The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s

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Overview

Renata Holod, Hasan-Uddin Khan, and Kimberly Mims's "The Mosque and the Modern World: Architects, Patrons and Designs Since the 1950s" offers a comprehensive and critical examination of mosque architecture across the globe from the mid-20th century onwards. The book delves into how the traditional typology of the mosque has been reinterpreted, challenged, and transformed by modern architectural practices, materials, and design philosophies. It explores the complex interplay between religious requirements, cultural identity, national aspirations, and global architectural trends, presenting a rich tapestry of case studies from diverse geographical and political contexts, including the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.

The central argument of the book is that modern mosque design is not a monolithic phenomenon but a dynamic and often contradictory field, shaped by the visions of architects, the demands of patrons (ranging from states and royal families to local communities), and the evolving understanding of what constitutes a 'modern' yet 'Islamic' space. The authors highlight how architects have grappled with the legacy of historical Islamic architecture while integrating contemporary aesthetics and technologies, often resulting in innovative and sometimes controversial designs. The book is significant for its extensive documentation and analysis, providing invaluable insights into the cultural, social, and political forces that have influenced the construction of mosques in an era of rapid change and globalization.

Key Takeaways

- Modern mosque architecture since the 1950s reflects a complex negotiation between Islamic tradition and global contemporary design principles.
- The role of patrons, including states, royal families, and local communities, is crucial in shaping the architectural expression and symbolic meaning of modern mosques.
- Architects worldwide have explored diverse approaches to mosque design, ranging from contextual regionalism to abstract modernism, often challenging conventional forms.

• Mosques built in non-Muslim majority countries often serve as important symbols of cultural identity and community cohesion for Muslim minorities.

• The integration of new materials and construction technologies has significantly expanded the formal possibilities for mosque design in the modern era.

• Understanding modern mosque architecture requires considering the socio-political contexts, national identities, and individual artistic visions that underpin each project.

• The book demonstrates that there is no single 'modern Islamic style,' but rather a rich spectrum of interpretations reflecting diverse cultural and theological perspectives.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction

This introductory section sets the stage for understanding mosque architecture in the modern world, from the mid-20th century onwards. It outlines the book's scope, addressing how mosques have evolved in response to decolonization, the rise of independent Muslim states, oil wealth, and global migration. It introduces the central themes of identity, tradition versus modernity, and the diverse roles of architects and patrons in shaping these sacred spaces, emphasizing the mosque as a dynamic architectural type reflecting complex socio-political and cultural shifts across different regions.

The Mosque and the Modern World

This chapter delves into the conceptual framework of 'modernity' as applied to mosque design. It explores the tension between preserving traditional Islamic architectural elements and adopting contemporary building technologies, materials, and aesthetics. The authors discuss key debates around authenticity, symbolism, and the role of architects in defining new forms for religious spaces. It examines early post-colonial efforts to forge national architectural styles and how these often incorporated both local heritage and international modernism, setting the stage for the diverse architectural expressions seen in later decades.

The Mosque and the State

This section examines the profound influence of state patronage on mosque architecture, particularly in newly independent Muslim-majority nations and oil-rich states. It illustrates how governments utilized mosques as powerful symbols of national identity, modernization, and political legitimacy. Case studies often include monumental national mosques, such as the King Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, the National Mosque in Abuja, and various grand projects in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, showcasing large scale, often international architectural collaborations, and the projection of state power and religious authority through design.

The Mosque and the Community

This chapter focuses on mosques built through local community initiatives, often reflecting grassroots needs and more vernacular or regionally specific architectural expressions. It contrasts with state-sponsored projects by highlighting the role of local committees, individual donations, and a desire for spaces that resonate directly with the immediate congregation. Examples often include smaller, more intimate mosques in villages or urban neighborhoods, frequently built with local materials and traditional craftsmanship, emphasizing functionality, accessibility, and communal participation in their design and construction, reflecting diverse local interpretations of Islamic architectural heritage.

The Mosque and the Individual

This section explores the significant impact of individual patrons and architects who have left a distinctive mark on mosque design through their personal vision or artistic experimentation. It features projects driven by a specific philosophical approach to Islamic architecture or unique aesthetic sensibilities. The chapter discusses figures like Hassan Fathy, known for his advocacy of vernacular architecture and traditional building techniques, and Abdel-Wahed El-Wakil, celebrated for his revival of Mamluk architectural traditions. It also includes wealthy private individuals commissioning unique and often avant-garde mosque designs that push the boundaries of conventional forms and materials.

