

GRAAF, Reinier de

Four walls and a roof : the complex nature of the simple profession. --
Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2017

513 p. : fot., il. ; 24 cm.

Bibliografía: p. 487-505

ISBN 978-0-674-976-108

1. Arquitectura contemporánea 2. Crítica arquitectónica 3. Siglo XX 4.
Siglo XXI

7.07 Profesión de arquitecto

COAM 19934

Reinier de Graaf

Four Walls and a Roof

THE COMPLEX NATURE OF

A SIMPLE PROFESSION



ARCHITECTURE, we like to believe, is an elevated art form that shapes the world as it pleases. *Four Walls and a Roof* challenges this notion, presenting a candid account of what it is really like to work as an architect.

Drawing on his own tragicomic experiences in the field, Reinier de Graaf reveals the world of contemporary architecture in vivid snapshots: from suburban New York to the rubble of northern Iraq, from the corridors of wealth in London, Moscow, and Dubai to garbage-strewn wastelands that represent the demolished hopes of postwar social housing. We meet oligarchs determined to translate ambitions into concrete and steel, developers for whom architecture is mere investment, and the layers of politicians, bureaucrats, consultants, and mysterious hangers-on who lie between any architectural idea and the chance of its execution.

Four Walls and a Roof tells the story of a profession buffeted by external forces that determine—at least as much as individual inspiration—what architects design. Perhaps the most important myth debunked is success itself. To achieve anything, architects must serve the powers they strive to critique, finding themselves in a perpetual conflict of interest. Together, architects, developers, politicians, and consultants form an improvised world of contest and compromise that none alone can control.

Four Walls and a Roof

The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession

Reinier de Graaf

Harvard University Press

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

LONDON, ENGLAND

2017

Copyright © 2017 by Reinier de Graaf
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
Third printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Graaf, Reinier de, 1964– author.

Title: Four walls and a roof : the complex nature of a simple profession /
Reinier de Graaf.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2017. |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017010016 | ISBN 9780674976108 (cloth : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Architectural practice. | Architecture.

Classification: LCC NA1995 .G69 2017 | DDC 720—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017010016>

It is life that is right and the architect who is wrong.

—Le Corbusier (toward the end of his life)

Contents

Preface	xi
I. Authority	1
1. I Will Learn You Architecture!	3
2. More Specifically, Everything!	7
3. Let Me Finish!	11
4. Four Walls and a Roof	15
II. Default by Design	19
5. Bloody Fools! The Story of Pimlico School, 1970–2010	21
6. Architektur ohne Eigenschaften	31
7. Neufert: The Exceptional Pursuit of the Norm	55
8. Reference without a Source: The Appeal of Atlanta Airport	63
9. The Inevitable Box	71
III. Found Causes	91
10. Spaceship Earth	93
11. Mies en Scène	103
12. Intruders: How Smart Technology Infiltrates Architecture	109
13. “Public” Space	115
14. From CIAM to Cyberspace: Architecture and the Community	123
15. With the Masses: The Architecture of Participation	133
IV. Trial and Error	145
16. Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit: Part One	149
17. London	167
18. How Is Denmark?	169
19. Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit: Part Two	183
20. Facing the Facts	199

21.	Naukograd	203
22.	A Spanish Tender	209
23.	On Hold	275
V. Powers That Be		283
24.	After the End of History	285
25.	The Other Truth	297
26.	Socialist in Content, Realist in Form	301
27.	The Descendant: A Conversation with Xenia Adjoubei, Nikita Khrushchev's Great-Granddaughter	307
28.	Undesirable Work Styles	317
29.	A Benevolent Dictator with Taste	323
30.	Royal Approval	327
31.	His Architect	334
32.	A Property Developer for President	337
VI. Megalopoli(tic)s		351
33.	A Faustian Bargain	353
34.	Amanhã	357
35.	Smart Cities of the Future	367
36.	The Sum of All Isms	371
37.	Dear Mr. Barber	375
38.	At Your Service: Ten Steps to Becoming a Successful Urban Consultant	381
39.	Rankings	385
VII. Progress		401
40.	Coup de Grâce: Pruitt-Igoe Revisited	404
41.	The Century That Never Happened	415
42.	In Memoriam: A Photo Essay	427
43.	The Captive Globe	459
44.	Remains of a Brave New World	467
Notes		487
Acknowledgments		507
Chapters Previously Published		509

