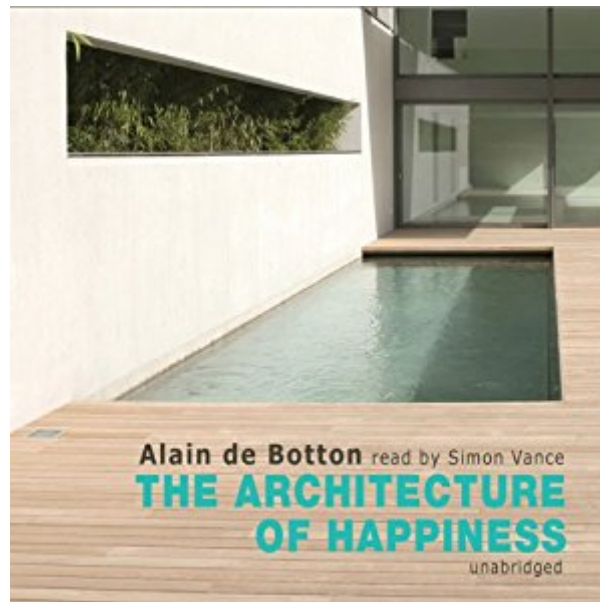


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# The Architecture Of Happiness



## Synopsis

The Architecture of Happiness is a dazzling and generously illustrated journey through the philosophy and psychology of architecture and the indelible connection between our identities and our locations. One of the great but often unmentioned causes of both happiness and misery is the quality of our environment: the kinds of walls, chairs, buildings, and streets that surround us. And yet a concern for architecture is too often described as frivolous, even self-indulgent. Alain de Botton starts from the idea that where we are heavily influences who we can be, and argues that it is architecture's task to stand as an eloquent reminder of our full potential. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 4 hours and 40 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: March 4, 2009

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B001UP735O

Best Sellers Rank: #4 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Architecture #35 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Criticism #43 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics

## Customer Reviews

I'm a big fan of Alain de Botton's writing, so when I saw that his newest book, "The Architecture of Happiness" would not be released in the US until October 2006, I ordered it directly from .uk. I read it in two or three days and was not disappointed. Botton has a great way of connecting the writings and thoughts of the great minds of world civilization to everyday human experiences. In this case, to the kinds of buildings (public and private) we build or aspire to build, or conversely, tolerate and settle for. The book is amply illustrated. As nice as these photographs and illustrations are, Botton's writing is so precise and illustrative in its own right that the illustrations are not always necessary. In contrast to "The Art of Travel" and "The Consolations of Philosophy", Botton's new book does not rely on quotations from ancient and modern philosophers and theorists to make its points. Quotations

are few, but apt. In compensation, though, I feel Botton is exposing the reader more directly to his own thoughts, observations, and assessments. He is less melancholic than in his earlier works; also, less clever and cute. He's as interesting as ever; just more authentic, exposed, and confident in his own voice. As I was reading I found that the sentences I wanted to underline were mostly Botton's own, not those of someone he was quoting. One of these should give you a good idea of where this book will take you: "We arrange around us material forms which communicate to us what we need--but are at constant risk of forgetting we need--within. We turn to wallpaper, benches, paintings and streets to staunch the disappearance of our true selves." (p. 107) It's hard to remain a sleepwalker after reading one of Alain de Botton's books. And they always bear re-reading.

Have you ever read a book that was so good that you flip through it trying to find a representative passage that you would like to share with others, but you end up seeing that you are faced with the dilemma of re-writing the whole thing from page one because all of it is so indispensably rich and worthy of regurgitation? This is what is happening to me, here at Starbucks, having just finished reading Alain de Botton's *The Architecture of Happiness*. Oh, such an amazing book. Recently, I met a group of friends at [no surprise] a Starbucks and because I arrived early, I brought my book in and read for a while. Soon they showed up and I set the book aside. My pal picked it up and read the title, flipped through it a bit, and promptly looked at me as though I had three heads, and all of them were Martian! "What the hell are you reading this for?" he asked. "I am totally immersed in the topic," I said. And went on to explain.... It's not about architecture, as in, how to build things. It's about the appreciation of the art that surrounds the process of all creative effort, architecture included. The author discusses the development of so many things, from teacups to chairs to vending machines. Windows, bridges, water faucets, theatres, entire plans of cities, tables, factories, empty fields... the way we think [or don't think] about all of these things. Of course, buildings, from homes to skyscrapers, being perhaps the most prominent aesthetic consideration in our day-to-day field of vision, these get the most attention. Why do we build as we do? What is the history, the genesis and evolution of what we have now come to consider as architectural norms?

To read De Botton is to go on a journey to places at once unexpected yet familiar; for example, one point is supported by reference to a diagram of nose shapes and sizes. His books teach rather than exposit; they do not lack for a direct thesis--they make arguments and reach conclusions. In this book on architecture the point is made that we have a responsibility to create something that is worthy of the natural surroundings that will be altered by the creation. We have the ability and

resources to transcend mere engineering concerns and the argument is made in this book that we have a duty to do so. Obviously we cannot live the modern life stuck out in a meadow, no matter how beautiful the scenery--but our author argues that is equally difficult (or pointless) to live in a community of soulless boxes, that architecture which fails to honor aesthetic ideals is a failure even if it keeps the weather out. Good architecture is the result not of adherence to classical ideals, budget measures or engineering goals but of a balance achieved among the almost infinite range of available architectural choices. The author understands that in order to bring his reader to an appreciation for balance in architecture that he must provide a context--he has to demonstrate when things are out of balance. De Botton excels in providing just the right amount of history, pictorial evidence, contemporary example and discussion--in fact, his presentation is itself artfully balanced and perfectly suits his theme. There may be disagreements about the thesis; however, I think that the quality of the writing is worthy of any superlatives. Anyone familiar with Michael Palin's travelogues knows that they can't be missed regardless of the destination--Mr.

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