

The most influential architectural treatise ever published

Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*. Venice: D. de' Franceschi, 1570. 12 1/4 inches x 8 3/8 inches (311 x 213 mm), 332 pages, 86 plates.

Countless generations of architects and designers have been inspired by Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (The four books on architecture), the most influential treatise on Western building to emerge from the Italian Renaissance. The popularity of this survey of the tradition of classical architecture continues undiminished to the present day.

Andrea Palladio (1508–80) was a very successful architect who designed stylistically sumptuous buildings in Venice and the Veneto. His name is identified with the architectural movement named after him, Palladianism, which emanated from Northern Italy and grew in popularity across Europe through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and extended to America a century later. Consequently, he is probably the best-known architect in the Western world. His international fame is due largely to his *I quattro libri* with its inspirational combination of clear and direct words and images.

Palladio reasoned that only through direct study of antiquity, *in situ*, could the greatness of ancient architecture be truly understood and incorporated into modern building projects. He traveled to Rome and created spectacular drawings of temples, shrines, arenas, and the Roman baths. Palladio reconstructed the ruins as entire buildings as he imagined they had been designed; the drawings in his book present them as potent symbols of civilized Virtue, perfect and complete. In addition to reconstructions of ancient architecture, *I quattro libri* includes examples of built and projected designs — country houses and farm estates (*ville*), townhouses (*palazzi*), a monastery (*convento*) in Venice, and a bridge across the Grand Canal.

Palladio was sixty-two when *I quattro libri* was published, and the variety and quality of the designs confirmed his flexibility and the universal applicability of his approach to the classical language of architecture. The optimistic and timeless message in Palladio's masterwork transcends stylistic

boundaries; it provides intellectual and visual enjoyment and reminds us of the power and authority of architecture of quality.

This extraordinary copy of *I quattro libri dell'architettura*, from the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress, is in a binding of fine contemporary limp vellum with gilt-stamps. The spine is decorated with gilt ornaments, in panels divided by incised and gilt bands. The title ARCHI | TETTU | RA | DEL | PALLA | DIO is lettered in sepia roman capitals in the second panel. The earliest recorded owner of this copy was the French historian and parliamentarian Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553–1617), who probably acquired it new. After de Thou's death, the library was preserved in the family as an heirloom for two generations, enlarged and opened to the public. For financial reasons the collection was sold in 1680. This Palladio is next recorded (by bookplate and monogram) in the library of the great American collector Robert Hoe (1839–1909), a wealthy manufacturer of printing presses. Hoe was a founder and first president of the Grolier Club of New York, which remains the country's leading association of bibliophiles.

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