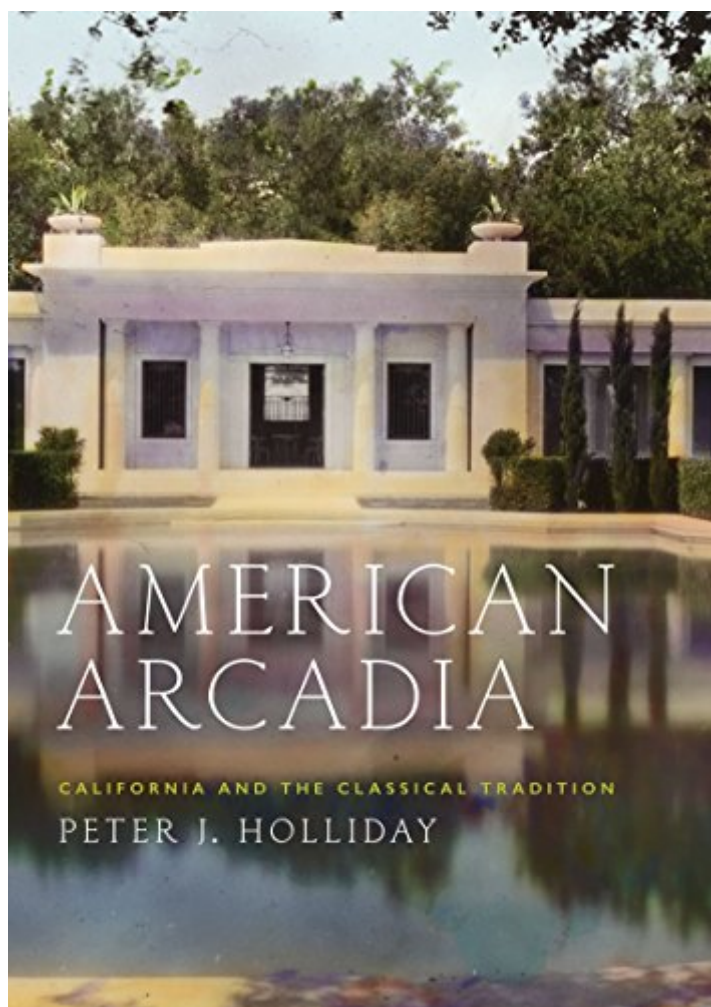


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American Arcadia: California And The Classical Tradition



Synopsis

A vivid and engaging exploration of California's debt to the ancient world. Discussing the influence of the classics on America is nothing new; indeed, classical antiquity could be considered second only to Christianity as a force in modeling America's national identity. What has never been explored until now is how, from the beginning, Californians in particular chose to visually and culturally craft their new world using the rhetoric of classical antiquity. Through a lively exploration of material culture, literature, and architecture, *American Arcadia* offers a tour through California's development as a Mediterranean haven from the late nineteenth century to the present. In its earliest days, California was touted as the last opportunity for alienated Yankees to establish the refined gentleman-farmer culture envisioned by Jefferson and build new cities free of the filth and corruption of those they left back East. Through architecture and landscape design Californians fashioned an Arcadian setting evocative of ancient Greece and Rome. Later, as Arcadia gave way to urban sprawl, entire city plans were drafted to conjure classical antiquity, self-styled villas dotted the hills, and utopian communities began to shape the state's social atmosphere. Art historian Peter J. Holliday traces the classical influence primarily through the evidence of material culture, yet the book emphasizes the stories and people, famous and forgotten, behind the works, such as Florence Yoch, the renowned landscape designer and set designer for *Gone with the Wind*, and "Sister Aimee" Semple McPherson, the most publicized Christian evangelist of her day, whose sermons filled the Pantheon-like Angelus Temple. Telling stories from the creation of the famed aqueducts that turned the semi-arid landscape to a cornucopia of almonds, alfalfa, and oranges to the birth of the body-sculpting movement, *American Arcadia* offers readers a new way of seeing our past and ourselves.

Book Information

File Size: 81136 KB

Print Length: 480 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (May 3, 2016)

Publication Date: May 3, 2016

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B015P7A0S4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #569,084 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #44

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Styles > Ancient & Classical #68 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Art >

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Photography > Architecture > History & Periods

Customer Reviews

East coast snobs like me tend to think of California, especially southern California, as a land of glitz, with little awareness of the distant past. Holliday's book shows us how wrong we are, laying out (and showing in beautiful images) a world of classical style in California's arts and especially architecture. Although written by an academic, this is an accessible and clearly written book. The photos alone make the book worth owning. So much to learn here.

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