

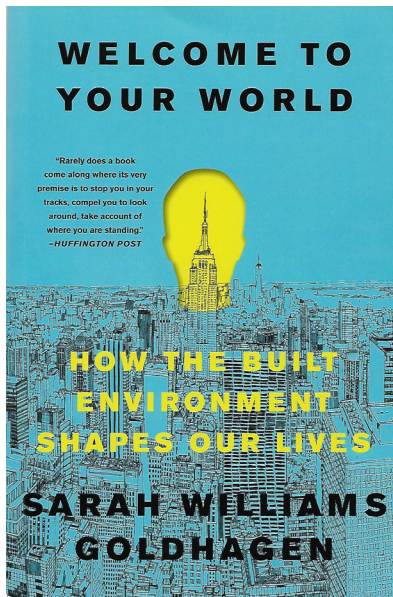
Welcome to Your World

How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives

Author: Sarah Williams Goldhagen

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“Our relationship to the built environment differs from that of any other art.” In order to find this special relationship, the award winning writer Sarah Williams Goldhagen, who taught at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design for ten years and was an architecture critic for the American magazine New Republic, expounds the relationship between built environment and human cognition in the current social context from multiple perspectives.

This is a wide-ranging English book with about 350 pages that analyzes many aspects such as psychology, sociology, architecture and landscape. The seven chapters in this book show step by step the impact of the built environment on people, how they experience the built environment, the factors that affect this experience in natural and social worlds and the principles and inspirations for designing the built environment. Through interpreting the form, pattern, color, light, sound or texture of buildings or landscape, Goldhagen explores how much the built environment affects what we think, feel and do. A critical tone and more than 150 photographs show that too many construction sites in the city are gradually devouring the quality of the life, and poorly designed places destroy people’s lives, when many builders only pursue quantity of buildings. For example, overcrowding, lack of privacy and environmental noise diminish the people’s capacity to overcome challenges. Windowless rooms also exacerbate behavioral problems and aggressive tendencies. But a good built environment can activate the senses, integrate nature and provides a good social context, thereby enhancing human capabilities. From the macroscopic urban layout to the microscopic architectural space, the author has carried out a detailed analysis of the value of public spaces and buildings to prove that the impact of the environment on people is subtle.

Each chapter has a clear logic and the study of this book is very instructive. The readers will not only understand the complex relationship between their mental health and the environment they inhabit, but also realize that the built environment matters because it can also be changed. This is a must-read book for designers to learn how to design for humans and what good design is. It also reminds them that constructed landscape can shape multiform lives. The writing method of praising after criticizing clarifies that critique plays an important role in design process. The author explains the professional theories by simple examples that people can integrate in daily life, the reading experience will be more intuitive and interesting. Thus, this book is valuable for everyone and it helps us to discard the notion that design is a discretionary luxury.

This book mobilizes people to work together to create a better built environment and a better life. Following the author’s guidance, the readers will gain professional knowledge and also comprehend the philosophy and meaning of life in the future world.

Review by Cai Yuqing (10.08.2020)