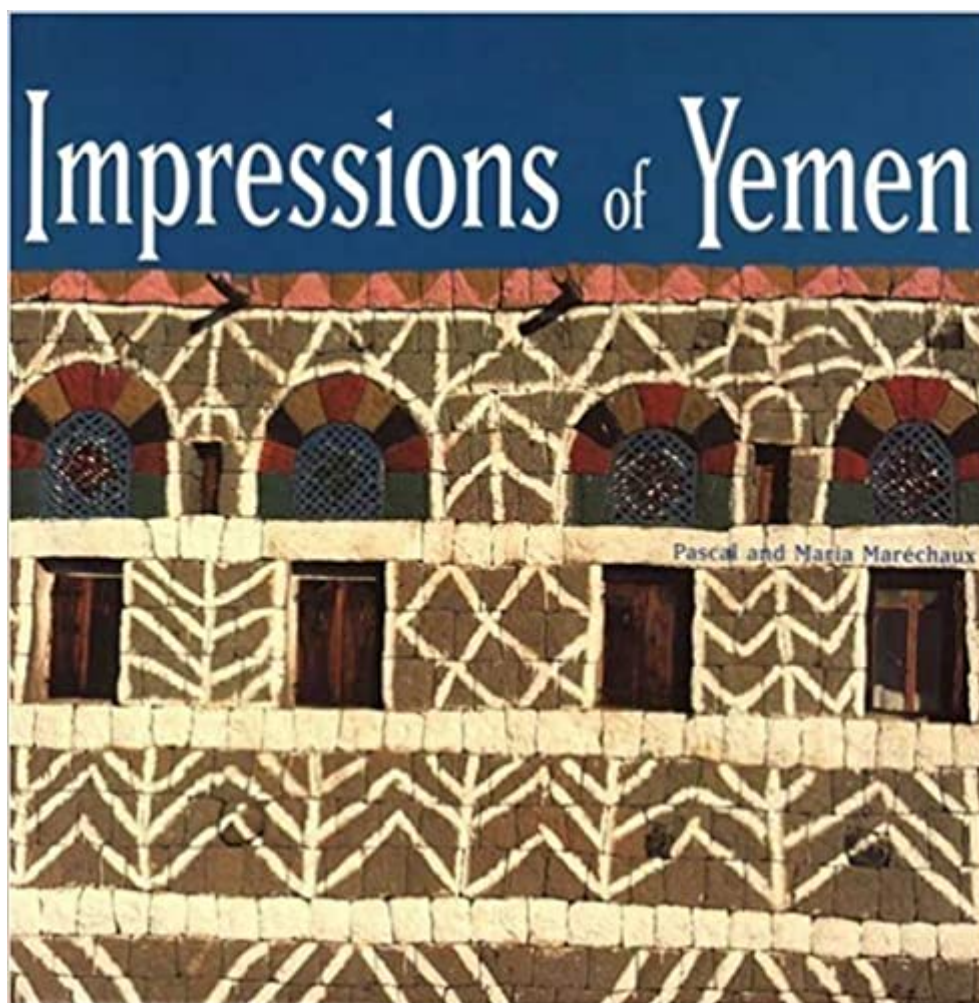


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Impressions Of Yemen



Synopsis

A country surrounded by mountains, Yemen has for many centuries remained untouched by and resistant to foreign influences. Turned in upon itself Yemen is a world whose arts and architecture preserve many links with the past, while integrating the modern world to an often startling degree. From the coastal plains of the Tihama in the west inland to the cities of Wadi Hadramawt in the east, Pascal and Maria MarÃ©chaux's beautiful photographs reveal the origins and meanings of the extraordinary indigenous painted houses. Yemeni architecture uses only local resources, inscribing its forms directly into the landscape, to produce a highly mimetic effect: the forms and decoration evoke the qualities of the mountains and earth, the natural light, and the vegetation of the environment. Architecture is also an important bearer of social symbolism: brilliant colors are used both to protect and to seduce, to vaunt the wealth and status of the owner; and the organization of interior space defines the central role of hospitality in Yemeni life. The language of color on both architectural exteriors and interiors reflects the organic world through the use of natural pigments, and also creates complex representational forms linked to the costume and body make-up of the individual inhabitants. In a fascinating text, the authors describe how, through a limited decorative repertoire and the same materials, houses of similar form yet infinite variety are constructed. This beautiful book introduces us to a misunderstood world, a culture threatened by modern technology, which nevertheless demonstrates a mastery of materials, tools, and symbols to produce a polychrome architecture of immense and lasting power.

