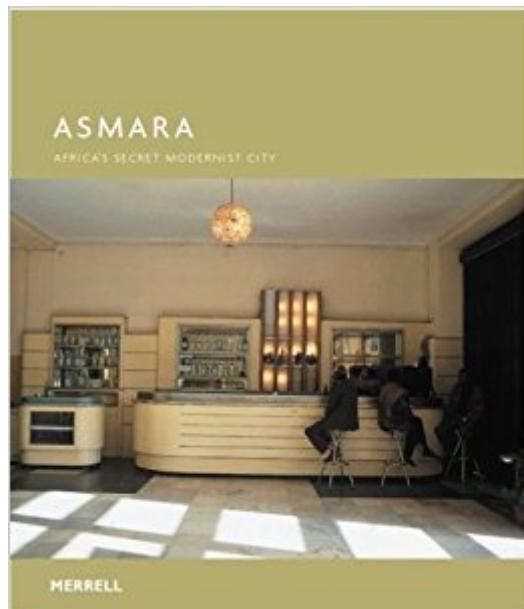


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# Asmara: Africa's Secret Modernist City



## **Synopsis**

Asmara, the capital of the small east African country of Eritrea, bordering the Red Sea, is one of the most important and exciting architectural 'discoveries' of recent years. Built almost entirely in the 1930s by the Italians, Asmara has one of the highest concentrations of modernist architecture anywhere in the world, and has evocatively been described as "the Miami of Africa." Desperate to build quickly, the colonial government of the time allowed radical architectural experimentation that would not have found favour in the more conservative European environment. Asmara therefore became one of the world's prime locations for architectural innovation during the Modern Movement. That this occurred at all is remarkable enough, but that these buildings should have survived in such numbers today makes it one of the finest modernist cities in the world. This building-by-building survey, illustrated with rare archival material and specially commissioned photographs, is a groundbreaking publication that is set to become one of the most important new books on modernist architecture of recent years.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

An excellent overview of Asmara's colonial past, the ambitious building program of its Italian occupants, and its present condition. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren are heritage consultants with broad international experience. They have spent more than five years working to identify, preserve and publicize the cultural assets of Eritrea. Naigzy Gebremedhin, one of Africa's most experienced and highly

regarded consultants in the fields of architecture, engineering and the environment, was formerly Director of Eritrea's Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Programme. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

I spent my formative years living in Asmara, and was interested in reading about all the wonderful buildings in town. The writers did a good job gathering up all the tidbits of information. Asmara is a town that has changed little over the years, but one thing that has completely changed from my childhood years is the street names. I knew names such as Queen Elizabeth Blvd and Haile Selassie Avenue, but these names are long gone, Because of that I would have been lost trying to figure out the location of the buildings if the authors had not thought to include the old street name and current street names. I also loved having the blueprints available, plus original photos and current photos that detail any changes to the structure over the years. My one complaint is related to the maps. It is probably no the authors fault, but the old maps they included are all but unreadable. They were probably reproduced as well as they could be, but that doesn't help us trying to decipher what they say. I am tempted to say it might have been better without the old maps that a person can't read. The new map was helpful.

I would like to add how important a text this is to the literature on fascist aesthetics. With the institutionalization of genocide studies, the development of curriculum on the powerful ideas of modernity, national myth, the power of a carefully-developed aesthetic for propaganda, spectacle, crowd control to inspire people to buy into a modernist national myth becomes imperative. Frederic Spotts, in "Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics", pinned down the long-rumored connection between fascist aesthetics and rock concerts. He documented the fact that David Bowie and Mick Jagger both spent hours watching Leni Riefenstahl's masterpiece of Hitler propaganda, "Triumph of the Will". The thought of Jagger and Bowie as manipulators of a fascist aesthetic rather than the alleged revolution they've been singing about all these years should give every fan of rock concert production food for thought. Under my thumb, girl. There's a PhD. thesis to be written comparing rock concert production effects with those carefully laid out by Albert Speer for the Nuremberg rally, which is the subject of Riefenstahl's movie. Asmara was Mussolini's planned city, his expression of modernism in his newly-acquired African colony. It is a most beautiful city, and takes its place with the publication of this excellent book as perhaps the most ambitious expression of the totalitarian ethic. Compared to Soviet modernism or Hitler kitsch, Asmara stands for Italian superiority in architecture unchanged since the Romans. As a planned city for Africa, Asmara is also a major site

for post-colonial or subaltern studies. How Italian fascism was to educate, control and colonize Africans with the beauty of Asmara was a message consciously implanted in every cantilevered roof and enlightened street grid by the fascists. So this book takes its stand with two other revolutionary studies of colonial and post-colonial architecture, Okwui Enwezor's "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa", which documents architectural plans for European planned cities in Africa, and, "The Politics of Design in French Colonial Architecture" by Gwendolyn Wright. The idea that modernity itself is a thrusting, crushing colonial -- and in the case of Asmara, fascist -- power is a message this beautiful book, this beautiful city, and the beauty of Africa on her own, gives, unforgettably.

I spent seven years living and working in Asmara and was fascinated by its architecture. To compliment Asmara the city, are its citizens, the Asmarinos-friendly, dedicated, hardworking and very proud. Looking through the pages of this book brought back great memories of my time in Asmara. I was able to view the dedicated work of the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project (CARP) in the inner, historical quarter of the city. To see these old buildings come back to life was a joy to behold; especially the devotion to restoring the buildings authentically. Anyone who has visited this timeless city will be captivated by the journey through the pages of this book. Originally aimed at people in the architectural business, the book reaches out to any reader with its photographic portrayal of one of the world's unique cities. An extremely well researched and written book; the authors have devoted a great deal of time into their research with getting every aspect of Asmara's development history correct. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and commend it to anyone who has ever visited Asmara. Ane Asmara yefetwa eyee.

Italy in the 30' years of 20th century had a strong tradition in Bauhaus-like architecture, which was used by the fascist regime expressing through it its symbolic values, but never at a degree that changes the nature of that great architectural design. These modernist architectures that remain in Asmara witness this fact: public buildings that preserve the best of the architectural design of that era. The book gives an excellent photographic account.

I loved this book. I have been in Asmara and have my own photos, but I go to this book when I want to show others what the city looks like. This copy I gave to a woman who grew up in Asmara. She was delighted. Now she can show her children and grandchildren.

Looked for this book in many places and finally got it on . I am happy with purchase. Very well taken photos and narration of history of Asmara. I needed this book because I believe it is a collector's item. Worth every penny that I spent and often I look at it to marvel at the architecture. Very well presented book.

Excellent job by the photographers and the historian. I love the cover page fantastic gives what to expect inside.Thank you guys for your contribution it is my hard copy Asmara Architectural museum now!

I loved it. It illustrated in details the beauty of Eritrea. Kudos to Edward Denison.

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