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Visions Of Heaven: The Dome In European Architecture



Synopsis

There's an ethereal magic to standing beneath a dome, neck craned, looking up at a vision of the heavens created by some long-ago figure of genius. From the Pantheon to the Hagia Sophia, the power of the dome seems transcendent. Photographer David Stephenson's magnificently kaleidoscopic images of dome interiors capture this evanescent drama, and make *Visions of Heaven* one of the most spectacularly beautiful books we've ever produced. Traveling from Italy to Spain, Turkey, England, Germany, and Russia, among other countries, and photographing churches, palaces, mosques, and synagogues from the second to the early twentieth century, Stephenson's work amounts to a veritable typology of the cupola. His images present complex geometrical structures, rich stucco decorations, and elaborate paintings as they have never been seen before. Brilliantly calibrated exposures reveal details and colors that would otherwise remain hidden in these dimly lit spaces. *Visions of Heaven* shows more than 120 images, including the Roman Pantheon, the Byzantine churches of Turkey, the great domes of the Renaissance, the decorative cupolas of the Baroque and the Rococo ages, and a nineteenth-century synagogue in Hungary.

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Customer Reviews

'Visions of Heaven: The Dome in European Architecture' is one of those apparent coffee table books made to grace the room of art lovers and to initiate conversations about travel and architecture and art among guests. But this splendid book is far more than that (though a

magnificent 'coffee table book' it most assuredly is!). Photographer David Stephenson has traveled throughout Europe from Italy to Spain, Turkey, England, Germany, Russia and beyond, intent on capturing the magnificence of the domes that crown the cathedrals, palaces, mosques, synagogues and other imposing architectural wonders of the world. Technically speaking, photographing these domes is a feat unto itself: much time must have been spent on the floors of these edifices to capture angles of intent that would allow the resultant photograph to not only give the exciting detail of a concave surface but also to allow the available light to make the colors true. The result is a book of over 120 full color photographs of art that too often goes unnoticed as visitors to these special places fail to strain necks to see the entire masterpiece above their heads. But the aspect of this book that makes it even more successful is the fact that Stephenson acknowledged the need for historical background to supplement appreciation of these domes and to that end Victoria Hammond in her essays and Keith F. Davis in his seductive foreword open discussions not only of the art itself, the creators, the materials, and the history of each dome, but they also address the concept of the dome as a reaching to heaven. The writing works as successfully as the photography and together create a book that is not only beautiful but also grandly informative. Highly recommended. Grady Harp, December 06

Honestly I never really considered what a book on images of famous domes would be like, this is definitely a niche book, but it is spectacular. These images are crisp and because all the photos are taken from the same distance you can really appreciate the differences in the domes...most are just simply breathtaking. It seems every turn of the page, gives you a more spectacular image. Granted some are more ornate than others, but all of the domes have their own character and beauty. Amazing book on an interesting subject, pick it up, you won't be able to put it down.

I don't have much to add to the earlier reviews except to say that if you like kaleidoscopes, mandalas or snowflakes, you will probably love this book. It is full of images of 6-fold and 8-fold symmetry and even one each of 3-fold and 5-fold. The pictures can be viewed as realistic depictions of parts of buildings or as abstractions, pleasurable purely for the pattern. There is something in the human brain that loves this sort of thing, and if you want to indulge that something and just wallow in beauty, get this book. Wow!

Dome architecture is something special: and its special qualities and art are captured by photographer David Stephenson in his images of dome interiors VISIONS OF HEAVEN: THE

DOMES IN EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURE. Stephenson traveled across Europe and even into Turkey and Russia photographing churches, palaces, mosques and synagogues created from the second to the 20th century: his visual display captures over a hundred images of some of the finest dome construction in the world, while an essay by Victoria Hammond tracks dome and its decoration. Diane C. Donovan, Editor California Bookwatch

Some long ago inventor discovered that if you place carefully shaped rocks just so they will remain in place as an arch, dramatically reducing the amount of stone you need to hold up a bridge, an aqueduct, or the entrance to a castle. It probably wasn't too much later that someone recognized that a bunch of arches next to each other would yield an arched ceiling to a room. My guess is that it then took a very long time for someone to recognize that if you made a series of arches in a circle you could make a domed room. But as soon as one was built, I suspect that a priest of some kind looked up and immediately saw that a miniature version of the sky had been created, and that an artist could transform this sky into a 'Vision of Heaven.' This book shows what decoration has been applied to the insides of domed buildings from about the second century to the twentieth. It is an absolutely spectacular set of photographs of how artists have brought the heavens down to earth.

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