

The Lesson of Light in Architecture

Light is the energy of revelation in form and space which are the stuff of architecture.

We live by light. We go to it; and the eye is quick to judge whether there is enough, of the right kind, in the best place.

Light overcomes the void of darkness, but it depends on shadow to show form.

Above all, light belongs in the direction of the object, not in the eye of the beholder.

When structure first admitted the gift of light, it was as treasured as tropical shade, to inspire a tradition of their sensitive embodiment in design.

Night and day are now lit by an abundance which, at first sight, may be mistaken as better because more. More light is better, only if required and of the right quality: it can easily be worse, otherwise.

The world of light in architecture is shaped between the polarities of dramatic and spatial interiors.

In the dramatic interior, mystery and emotion prevail. There is high contrast, daring dazzle, inverse direction and uncertain boundary. The focus is compelling in high-light. The setting is deep in shadow. Relief is lit by surprise. All is sensation: it is theatrical.

In the spatial interior, light is distributed for the benefit of general use in an accommodation which balances stimulation with ease. There is good modelling, gentle suffusion, sensible screening and all-round direction with occasional high and low lighting in supportive relief. There is no doubt. All is visible. Common purpose prevails: it is the general habitat.

This is the lesson of light.

Oscar Naddermier

Professor Oscar Naddermier