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Customer Reviews

A country surrounded by mountains, Yemen has for many centuries remained untouched by and resistant to foreign influences. Turned in upon itself Yemen is a world whose arts and architecture preserve many links with the past, while integrating the modern world to an often startling degree. From the coastal plains of the Tihama in the west inland to the cities of Wadi Hadramawt in the east, Pascal and Maria Marechaux's photographs reveal the origins and meanings of the extraordinary indigenous painted houses. Yemeni architecture uses only local resources, inscribing its forms directly into the landscape, to produce a highly mimetic effect: the forms and decoration evoke the qualities of the mountains and earth, the natural light, and the vegetation of the environment. Architecture is also an important bearer of social symbolism: brilliant colors are used both to protect and to seduce, to vaunt the wealth and status of the owner; and the organization of interior space defines the central role of hospitality in Yemeni life. In a fascinating text, the authors describe how, through a limited decorative repertoire and the same materials, houses of similar form yet infinite variety are constructed.

... light which is nothing other than one of the ninety-nine qualities of God." So says the author(s) in one of the descriptive passages in this book of photography. Pascal and Maria Marechaux have lived and visited the Yemen over a period of three decades, have produced a good half-dozen books, mainly of photography, on the country, and have thus become recognized experts on the country. This is one of their later works, produced in the late '90's. They are trained architects, with a deep understanding of form and design, and couple that with a photographer's appreciation of light, and its absence, the shadows. The subject matter in this book is an exquisite balance of buildings and people. The landscapes of previous books are largely absent. They ranged over almost all the now-unified Yemen, including the Tihama lowlands and Wadi Hadramaut. The photographs of the city of Shibam remain a classic, the city of the ancient world with "skyscrapers" tucked into the heart of the Hadramawt. I particularly liked the tomb of Ahmad ibn Isa al-Muhajir, in this same wadi, taken at an angle to accentuate its form, and its stark white against the dark hills (p38). In terms of people, they score again and again with arresting faces of these unique people. The men of the Munabbi tribe, in festive gear, on page 100, are a study all to itself. Likewise, form and figure are stunning with a woman in the doorway on page 103. The last chapter focuses on the vision of a futuristic world, and captures images on trucks and buildings that reflect the modern era of planes and satellite dishes. The focus of the book is on the architectural design and details of

houses, and the makeup and decorations worn by men and women during festive periods. Yemen, perhaps more than other countries of the Arab world, uses color in often gaudy and splashy displays, which is the subject of the chapters entitled "The Rainbow House," and "Painting Happiness." The works of the Marechaux's are essential for anyone planning to visit the Yemen, and even for the more numerous "armchair travelers" who want a deeper understanding of this land that has long been isolated, which has determined a more unique path of development.

Very good pictures of architecture of changing styles in many towns in Yemen. Definitely a must have if you love the fantastic architecture of Yemen.

I bought this book for its photographs. My friend was writing a book about a Yemeni family and I was curious about the scenery and houses she described. This book was helpful and inspiring especially if you like folk art and architecture.

This book is unlike other photographic books on Yemen, it does not attempt to tell the whole story but rather examines in closeup the details that form the whole such as the styles, patterns and forms that together distinguish Yemen as a bridge between Arabia and Africa. Similarly it looks at the way the Yemenis have sculpted their environment from houses to faces. Remarkable in its detail. This book keeps Yemen's secrets but exposes its character.

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