

Naked Airport

A Cultural History of the World's Most Revolutionary Structure

When people talk about commercial aviation, they usually talk about airline companies, aircraft and flight attendants. It is apparently far more attractive to talk about the airlines' fiscal performances, the latest aircraft types, or the flight attendants' outfits than about other aspects of the airline industry. Airports, however, are sometimes overlooked in this respect, but as the final stops for passengers prior to boarding the aircraft, and, more in general, as gateways to air travel, airports play a very important role in terms of their facilities and the soothing atmosphere terminal buildings exude. The "Naked Airport" is probably one of the rare books covering the historical development stages of airport construction.

By Alastair Gordon

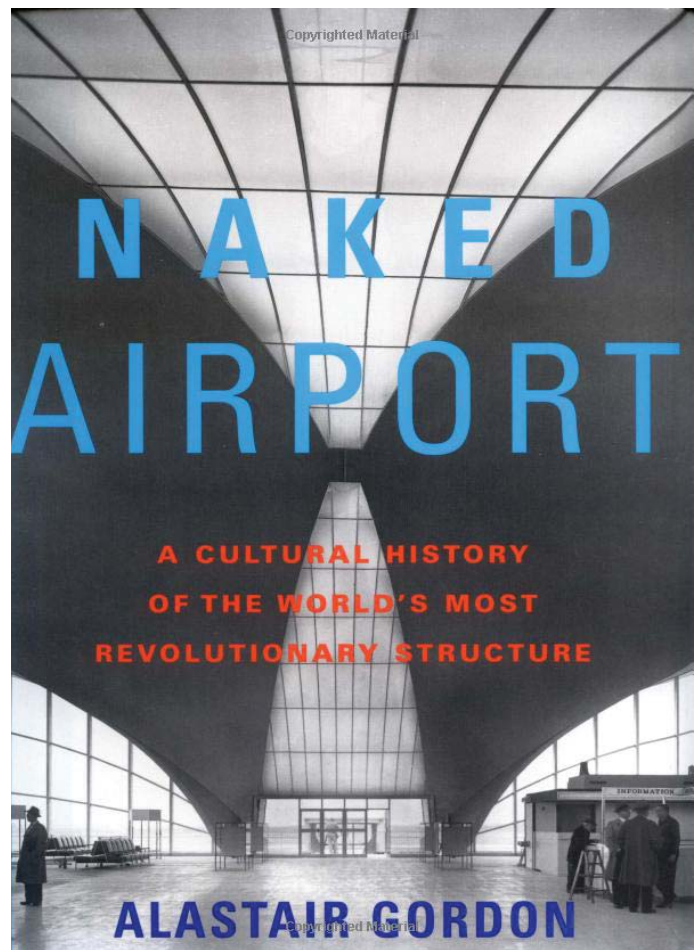
Book Review by: Abdullah Nergiz

Outline

The book covers the evolution of airport terminal construction in six chapters; from the muddy fields to the sterile concourse. The first three chapters include the pre-war days (Prototypes:1924-1930, Naked airport:1930-1940, New deal:1933-1941), whereas the final three chapters (Air power:1939-1957, Jet-land:1957-1970, The sterile concourse:1970-2000) explain the rapid growth of the commercial aviation industry, and the constant need for bigger terminal buildings in the second half of the 20th century. The book ends with the epilogue title of 'Lindbergh to Bin Laden', which discusses the tragic change of the image of aviation from freedom to security concerns.

Discussion

The book title was chosen after the architect Le Corbusier's description of airports where he claimed that the beauty of an airport is in the splendor of wide open spaces and nothing could compete with the airplane itself, and thus the only appropriate architecture was one that was practically invisible: just sky, grass, and concrete runways. In brief, an airport should be naked. In the early days of commercial aviation, airports were small, close to the downtown areas of the cities they belonged to, and sparsely populated. But after World War II, the introduction of the jet engine gave a tremendous boost, elevating air travel to new heights. Passenger numbers grew tremendously, and thereby generating an even greater demand for even bigger airport buildings. In the 1960s, gigantic airports were built to accommodate the rapidly growing numbers of jet travel passengers. Airports became like satellite cities in urban planning, complete with their own police forces, health care systems, fire departments, accommodation plants and entertainment facilities.



However, in the turbulent 1970s, security concerns of air travel began to come to the forefront as airline hijackings were becoming more common. Security concerns replaced architectural and stylistic concerns of airport buildings. Electronically controlled areas, security codes, cast concrete and massive roofs converted terminals to a less inviting public place as the final stop prior to

NAKED AIRPORT

"Alastair Gordon scrutinizes airports as a microcosm of twentieth-century America, and it's all there—the technology, the architecture, the politics, the business, and the genius and daring that it took to meet the challenge of an ever-onrushing future. *Naked Airport* is as exhilarating as it is literate and informative."

—JOHN BERENDT, AUTHOR OF *MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL*

"Alastair Gordon achieves the improbable, simultaneously reconnecting us with a sense of the early romance of flying and airports even as the story draws inevitably to the tragedy of 9/11 and its horrific blend of aviation and architecture. Along the way, Gordon provides a truly compelling account of how airports had over the course of three-quarters of a century become the locus of not only modern dreams but postmodern nightmares as well. Don't leave home without it."

—TERENCE RILEY, THE PHILIP JOHNSON CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN AT MOMA

"*Naked Airport* vividly conjures up the primitive buildings and intrepid bravado of pioneering aviation, the alluring fantasies that surrounded early commercial flights, the advent of fashion with high-speed jet travel in the 1960s, followed by the intrusion of cost cutting and surveillance that turned the dream into a nightmare later that same decade. Alastair Gordon's book reminds us that the experience of flying is conditioned, more than anything, by that of airports."

—GWENDOLYN WRIGHT, AUTHOR OF *BUILDING THE DREAM: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF HOUSING IN AMERICA*

"Reading Alastair Gordon's splendid survey of airport architecture is like stepping into a time machine and bearing witness to all the ambition and angst of the twentieth century itself. *Naked Airport* is highly erudite, extremely entertaining, and a fascinating read."

—CAROLE RIFKIND, AUTHOR OF *A FIELD GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE*



boarding. Finally, towards to the end of the 20th century, architects tried to combine the security and comfort concepts in an effort to enable air travelers to relax before they board the aircraft.

Conclusion

The author's smooth writing style and the 108 well chosen black & white illustrations make the book very easy to read. I recommend the book to anyone intending to explore airports, one of the most important elements of air travel other than aircraft, airline companies and cabin crew. The best part of the book is the legendary Terminal 5, or TWA Flight Center, designed by famous Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen. The TWA Flight Center is also the apogee of the airport architecture style. I suggest readers visiting Terminal 5 in JFK (New York), if they can. Currently used by JetBlue, TWA's bird-like Terminal 5 can be seen in many movies, such as Steven Spielberg's *Catch Me, If You Can*.

About the author

Alastair Gordon is a contributing editor to *House & Garden* and *Dwell* magazines. He writes regularly for the *New York Times*, and his articles have been published in *Architectural Digest*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Vanity Fair*, *Town & Country*, and *The New York Observer*. He is the author of several books, including *Weekend Utopia* and *Beach Houses*.

About the reviewer

Abdullah Nergiz is a qualified aviation expert working as coordinator for Turkish Airlines. He is specialized in e-commerce and history of commercial airline industry.

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