A book a year. Because it takes a year to construct a building (on paper).

Since 2007, every twelve months, the Renzo Piano Foundation has published a monograph devoted to the most iconic projects worldwide by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, in more than 50 years’ work.

The history of the buildings is followed by an account of the day of the meeting with the client and then the opening to the public, through the story of each phase: the site inspection and the first sketch, the project and its variants, teamwork, the search for solutions and materials, experimentation and prototypes, difficulties and challenges, adventures on the construction site, and finally the handover of the building to the public and the city.

This long account recounted in images ends with a text by Renzo Piano, who personally reconstructs the history of each project. Each volume is enriched by the testimony of those who took part in the project and marked its destiny: they may be RPBW partners or engineers, or even anthropologists, scientists, botanists, landscape architects and curators.

The portrait of a building consists of many voices, in every case different.

All the material we use comes from the research and cataloguing work of the Renzo Piano Foundation’s archives: you will find unpublished sketches and drawings, design options and details that will never be published elsewhere, photos of the team at work and each phase of construction work.
2017, Santander, Spain.

Another museum and cultural center overlooking the promenade of Santander, in northwest Spain. The relationship between Renzo Piano and Emilio Botín and their shared love for the sea, which becomes part of the project. An intervention that enables a view of the water to be a part of the city. How to raise a 5,000-ton building off the ground. Work on light and its reflections: the choice of ceramic.
1977, Paris, France.

Forty years after the inauguration of the Centre Pompidou, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers get together and recount as a duo the extraordinary human and professional experience of their debut. Much more than the story of this “spaceship” that landed in the heart of Paris: it is the beginning of their adventure told in the first person. From the phone call announcing their victory to the building today. In the volume drawings, photos and unpublished testimonies.
2016, Athens, Greece.

The redevelopment of a semi-abandoned site, the former home of the racecourse, which finds its natural connection with the rest of the city and the sea. A National Library to house some 750,000 volumes, an Opera House and a large public park in the area of Faleron, the ancient port of Athens. A project that grows out of the topography: the hill is raised to accommodate the buildings and make space for greenery. In this way a park of 166,000 square meters is born, with 30,500 trees and 35,000 shrubs. Adventures on the building site: construction of a one-hectare canopy in ferrocement.
2015, New York, USA.

Another museum dedicated to contemporary American art, with 21,000 works by 3,000 artists. The complicated story of a building that “returned home” by traversing New York to land up in the old industrial Meatpacking district. A “vessel” of 19,500 square meters, weighing 28,000 tons, raised off the ground. The dialogue with the city and the Hudson River. Adventures on the construction site: the arrival of Hurricane Sandy that changed the project.
The comparison with the masters: designing alongside Le Corbusier’s masterpiece. A small monastery for 12 Poor Clare nuns immersed in the silence and seclusion of the wood. A place that interprets their motto: “silence, joy and prayer”. Work starting from the minimum size: the nuns’ cells each measuring 2.70 m per side. Underground construction and exposed concrete.

The dream of building the tallest skyscraper in Europe in the heart of London. This gave birth to the Shard, a small vertical city 309 meters high. Urban recovery and collaboration with Ken Livingstone. The adventure of the Public Inquiry: planning with the city and its inhabitants. The theme of public transport: 48 parking spaces for 8,000 people. For the first time ever the top-down technique for building such a tall structure.

Adventures on the construction site: the alpinists who worked on the façade.
2008, San Francisco, California.

A museum to celebrate the beauty and fragility of the Earth, through the natural sciences. The relationship with scientists and researchers. Constructing in the heart of the Golden Gate Park “a gentle machine” to explore the relation between building and nature. The construction of a green roof of over 18,000 square meters covered by a living carpet of plants that do not need irrigation. Collaboration with botanists. The first great living carpet of plants that do not need irrigation. The roof of over 18,000 square meters covered by a building and nature. The construction of a green building. Constructing in the heart of the Golden Gate Park. The California Academy of Sciences, today I am going to tell you about the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. A museum to celebrate the beauty and fragility of the Earth, through the natural sciences. The relationship with scientists and researchers. Constructing in the heart of the Golden Gate Park “a gentle machine” to explore the relation between building and nature. The construction of a green roof of over 18,000 square meters covered by a living carpet of plants that do not need irrigation. Collaboration with botanists. The first great institution that won LEED Platinum certification.
1998, Nouméa, New Caledonia.

The discovery of a new world: the human and professional adventure of designing in the antipodes. Working between architecture and anthropology. A Cultural Centre to celebrate Kanak culture, its traditions, language and craftsmanship, made up of 10 different buildings with different functions. A true village. The exploitation of ventilation and the difficult research to express the tradition of the Pacific with modern language. The long research into materials.
1997, Basel, Switzerland.

Again a museum, this time surrounded by greenery, and again a great client: the collector Ernst Beyeler. The evolution of the theme of natural light from above. A lightweight glass roof selects and filters natural light, redistributing it in the exhibition spaces. Designing and verifying: the history of prototypes. A space made up of compressions and expansions, horizontal and inclined planes, calm and tension. A place of “luxe, calme et volupté” as Beyeler wanted his museum to be.
1987, Houston, Texas.

The project that marked the “return to architecture” after the Centre Pompidou. The extraordinary encounter with the client, Dominique de Menil, who wanted a building “big inside and small outside” in which to exhibit over 10,000 pieces of primitive and modern art. The rotation of the works and the “Treasure House”. The theme of natural light and the idea of the village museum. Experimentation as a fundamental tool of the creative process. A unifying thread, that of experimentation and natural light, that would accompany RPBW’s work in many future projects.
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