The Mosque and the City

This chapter addresses the complex challenges and opportunities of integrating mosques into modern urban environments. It examines how mosques adapt to dense cityscapes, respond to contemporary urban planning regulations, and contribute to the civic fabric of rapidly developing cities. Discussions cover issues of visibility, accessibility, and the creation of sacred spaces within bustling secular contexts. Case studies include mosques that incorporate commercial or educational facilities, those designed to make a strong architectural statement within an urban skyline, and those that navigate the complexities of urban infrastructure and public space.

The Mosque and the World

This section focuses on the global diaspora of Muslim communities and the emergence of mosques in non-Muslim majority countries, particularly in Europe, North America, and Australia. It explores how these mosques navigate issues of cultural identity, integration, and representation in new contexts. The chapter discusses the architectural challenges of creating visible yet sensitive religious structures, often balancing traditional iconography with contemporary Western architectural styles, and serving diverse immigrant communities while engaging with the wider host society, reflecting a globalized understanding of Islamic architecture.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter provides a synthesis of the diverse trends and themes discussed throughout the book. It reflects on the evolving nature of mosque architecture in the modern era, highlighting the interplay of tradition and innovation, local and global influences, and the continuous search for identity and meaning. It offers insights into future directions for mosque design, considering ongoing challenges such as climate change, technological advancements, and the changing demographics of Muslim communities worldwide, while emphasizing the mosque's enduring role as a spiritual, social, and communal center.

Themes

- Modern Islamic architecture
- Cultural identity
- Globalized design
- Patronage and power
- Tradition and innovation
- Sacred space evolution

Frequently Asked Questions

What is The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s about?

The book is a comprehensive study of mosque architecture worldwide from the 1950s to the late 20th century. It explores how architects and patrons have reimagined the mosque, balancing traditional Islamic forms with modern design, materials, and global architectural trends, examining projects across diverse cultural and political contexts.

Is The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s worth reading?

Yes, it is highly recommended for anyone interested in architectural history, Islamic art and architecture, cultural studies, or the intersection of religion and modernity. It offers a meticulously researched and richly illustrated survey, providing deep insights into the evolution of a significant building type in the modern era.

How does The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s end?

Spoiler: The book concludes by reflecting on the future trajectory of mosque architecture, discussing ongoing challenges such as globalization, environmental considerations, and the perpetual dialogue between tradition and innovation. It offers a forward-looking perspective on how mosques will continue to adapt to evolving societal and spiritual needs.

Who should read The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s?

This book is essential reading for architects, architectural historians, urban planners, scholars of Islamic studies, and students of art history. It also appeals to anyone with an interest in cultural identity, religious architecture, or the impact of globalization on built environments.

How long does it take to read The mosque and the modern world: architects, patrons and designs since the 1950s?

Given its academic nature, detailed analysis, and numerous illustrations, reading this book thoroughly would likely take between 6 to 8 hours, depending on the reader's pace and engagement with the visual material.

Questions & Answers

What is the central argument of "The Mosque and the Modern World"?

The book argues that mosque architecture since the 1950s is a complex interplay of global modern architectural trends, diverse local traditions, and the specific socio-political and economic contexts of patrons and communities. It challenges the notion of a singular "modern Islamic architecture," instead highlighting a spectrum of regional and ideological approaches to mosque design in a post-colonial and increasingly globalized era.

How do the authors define "modernity" in the context of mosque architecture?

The authors define modernity not merely as a stylistic movement but as a broader condition encompassing technological advancements, new materials, globalized architectural discourse, and changing social structures. In mosque design, this translates to debates over functionalism, symbolism, and the integration of contemporary building practices while maintaining spiritual and cultural relevance, often leading to innovative forms and interpretations.

What role do patrons play in shaping modern mosque designs, according to the book?

Patrons, ranging from national governments and royal families to local communities and wealthy individuals, play a crucial role. Their ideological stances, financial resources, and cultural aspirations often dictate the architectural direction, choice of architects, and the symbolic messages embedded in the mosque. The book illustrates how patronage can either encourage radical innovation or reinforce traditionalism, reflecting diverse agendas.

How does the book address the tension between tradition and innovation in mosque design?

The book explores this tension as a central theme, showing how architects and patrons navigate the desire to create contemporary structures that also resonate with historical Islamic architectural forms and spiritual meanings. It highlights various strategies, from abstracting

traditional motifs to reinterpreting historical typologies, demonstrating that innovation often involves a dialogue with tradition rather than a complete rupture, adapting to new contexts.

What is the significance of the "since the 1950s" timeframe in the book's title?

