

# African Spaces: Designs For Living In Upper Volta

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The culmination of the work of Gropius and Wachsmann in this field was the General Panel Package House, on which they collaborated, developed in the United States from 1941 to about 1950. This project, carried so tantalizingly near to success, proved to be the swan song of the factory-produced house as Gropius and Wachsmann envisioned it. It appropriately receives the lengthiest discussion (comprising almost the last 90 pages of the book), an extraordinarily balanced account of the complex events behind the pursuit and failure of the dream. Personal details—the arduous emigration of both protagonists, the unavoidable tension of work in the Gropius household at Lincoln—are memorable. The complementary strengths of the two men are drawn out: “Wachsmann was the essential innovator of detail. Gropius . . . provided the theoretical framework” (p. 259). Strongest of all emphases, throughout the book but especially here, is Herbert’s careful attention to the crucial question of economics.

Two or three issues, however, seem to me to be too lightly covered. Herbert notes on several occasions (for example, p. 153 and p. 302) that factory-produced schemes were seldom significantly less expensive than conventional construction. A part of the problem of course lies in the fact that no such schemes were made in sufficient volume to realize the economics of mass production. But part of the problem may lie elsewhere. In the period embracing the Gropius-Wachsmann story (and well before, for that matter), conventional construction, especially that based on balloon-frame derivatives in the United States, was a field in which what Herbert properly calls “creeping industrialism” (p. 17) was continuously at work improving an already rather efficient process. He discusses this phenomenon knowledgeably but briefly on pp. 17–18, but my own feeling is that a fuller assessment of that more mundane development, brought in at several points in the story, would help our understanding of the continued non-success of factory-produced housing schemes.

A concomitant issue is the problem of foundation and utilities, especially on irregular sites. This too I suspect is one of prefab’s *beses mores*, and it too is alluded to in the discussion of the Palestinian houses (p. 190) and elsewhere. But the foundation problem is complex and needs a few paragraphs or pages of analysis at several points.

In this general connection, Herbert is to be commended for facing and discussing the phenomenon of the mobile home, one

of whose great advantages is that it simply sidesteps the foundation problem, and for underscoring the tragedy that Gropius’s and Wachsmann’s point of view led them to reject or ignore the mobile-home approach.

Modular systems—and the systems discussed in this book are essentially modular—resist yielding flexible, genuinely workable domestic plans. Gropius and Wachsmann no doubt struggled to make them do so, but with varied success. A General Panel plan by Gropius (p. 296) has the living room mutilated by two doors, a hallway entry, and a large opening to dining. The living room plan on p. 295 is even more frustrating for furniture arrangement if one considers where floor-to-ceiling glass, shown only in elevation, occurs. Such shortcomings can hardly have been crucial to the failure of the dream, since not enough houses were produced to test market reaction. It may be that the competition was doing no better; certainly some other prefab proposals (for example, the “Igloo” house, p. 237) were far worse. Gropius, at least, sought a components system capable of giving a variety of plans. Still, with architects of this distinction, one wonders whether matters of furniture arrangement for human use were confronted and, if so, whether there was not an obligation to demonstrate this. (The plan that tells us the most in this regard is the Packaged House type A [pp. 260–261]—the one that also shows most clearly what was intended for foundations and utility services; but this plan, which seems so graphically and technically elegant, is a lot less so in its provision for normal family usages.)

Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxion House is discussed (especially on p. 223); but I was surprised to find that his Wichita House, so much more fully developed and so close to realization contemporaneously with the Packaged House, is nowhere mentioned, not even in a note.

Nevertheless, these minor caveats are just that. This is a significant book and fundamental reading hereafter, I would think, for study not only of Gropius and Wachsmann but of the ideals and processes, difficulties and limitations, of the Modern Movement in general.

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## TRADITIONAL BUILDING IN AFRICA AND AMERICA

JEAN-PAUL BOURDIER and TRINH T. MINH-HA, *African Spaces: Design for Living in Upper Volta*, New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1985, vii + 232 pp., 102 illus., 74 figs., \$37.50.

J. C. MOUGHTIN, *Hausa Architecture*, New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1965, 182 pp., 129 illus., 84 figs., \$24.95.

LABELLE PRUSSIN, *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, xxiii + 306 pp., 228 illus., 17 color plates, 199 figs., \$75.00.

FRIEDRICH W. SCHWERDTFEGER, *Traditional Housing in African Cities: A Comparative Study of Housing in Zaria, Ibadan and Marrakech*, New York: John Wiley, 1982, xi + 480 pp., 24 illus., 66 figs., over 150 charts, \$60.00.

The growing interest in traditional African architecture among architectural historians and the general public is attested to by the expanding number of publications in the field. These include journal and periodical articles, conference proceedings, and books like the four under review. Traditionally, Africa, like the proverbial “Orient” of Edward Said, is a career for Western Af-

African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) [Jean-Paul Bourdier, Trinh Minh-Ha] on vermiculturemanual.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. The diversity and complexity of African vernacular architecture remain widely unknown both to the general public and to architects. Yet Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) has published several books on vernacular architecture, notably *Drawn from African Dwellings* and *African Spaces: Design for Living in Upper Volta*. African spaces: designs for living in Upper Volta /? Jean-Paul Bourdier, Trinh T. Minh-ha. Author. Bourdier, Jean-Paul. Other Authors. Trinh, T. Minh-Ha (Thi). AFRICAN SPACES: DESIGNS FOR LIVING IN UPPER VOLTA (BURKINA FASO) By Trinh Minh-ha - Hardcover. eBay!. African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta by Bourdier, Jean-Paul & Trinh T. Minh-Ha and a great selection of similar Used, New and Collectible Books. Review: African Spaces: Design for Living in Upper Volta by Jean-Paul Bourdier, Trinh T. Minh-Ha; Hausa Architecture by J. C. Moughtin; Hatumere: Islamic. For a LIMITED TIME ONLY on all orders, you get: SIGNED BY JEAN-PAUL; 10x10 SIGNED/NUMBERED PRINT. Body Unbound - the latest book by Jean-Paul. African spaces: designs for living in Upper Volta by Jean-Paul Bourdier African spaces: designs for living in Upper Volta. by Jean-Paul Bourdier; T Minh-Ha. African Spaces by Jean-Paul Bourdier, , available at Book Depository African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta. Philadelphia: Chelsea House. Bourdier, Jean-Paul, and Trinh Minh-ha. African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta. New York: Africana Publishing. In all spheres of African life considered in this chapter as in the rest of this book geometrical (), African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta. Environment and social behavior: Privacy, personal space, territory and crowding. Monterey, CA: African spaces: Designs for living in Upper Volta. New York. cation of design and engineering technology can be invested in them. Further, we can T. Minh-ha. African Spaces, Designs for Living in Upper-Volta. Page 1. jean-paul bourdier/trinh t. minh-ha. AFRICAN. SPACES designs for living in upper volta. African Spaces. Designs for Living in Upper Volta. In collaboration with Jean-Paul Bourdier. New York, London: Holmes & Meier, Anthropological and. Woman, Native, Other. En minuscules. African Spaces. Designs for Living in Upper Volta. Lovecidal: Walking with the Disappeared, Fordham University Press. African Spaces that owe much to Muslim aesthetics, pro-. Islamic Design in West Africa. Designs for Living in Upper Volta vide a foundation for interpreting the. Neither black/red/yellow nor woman but poet or writer. . African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta ( ) (with Jean-Paul Bourdier). African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta. Trinh T. Minh-ha. from: N/A Vernacular Architecture of West Africa: A World in Dwelling. Trinh T. Minh-ha.

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