

Serge Chermayeff: Designer, Architect, Teacher



Written by renowned architectural historian Alan Powers, *Serge Chermayeff: Designer Architect Teacher* is a fascinating study of one of the major unsung forces of twentieth-century architecture. Architect of the De La Warr Pavilion and teacher to Rogers and Foster are only a fraction of his immense life and works. This keenly-anticipated title contains over 200 illustrations, 30 of which are in colour. *Serge Chermayeff: Designer, Architect, Teacher* tells the extraordinary life story of one of the pioneers of twentieth century architecture. Best known for his collaboration with Eric Mendelsohn on the iconic De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, Chermayeff emigrated to America in 1940 to concentrate on teaching. Two distinguished careers spanning two distant countries and virtually a whole century have, until now, conspired to obscure his true influence on the world of architecture. This book, containing 200 black and white and 30 colour illustrations, will fill the gap in the market in the literature about twentieth century architecture. Born during 1900 in Grozny, Chechnya, into an oil-rich Jewish family, he was educated in England but was unable to take up his place at Cambridge after his familys wealth was lost in the 1917 Revolution. He eventually found himself running the modern design department at Waring & Gillow after years earning a precarious living variously as a journalist, professional dancer (including a spell in Buenos Aires managing a dance hall), and interior designer. He quickly became a name along with the likes of Wells Coates, moving in the right circles at a time of intellectual and ideological ferment. He became a key member of the architectural avant-garde, developing his design philosophy based on physical and psychological comfort and visual harmony. As well as the De La Warr Pavilion, Chermayeff produced several important

buildings (including his own house at Bentley Wood) before his change of continent and career focus. His teaching career began in earnest, leading eventually to posts at Harvard under J.L. Sert and at Yale under Paul Rudolph, where his students included Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. A brilliant, witty and sometimes devastatingly pessimistic lecturer, Chermayeff's academic career culminated in two books. One of these, *Community and Privacy* (with Christopher Alexander, 1963) was a bestseller, giving Chermayeff a second wave of fame. He had a wide circle of friends in other disciplines, from art to politics, economics and science, allowing his influence to be understood in the wider intellectual and political context. In an obituary tribute in 1997, his friend and collaborator Alexander Tzonis wrote, there are aspects of Chermayeff's thinking that remain as fresh, unfulfilled, topical and demanding as at the time of their inception in the 1960s, 1950s, or even the 1930s. A book about them is urgently needed. *Serge Chermayeff: Designer, Architect, Teacher* portrays his conviction in the power of positive thought and action for beneficial change and offers many lessons for the architecture profession in the twenty-first century.

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