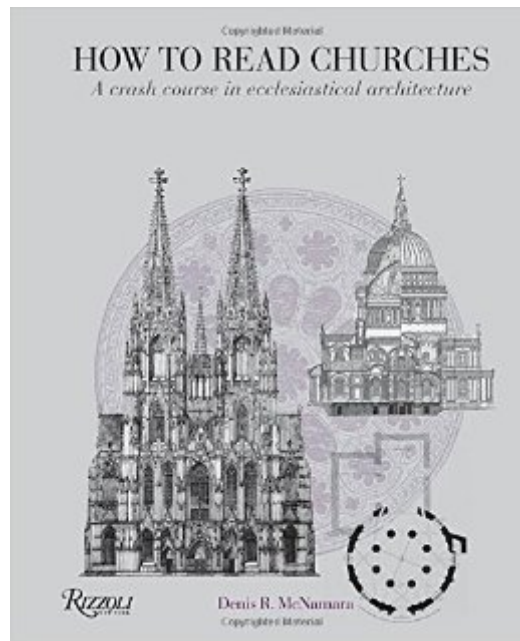# How To Read Churches: A Crash Course In Ecclesiastical Architecture

Synopsis

Small enough to fit in a pocket yet serious enough to provide real answers, this primer is a must-have for architecture and history buffs, tourists, and churchgoers interested in decoding the styles and symbols of religious buildings. Every building contains clues embedded in its design that identify not only its architectural style but also who designed it, what kind of congregation it was built for, and why. This practical yet charming handbook is the key to decoding the style, history, evolution, and social significance of religious buildings. Not strictly limited to churches, it also covers abbeys, chapels, and monasteries, among other structures. Organized according to architectural element (windows, domes, arches, etc.), each element is presented in chronological order. Additional chapters explore the architectural influence of geography, history, and various creeds, along with an illustrated timeline showing how, where, and in many cases why certain church features evolved through the centuries. There is also a useful introduction to naming each component of a church, from vaults to buttresses and transepts to apses. All entries are illustrated with period engravings and line drawings. This book will be invaluable for architecture buffs and anyone who has ever wondered why classic New England churches are white with little ornament, why Quaker meetinghouses have no altars, or why Episcopalians traditionally favored the Gothic style.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Author Denis McNamara is a recognized expert in classical church architecture, which after 40 years of dreadful utilitarianism is thankfully making a comeback. In his new book, he uses beautiful

sketches of famous and lesser-known churches, chapels, and cathedrals to teach readers about the styles, materials, motifs, and purposes of ecclesiastical buildings. It is a wonderful resource and, like a mini-coffee table book, a great thing to leave around the house for visitors and family members to pick up and read at their leisure. My one criticism is its topical organization. It would have benefited from earlier explanations of key concepts and terms, which the reader must learn as he or she reads along. Regardless, McNamara satisfies a need for a book on ecclesiastical architecture easily understood by non-expert laymen. Highly recommended.

"How to Read Churches: A Crash Course in Ecclesiastical Architecture" by Denis R. McNamara offers a fascinating look at the ideas behind the architecture of churches. In many ways, churches are meant to represent the connection between heaven and earth. McNamara, who holds a BA in art history from Yale University and a PhD in architectural history from the University of Virginia, makes what could have been an extremely complex topic very accessible to the interested reader.He covers all architectural periods and styles, from classical to Romanesque, Gothic to modern and into the present day. He also explores the reasons behind the architectural choices (both design and material) and what each choice was/is trying to convey. Decorative elements such as stained glass windows and statuary are also examined.The informative text is accompanied by line drawings providing examples of each architectural aspect from existing churches. While one may have wished to see actual photographs of these elements, the line drawings do help provide a unified feel to the book."How to Read Churches" is fascinating for anyone interested in theology, architecture, history, or art. It is small in size (6 1/2" x 5"), but offers a wealth of information. It would make a perfect travel companion whether one is exploring churches close to home or on pilgrimage in a foreign land. It would also make a fine text to accompany a class on church architecture.

This small, easily portable book introduces a wide scope of topics pertaining to the architecture of churches, all the way from floor plans to stained glass.Its apparent simplicity clearly derives from major research and editorial work. The text is short and to the point and emphasis is placed on illustrations. Consistently, these are monochrome drawings. They succeed in focussing attention on concepts rather than on individual buildings as photographs would have. The lay-out is both contemporary and attractive.This work is very strongly recommended, both as an introduction or a refresher on the topic and as a travel companion.

This small gem informs the reader about numerous different details of sacred architecture, giving

interesting examples and images. It's small enough to bring on the plane or train. Not meant as a complete tome on the subject, this book will serve the amateur very well. Highly recommended.

A beautiful little book. It would make a nice gift. And the information is surprisingly useful for church members with classic church buildings to maintain. I am enjoying it.

I liked this book, but was hoping McNamara would get into the "why" churches look the way they do more than just provide simple descriptions of different elements of a church. This book is great for description, but lacks enough "philosophy" of Church architecture to enable one to "read" churches.

Very nice hand-sized book that contains many well-printed diagrams of various types of church architecture. It's detailed, informative, and printed on high-quality paper, and it's nice as a conversation book to keep at home but also portable enough to take on a tour.

Great reference text for students and practitioners of architecture, and anyone with the remotest interest in the anatomical features of architecture throughout the ages

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