Four Walls and a Roof

Preface

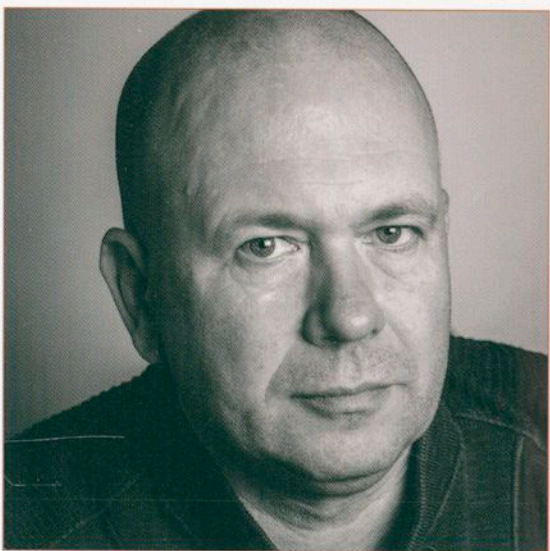
Why this book? Most architects are lousy theorists; I am no exception. Whenever we offer theories, they should be mistrusted. We go where our work leads us and develop thoughts along the way. Revelations about the larger things in life, if they come at all, are incidental by-products of our (often banal) labor.

That doesn't mean, however, that what architects have to say is without value. Architecture's utter dependence on outside forces provides it with intimate knowledge of those forces. Professional experiences give architects eyes and ears, even if they mostly insist on using their hands. Recorded and collated, these experiences amount to a revealing X-ray of the present.

These forty-four essays offer snapshots of a world usually invisible to outsiders. They voice doubts and talk of failed efforts and aborted attempts—of things that we thought would happen, but that never did. Their profound incoherence is a reflection of the world they describe; they are a personal record of the twenty-first century so far—a mix of tragicomic anecdotes from the field and larger reflections on the nature of our work. What does it mean to be an architect right now?

Roughly half the essays were written for prior publication without ever considering their placement in a book; the other half were written with this book solely in mind. The relations among the essays are therefore partially intentional and partially accidental. *Four Walls and a Roof* can be read like a book or browsed like a website—consumed in stages or even incompletely. Each of its seven parts addresses a myth looming over the profession of architecture: its presumed authority (Part I), its reliance on individual inspiration (Part II), its commitment to good causes (Part III), its control of its own professional practices (Part IV), its independence from external powers (part V), its mastery of the large scale (Part VI), and, finally, its unrelenting devotion to progress (Part VII).

Perhaps the overriding myth debunked by this book is that of the architect as a hero. Serving the same powers that it strives to critique, architecture is condemned to a perpetual conflict of interest. Together, architects, clients, politicians, and consultants make up an embroiled world in which it is forever unclear who calls the shots.



REINIER DE GRAAF is Partner at the Office
for Metropolitan Architecture, Rotterdam.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts

London, England

www.hup.harvard.edu

PHOTOGRAPH House in Wusterwitz, Germany, built with
recycled concrete panels from a housing estate in the former
East Germany, © Adrienne Norman

AUTHOR PHOTOGRAPH © Adrienne Norman

DESIGN Tim Jones

"This is a terrific book. It combines reflections on design, history, politics, and economics in an illuminating manner, offering a kaleidoscopic portrait of the state of architecture and its recent history. The writing is consistently delightful, always irreverent, and at times exceedingly funny."

—BERNARDO ZACKA, Stanford University and University of Cambridge

"The title of this book, provided by an innocent inquirer, has provoked Reinier de Graaf into a shrewd, lucid, and engaging survey of the architecture and building scene. He seems to have been everywhere and listened to everyone who is—or has been—active and influential in building and planning. You will not find a better guide to the planning, building, and architecture of the past half century!"

—JOSEPH RYKWERT, University of Pennsylvania

"Reinier de Graaf is ruthlessly honest about what it is like to work at architecture and wickedly cynical about how power works in our current economy. He uses his vantage point from a top architectural firm not to crow success but rather to push us architects, for better or worse, to keep fighting the good fight. Reading *Four Walls and a Roof* will make you laugh, cry, and so identify."

—PEGGY DEAMER, Yale School of Architecture

"This book is a frightfully funny and addictive read—and probably not only for architects. For us architects, it is also a profoundly annoying account of our profession, debunking its pretensions, reveling in its ironies and paradoxes. The persistence with which it makes my hair stand up must mean something: De Graaf is real rather than a cynic. Let me annoy him for a change: Reinier, you are a brilliant writer."

—PATRIK SCHUMACHER, Zaha Hadid Architects

Karl-Liebknecht-Straße

ISBN-13: 978-0-674-97610-8



90000