection.Undulating trajectories of work and life intersect throughout the story. In many of Voorsanger’s projects there are suggestions of a pilgrimage across space, a sequence of opening and closing, turning and unfolding, as with a series of pavilions designed for the World War II Museum in New Orleans, the wing-like roof of a mountain retreat for Russian oligarch Roman Abromovich, a twisting control tower for Newark Airport, or the highly sculpted interior of a bachelor’s loft in Tribeca. In some of the later work there’s an unsettled Dr. Caligari geometry of axial rotations and splintered spaces. Walls tilt back and overlap. Natural light penetrates the outer membrane. Multi-faceted roofs engage the sky. Voorsanger’s architectural practice served as an emotional anchor through trying times and helped to bring a sense of ceremonial order to life’s messy uncertainties. There was the adoption of two Iranian orphans; divorce from his first wife; a broken business partnership; the loss of his second wife to cancer; and a near-fatal embolism. In 1987, Voorsanger’s twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Roxanna, was senselessly murdered. As a form of eulogy, the architect designed a new kind of housing prototype. It was an elegiac gesture from father to daughter in which deep, personal loss was transformed, somehow, into healing space. "I don’t give a damn about myself, but I care deeply about my work," he says, acknowledging the number of times that his art has rescued him from a nagging sense of despair and existential dislocation. "Architecture has literally saved my life".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Born an orphan, Bartholomew Voorsanger became a celebrated architect. After years of practice, he only recently set out to publish a monograph. Through the process, he came to the realization that his body of work represents resolutions to his lifeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s struggles. AP spoke to Voorsanger about his turbulent life as a pivotal infl uence on the work featured in the riveting architectural monograph: Unfolded How Architecture Saved My Life by Alistair Gordon.The monograph was presumed fi wished when author Alistair Gordon called Voorsanger asking for something to write on the back cover. That was far from the case, as both author and subject were stunned to discover this mini bio would become the heart of the book. Ã¢â ¬Å“I didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t interlink these pieces, but Alistair did,Ã¢â ¬Â• says Voorsanger, who provided details of his life in context of where he was at in completing notable projects. Gordon immediately wished to integrate these life stories. Ã¢â ¬Å“You could have sunk without it through all these storms,Ã¢â ¬Â• Voorsanger recalls Gordon saying. The narrative enriches the context of the monograph as when good design is set o by a simple, powerful gesture. Ã¢â ¬Å“For me, at a certain level, I donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t care about my lifeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s narrative, because itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s basically past. What I do care about is architecture: the projects that came of my various personal disasters.Ã¢â ¬Â• (rchitecture of an Optimist)

Alastair Gordon (author of UNFOLDED) is an award-winning critic and author who has written regularly about the built environment for the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. His critically acclaimed books include Naked Airport, Weekend Utopia and Spaced Out. He teaches

critical writing at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, and is Editorial Director of Gordon de Vries Studio, an imprint that publishes books about the human environment.

UNFOLDED is a very good book about the life and career of architect Bartholomew Voorsanger. The author, Alastair Gordon, weaves the story of personal life and death events with professional architectural milestones, some are related, some coincidental. Bottom line, this a well told story about a very interesting man who happens to be among the elite of contemporary architects. We are allowed inside his life and inside his design brain. Yes, there are great pictures of his buildings and details of his materials, textured metals, high tech glass, wood floors and ceilings. Also included are extraordinary presentations for projects not built. The study for the tower at LaGuardia Airport is absolutely fantastic and should have been realized. The real treat from this collection of Bart VoorsangerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s work are the private home commissions. All of his talents come to play, his use of the site, glass, light, warm intimate materials, unexpected angles, the inside/outside handshake of living with the world. But it is the roofs that give a weightless character to the dynamic forms of these very structured houses. The roofs are like giant paper airplanes, a wing to keep the house on track, and to think that Bart admits he designs backwards, starting with the roof! I am glad architecture saved Mr. VoorsangerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life and he has certainly returned the favor by giving architecture some resuscitation.

This is as much a biography as a book on modern architecture. Bart Voorsanger's unusual life story and its connection to his choice of profession makes "Unfolded: How Architecture Saved my Life" a fascinating read. His body of work is impressive and a very different and elegant form of modern design. It's a real skill to create modern buildings as Voorsanger has whose elements are fully integrated and of a piece, and not just modern for modern's sake. I think this book should be required reading for students beginning their studies as well as for anyone considering a career in architecture.

That a Monograph of the works of such a talented and considered Architect as Bart Voorsanger would appeal to Architects will come as no surprise .However this book will appeal to anyone with even the remotest interest in Architecture or the struggles an artist honing his craft over a lifetime of professional and personal challenges .The admission of failures and weaknesses in both spheres of Barts life will be welcome reading to many a struggling Architect/Artist .The pathos contained in the chapter on Ground Zero is heart wrenching where the tragedy of the professional role Bart is tasked

with is reflected in an unfolding tragedy in his personal life .(For this section alone the book is worth the purchase price .)Beautifully written, the book gently unfolds and peels away the layers of a complex architect ,revealing in parallel an equally interesting personal life .The author manages to gently convey the consideration and care given to the execution of the projects by Bart Voorsanger Hugely commited to his craft Bart admits to not caring about his life and only caring about Architecture. On the contrary ,the self reflection revealed in this book indicate a man who clearly cares about both .Paula M Murphy Architect .Ireland

It is often said that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“art and lifeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• are intertwined, but how about architecture and life? Alastair GordonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“UnfoldedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• is about Bartholomew VoorsangerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s extraordinary life, - full of personal and professional challenges - and how architecture became the force through which he survived and surmounted these challenges. The development of VoorsangerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s remarkably varied career designing museums, colleges, airports, housing, memorials and private homes is told against the backdrop of a turbulent and often tragic personal life. Imbued with a strong modernist sensibility and a love of nature, VoorsangerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s architecture reflects an exquisitely controlled balance of design, light and materials and a sustained openness to adaptation and exploration. Immensely readable, GordonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book is not only a tribute to the art of architecture and how it affects our very being, but also a detailed expose of the creative process, as well as a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit.

This is an extraordinary book combining biography, memoir and architectural monograph regarding the life and work of a master architect of our times. A fascinating life story culminating in a stellar career, this book leads the reader through the ways in which Voorsanger's life shaped and informed his architecture. This book is both a work of art (in the quality of its images and exquisite design) and a work of literature and compelling biography. Highly recommended for anyone interested in biography and memoir as well as contemporary architecture and the built environment.

Thought, which is the act of critical thinking, and the luxury of thought, so indispensable to society today, is evident throughout all the work in this beautifully produced monograph. I canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t fully express how moved I was when reading ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“UnFolded,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• this highly personal view of the work, thoughts, and

heart of Bart Voorsanger. My reaction comes from the fact that, for a very small slice of time, I had the privilege to be, as they say in the line from Hamilton, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“in the room where it happens.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Years latter, holding this book, a realization began to dawn--Voorsanger took what life had in store for him and kept right on going, unfolding space and at the end of the day, unfolding architectural poetry. - Konrad

I have always been impressed with the works of Bartholomew Voorsanger, and the works are each presented with impressive photos. UNFOLDED is both a fascinating and colorful biography and a parade of harsh experiences that influence his work. I could imagine myself living in each of the airy grand residences that are so beautifully presented. Recently visited the World War II Museum in New Orleans -- a work still in progress. The photos of it are riveting. Now they are building the ten story canopy over all of the WWII pavilions. There is a photo of the model with the canopy. Can't wait to see the canopy next year.

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