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A-frame



Synopsis

"A" was the architectural letterform of leisure building in postwar America. Eager to stake out mountain and lakeside retreats, an entire generation of high-end homebuilders and weekend handymen found the A-frame an easy and affordable home to construct; its steeply sloping triangular roof distinctive and easy to maintain (almost no exterior walls to paint!). Fueled by A-frame plans and kits, the style became something of a national craze, with tens of thousands of houses built. Indeed, the A-frame was an icon for recreation, and acceptable form of modernism (although its origins go back thousands of years), and a convenient tool for marketing a wide range of products, including gas-powered toilets, motorcycles, and canned vegetables; Fisher-Price even made one for children. So popular on the domestic front, the A-frame was eventually adapted to other building types, from roadside restaurants to churches. In a fascinating look at this architectural phenomenon, Chad Randl tells the story of the "triangle" house from prehistoric Japan to its lifestyle-changing heyday in the 1960s. Part architectural history and part cultural exploration, A-Frame documents every aspect of A-frame living using cartoons, ads, high-style and do-it-yourself examples, family snapshots, and even an appendix with a complete set of blueprints in case you want to build your own!

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A-frame architecture was a jaunty symbol of the good life in postwar, mid-century America—easily built and architecturally distinctive, tens of thousands of these triangular-silhouetted residences

popped up in vacation sites all over the country. In this prettily designed volume, Randl gives the A-frame movement some context, beginning with its architectural antecedents, and then outlining the A-frame's populist birth, which started with D.I.Y. building kits such as Campbell & Wong's Leisure House and Free-Time Homes. (Randl also discusses A-frames made by well-known architects like George Rockrise.) The book's main strength is its easy dexterity; Randl is as comfortable describing the mechanics of A-frame design (plywood and two-by-sixes dictated angular lines), as he is analyzing the social circumstances (rising wages, increased leisure time) that sped their popularity. It's in the latter category where the book really takes off, showing the A-frame's increasing popularity, as well as their expansion in use, from motels to restaurants to churches: "During the 1960s, the A-frame passed from object to idea." Sections like "A-frames in ads" show how home-furnishings manufacturers made use of A-frames to advance their own sales prospects, thus gelling the A-frame as a certified economic success, as well as a pop culture coup. To illustrate the wide influence of the architectural genre, Randl even includes a photograph of Fisher-Price's toy A-frame house. It's such careful research that earns this title an A. 150 color & 75 b/w illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Chad Randl is an architectural historian working at the National Park Service. He resides in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Not at all what I expected. Well written but was looking for more of a building guide.

Randl's summation of the A-frame is wonderful. The book contains vibrant photos of the structures from around the country, cartoons, advertisements, and a multitude of other media. The writing was clear and easy to read. This hardcover edition, at first glance, reminds me of a 1960's textbook which is a treat given the era that the book covers. The blue prints included practically inspire me to build my own A-frame. Bravo.

I love A frames!

Basic book about history and making A-Frame home

I love A-Frames and this book is OK except I find the print to be a bit light. It is printed in CHINA

where the world is made.

big beautiful book, lots of pictures, an easy read, lots of interesting history. I was hoping for something a little more technical, with details for a do-it-yourselfer to actually build one but its not here. A fun book if you're interested in a-frames.

I like this book. Great pictures and the details I hoped for to compleat my very own A-Frame. The hard cover make it a nice book to display as well.

A wonderful survey of the A-frame, including many photos and plans of architect-designed versions. Included are interesting designs from those many Modern lovers will know. Rudolph Schindler was the first to have designed one, back in the 1920's. There is also a refreshing and very modern design by Campbell & Wong, and the one by Robert Broward in Florida from 1960 whose front end cantilevers over the sandy beach is exceptional. The rendering portrays its drama. Broward's design was one of the few structures along the Ponte Verde beach to survive Hurricane Dora in 1964. But Mr. Randl does not stop at architect-designed A-frames. He carefully traces the historical development of the A-frame and how it became an icon in post-war America, weaving it with plenty of photographs, construction drawings, ideas on variations, and vintage advertisements from magazines to demonstrate its high popularity between the 1950's and 1970's. The author does well to support the premise that the A-frame became an American icon, making its way from vacation homes to restaurants and motel designs as well as religious buildings. He cites its influence upon Googie's (Lautner) and the Unitarian Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin (Wright). Even the now popular Lindal Cedar Homes of today grew out of Mr. Lindal's first design: an A-frame. If I had a critical wish for this book, it would be a much larger size, an oversize that perhaps presented many more architect-designed A-frames. I am sure more modern and organic architects have done them and it would be interesting to see those designs. Randl has in fact inspired me to consider one for a country retreat in my own home state. With this book's small size as the only demerit, I give Chad Randl's A-Frame an "A".

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