



Informal

Cecil Balmond

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Balmond is making the transition from structural engineer working alongside other architects to an architect in his own right. His structural thinking differs from that of others in his field, in its completely innovative conception of the engineer's contribution to architecture. The plasticity of architectural plans is enhanced through a decisive promotion of their structural designs. The borderline between structure and architecture thus becomes increasingly blurred. This process is explained in detail in "Informal" by reference to eight seminal projects. Balmond elucidates the theoretical basis of his engineering and architectural solutions, and his sketches transcend purely technical illustration - they are key to his approach. "Informal" invites readers to rethink their understanding of the relationships between architecture, design and engineering.

Informal Details

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Author : Cecil Balmond

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From Reader Review Informal for online ebook

Kezia Paramita says

make me want to learn about structure... think informalities, break the habit. outta from the "lectures" box.

but the plot is rather confused. make me read some sentences twice

Edward says

...an excellent discussion on the vitality of nested structures, their layering at various scales, and their simultaneity...exploring the "anti-grid" and the freedom of space.

Michael says

Informal here simply means asking "Why do a simple structural grid when forces resulting from hybrid uses, zoning, intentions, etc. aren't so clear cut? That's so 1954..." Having had the good fortune of spending the better part of a day with Balmond once, I would offer that he's perhaps one of the few people whose prodigious pomposity is somewhat justified.

The solutions shown here and in many other projects have a certain brilliance and definitely shy away from anything reeking of normalcy. The approaches or points of departures vary wildly for each project with seemingly little overlap. Of course these are all well-funded signature designs so what Balmond sells as structurally appropriate - even inevitable - for any given set of conditions are fundamentally just as forced as overlaying a Cartesian system on an enigmatic program and much more costly to boot, excepting perhaps the larger scaled projects like Congrexpo. Really many of these projects simply replace a recognizable approach to structure (grids and whatnot) with different systems of his/their own devising (nested, rotated triangles and whatnot). I suppose the Bordeaux House is one exception to this - maybe the Arnhem Exchange as well - and all of these are pretty great in conception and execution as the case may be (I understand the exposed Bordeaux beam and its connections have become an issue, but why split hairs). Balmond would argue, of course, that these aren't forced systems but, like lung arteries, tree branches, rivulets and the like, the "commands" follow the paths of least resistance and, therefore, are logical though certainly deeply studied outcomes. Maybe. He does talk about "backing into a system" and fully acknowledges that aesthetic intent often conflicts with a particular methodological rigor with these commands so it's all relative I suppose.

Generally this is mostly well written and comprehensible to those like me with a meager engagement with algorithms and "Cytosine with Guanine." The last chapter outlining "templates" is a bit more cryptic with sundry matrices and DNA correlations - in retrospect probably shouldn't have even bothered trying to read it. Overall, though, a good book if not necessarily a page-turner.

Stephanie says

don't try to do anything architecturally new with out cecil on your side
he knows what's up
