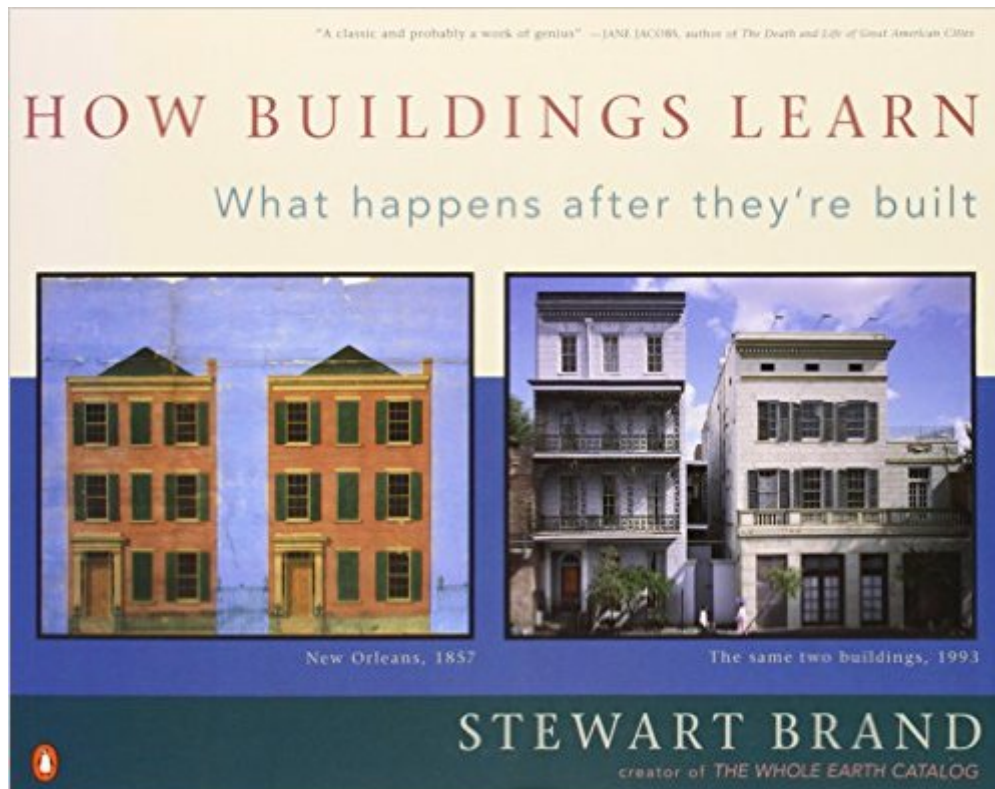


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# How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built



## Synopsis

Buildings have often been studied whole in space, but never before have they been studied whole in time. *How Buildings Learn* is a masterful new synthesis that proposes that buildings adapt best when constantly refined and reshaped by their occupants, and that architects can mature from being artists of space to becoming artists of time. From the connected farmhouses of New England to I.M. Pei's Media Lab, from "satisficing" to "form follows funding," from the evolution of bungalows to the invention of Santa Fe Style, from Low Road military surplus buildings to a High Road English classic like Chatsworth; this is a far-ranging survey of unexplored essential territory. More than any other human artifacts, buildings improve with time; if they're allowed to. *How Buildings Learn* shows how to work with time rather than against it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Stewart Brand's *How Buildings Learn*: What happens after they're built is as much a reflection of his life as it is about architecture. This potent clearly written essay provides valuable insights for a wider ranging audience while poking fun at established norms in the information age. Depreciatory of modernism casting doubt on the success of popular monuments paying homage to their creators, Brand does not limit his criticism of Wright for Falling Water in southwestern Pennsylvania or I.M. Pei's Media Lab Building at MIT. The strength of the book is the candid and thoughtful approach, interrelating complex issues with simple strands. Weaving a tale of old stuff in a new world, Brand proposes that buildings are most useful to their occupants and neighbors when they adapt. He assures that change will happen and that the only enduring monuments are those that can

transform with time. Brand relies on a variety of primary and secondary sources and reinforces his examples with candid photographs, often visually comparing and contrasting to make his points. For each of these archetypes he tests the building against its function to perform basic living needs. He candidly makes observations without concern for political correctness within the broader architectural community. Proposing six shear levels within a building based on their ability to temporally adapt, *How Buildings Learn* uses Site, Structure, Skin, Services, Space, and Stuff as a highly successful outline in delivering its message (p. 13). One source attributes this paradigm to that developed by British architect and historian F. Duffy's "Four S's" of capital investment in buildings. The site is eternal, yet often ignored by architects. The structure is most permanent defining the form and lasting 30 to 300 years.

'Buildings That Learn' covers the adaptation over time of buildings to tenant needs, often hindered by all of: the 'fixed solution in year xyza' aesthetic architects; the vagaries of the real-estate market; and the short-lifetime of modern buildings (quality not increased at same or better rate of increase in human life over centuries). Interestingly, software 'guru' Ed Yourdon flagged up similar problems hindering software productivity and quality in his 'Rise & Fall of the American Programmer' (e.g. non-customer focus, markets prices & labor costs, poor quality development etc.). Addressing the building layers (site, structure, skin, services, space plan and "stuff") through a logical sequence of chapters, to get the most out of this book deserves a thorough read rather than a surface glance. The deeply referenced & illustrated, entertaining chapters span: Flow- introduction and the time dimension; Shearing Layers- of the different rates of change in buildings; "Nobody Cares What You Do In There": The Low Road- easy adaptation in cheap buildings; Houseproud: The High Road- refined adaptation in long-lasting sustained-purpose buildings; Magazine Architecture: No Road- where tenants needs ignored for photo-aesthetics; Unreal estate- and markets sever continuity in buildings; Preservation: A Quiet, Popularist, Conservative, Victorious Revolution- to address incontinuity and frustrate innovators; The Romance of Maintenance- and preservation; Vernacular: How Buildings Learn from Each Other- and respect for design wisdom of older buildings; Function Melts Form: Satisficing Home and Office; The Scenario-buffered Building; and Built for Change- imagining buildings inviting adaption.

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