

# AIA News

## BOOK REVIEW

### Dreams and Schemes by David R. Dibner, FAIA (Xlibris Press, 2001)



*reviewed by Stephanie Stubbs, Assoc. AIA  
Managing Editor*

**Dreams and Schemes** is a really nice book. And these days, many people seem to be searching for small bits of “nice” to help stitch their lives back to a normal pattern. Its subtitle, “Stories of People and Architecture,” sums up its purpose: it

is a vehicle by which architect David Dibner can share his lifelong fascination with the people behind the buildings. The author has deliberately chosen to concentrate on this “softer” part of the profession; he states that he believes there exist plenty of other books that deal with architectural aesthetics and poesy. “There is a scarcity of currently available literature that emphasizes the importance of people in the balance between aesthetic and responsiveness to users’ needs,” he explains.

Dibner has earned a wealth of experience from which to draw his stories. His career as an architect spans more than half a century, and runs the gamut from private practitioner to large-firm principal to government architect. Through this book, he has created a semi-memoir that allows him to share with us—in his easy-to-like, storytelling fashion—lessons learned and best practices for dealing with clients, bosses, and coworkers. **Dreams and Schemes** offers a palatable means by which to study people in an architectural context, and perhaps hone the “people skills” that give a cutting

edge to the most basic, traditional form of practice.

**Dreams and Schemes** actually comprises a collection of short stories that follow the course of the architect’s career. Some are amusing (a husband and wife having a pitch-a-fit war over plans for their new house), some are sad (projects can’t always come to fruition) some even are scary (there are building officials on the take—what’s a young architect to do?) Some stories even have etiquette lessons: Is it proper (not to

mention prudent) to match your new boss martini-for-martini when he takes you out celebrating? Throughout is Dibner’s upbeat philosophy: “...what I love about architects [is] that they want people who are going to demand more of them and challenge them to do more or better.”

**Dreams and Schemes** will delight a number of audiences: the client baffled by blueprints and the first-year student subdued by structures will gain heart in realizing that all architecture comes down to people. Practitioners can reaffirm what Dibner illustrates so well: developing a successful strategy for any built project begins by creating a relationship with the client.

And how can you not smile when the author sums up his 50-year immersion in architecture with “For me it’s been a wonderful ride.” In the highest possible sense, Dibner has created a “Chicken

Soup for the Architect’s Soul.” It’s a really nice book. Read it.

**Dreams and Schemes** is available from the AIA Bookstore. Call 800-242-3837, option #4. 

