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American Framing

The Same Something for Everyone

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ISBN	9783038601951
Publisher	Park Books
Binding	Paperback / softback
Territory	World excluding Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Puerto Rico, United States, Canada, and Japan
Size	300 mm x 210 mm
Pages	252 Pages
Illustrations	159 color, 70 b&w
Price	£32.00

- A visual and textual exploration of the evolution, conditions, and consequences of softwood timber-framed construction in the American architecture since 1832
- Highlights how this quintessentially American type of construction has come to dominate the USA's built landscape and erased typological and social distinctions in a socially and economically deeply divided country
- Features newly commissioned images by American photographers Linda Robbennolt, Daniel Shea, and Chris Strong

From its origins in the Midwest in the early nineteenth century, the technique of light timber framing—also known at the time as "Chicago construction"—quickly came to underwrite the territorial and ideological expansion of the United States. Softwood construction was inherently practical, as its materials were readily available and required little skill to assemble. The result was a built environment that erased typological and class distinctions: no amount of money can buy you a better 2 x 4. This fundamental sameness paradoxically underlies the American culture of individuality, unifying all superficial differences. It has been both a cause and effect of the country's high regard for novelty, in contrast with the stability that is often assumed to be essential to architecture.

American Framing is a visual and textual exploration of the social, environmental, and architectural conditions and consequences of this ubiquitous form of construction. For architecture, it offers a story of an American project that is bored with tradition, eager to choose economy over technical skill, and accepting of a relaxed idea of craft in the pursuit of something useful and new—the forming of an architecture that enables architecture.

Paul Andersen is the director of Independent Architecture, a Denver-based office with projects that speculate on the roles that form, repetition, and pop culture play in architecture. **Jayne Kelley** is an editor and writer based in Chicago and currently a visiting assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago's School of Architecture. **Paul Preissner** is the principal of Paul Preissner Architects in Oak Park, IL, and an Associate Professor of Architecture at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Published 19th Jun 2023