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Teaching Architecture:
Zumthor in Mendrisio

Primo Anno

Atelier Zumthor at the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio

Rafael Lorentz

ISBN	9783037613443
Publisher	Quart Publishers
Binding	Hardback
Territory	World excluding Central Europe, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Africa, Middle East, and West Indies
Size	260 mm x 200 mm
Pages	280 Pages
Illustrations	300 color
Price	£64.50

- Insights into the teaching world of architect Peter Zumthor
- Based on previously unpublished material
- Interviews with Pia Durisch, Valentin Bearth and Peter Zumthor

This publication offers a rare and fascinating insight into the teaching world of renowned architect Peter Zumthor. Based on previously unpublished material – including letters, sketches and photographs – as well as recent interviews with former students, assistants, colleagues and Zumthor himself, it examines the origins, historical context and far-reaching influence of his pioneering course "Primo Anno" (1996–1999) at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio. The "Primo Anno" exercises form the structural basis of the book, while thematically organised interviews open up diverse perspectives on Zumthor's thinking and his unique didactic approach. Narrative chapters connect these elements into a common thread, reflecting on the findings and placing them in a broader theoretical context. Based on his dissertation, written between 2018 and 2021, as well as previously unpublished materials and interviews, the Swiss-Brazilian architect Rafael Lorentz documents a rediscovery that not only sheds light on Zumthor's thinking, but also reveals his formative influence on the identity of the Accademia.

Rafael Lorentz holds a PhD from Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio – Università della Svizzera Italiana and from Università IUAV di Venezia (2021). His doctoral dissertation explored the potential of teaching as a space of critical reflection for practice and was awarded the 2021 'prize for the promotion of research in art history' by the Swiss Association of Art Historians. He holds a master's degree in Theory, History and Criticism of Architecture (2016). Along with academic research, he has collaborated on the design of competition projects with local studios in Switzerland.

Publish date 8th Mar 2027