The 1950s mark a pivotal period characterized by post-colonial nation-building, increased oil wealth in some Muslim-majority countries, and the rise of global modernism. This era saw a surge in mosque construction, often commissioned by new states seeking to express national identity or by communities adapting to rapid urbanization, making it a rich period for studying architectural and cultural shifts in the Islamic world.

Does the book focus on a specific geographical region for its case studies?

No, the book adopts a global perspective, examining mosque designs across diverse geographical regions, including the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. This broad scope allows the authors to illustrate the varied responses to modernity and local contexts within the wider Islamic world, showcasing the rich tapestry of contemporary mosque architecture.

How does the book discuss the use of new materials and technologies in modern mosques?

The book details how modern materials like reinforced concrete, steel, and glass, along with new construction techniques, have enabled architects to create innovative forms and larger spans previously impossible. It explores how these materials are integrated, sometimes controversially, into designs that still aim to evoke traditional Islamic aesthetics or spiritual qualities, pushing the boundaries of what a mosque can be.

What is the book's perspective on the "identity crisis" often associated with modern Islamic architecture?

The authors acknowledge the debates and challenges concerning identity in modern Islamic architecture, where some critics argue for a loss of authentic Islamic expression. However, the book generally presents this period as one of dynamic experimentation and redefinition, where architects and communities actively forge new identities and expressions of faith rather than passively losing old ones, reflecting evolving cultural landscapes.

How does politics influence mosque design according to the authors?

Politics profoundly influences mosque design, particularly in state-sponsored projects. Mosques can serve as powerful symbols of national identity, political legitimacy, or ideological statements. The book provides examples where mosque architecture reflects governmental policies, pan-Islamic aspirations, or even local power struggles, making them more than just places of worship but also significant political statements in the built environment.

What is the role of symbolism in modern mosque architecture as presented in the book?

Symbolism remains crucial in modern mosque architecture, even as forms evolve. Traditional elements like minarets, domes, and mihrabs are often reinterpreted, abstracted, or even omitted to convey continuity, spiritual meaning, or cultural identity in new ways. The book shows how architects use both traditional and innovative symbolic language to communicate with worshippers and the wider public, adapting to contemporary sensibilities.

Does the book discuss specific architects or architectural firms?

Yes, the book features numerous architects and firms who have significantly contributed to modern mosque design. It highlights their individual approaches, design philosophies, and the challenges they faced in integrating modernism with Islamic architectural principles. Examples include figures like Hassan Fathy, Kenzo Tange, and various local practitioners, showcasing a diverse range of creative responses to the design brief.

How does the book categorize or analyze different approaches to modern mosque design?

The book doesn't impose rigid categories but rather analyzes approaches through thematic lenses such as the reinterpretation of tradition, the adoption of international modernism, the influence of regionalism, and the impact of patronage. It showcases a spectrum of designs from highly abstract to more overtly traditional, demonstrating the immense diversity of responses to the challenge of building mosques in the modern era.

What challenges do architects face when designing modern mosques, according to the book?

Architects face challenges including balancing functional requirements with spiritual symbolism, integrating modern materials and techniques with traditional aesthetics, satisfying diverse patron expectations, and navigating cultural and religious sensitivities. They also contend with debates over authenticity, innovation, and the appropriate expression of Islamic identity in a globalized world, making each project a complex negotiation of multiple factors.

How does the book address the concept of "Islamic identity" in architecture?

The book explores "Islamic identity" not as a monolithic concept but as a multifaceted and evolving idea. It demonstrates how different regions and communities express their Islamic identity through varied architectural forms, materials, and decorative schemes, reflecting local interpretations of faith, history, and modernity. This approach highlights the dynamic and pluralistic nature of Islamic architectural expression worldwide.

What is the book's overall contribution to the study of architectural history?

The book makes a significant contribution by providing a comprehensive and nuanced examination of mosque architecture in a crucial post-1950s period. It challenges simplistic views of tradition versus modernity, highlights the global diversity of Islamic architectural expression, and emphasizes the complex interplay of cultural, political, and artistic factors in shaping built forms, enriching our understanding of modern religious architecture.

Spoiler: How does the book conclude its discussion on the future of mosque architecture?

Spoiler: The book concludes by suggesting that mosque architecture will continue to be a dynamic and evolving field, constantly responding to new technologies, changing social needs, and ongoing dialogues between tradition and innovation. It emphasizes that there is no single "future" but rather a continuous process of reinterpretation and adaptation, reflecting the diverse and living nature of Islamic communities worldwide, ensuring its ongoing relevance.