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# I.M. Pei: Architect Of Time, Place And Purpose



## Synopsis

Jill Rubalcaba tells the conflict-ridden stories behind six of Pei's most celebrated buildings, all turning points in Pei's distinguished career: National Center for Atmospheric Research (Boulder, CO), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Boston, MA), National Gallery of Art, East Building (Washington, DC), Fragrant Hill Hotel (near Forbidden City, China), Louvre (Paris, France), and the Miho Museum (Japan). Each story, illustrated with drawings, architectural plans, and photographs, follows Pei on his journey—from his search for design inspiration, through the trials of construction, to the finished project. Although Pei claims that he does not have a stylistic signature, his buildings are identified by geometric form and minimalist beauty, an integral relationship with their natural surroundings, and a profound respect for the past while exceeding the needs of those who utilize them. His architectural sensibilities and achievements have made Pei one of the premier architects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Pei once explained his approach as requiring "a full understanding of the three essential elements—time, place, purpose—to arrive at an ideal balance." Pei's awards, buildings, a timeline, notes, suggested reading, and websites are also included.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**STARRED** Ages 12+ This handsome book introduces the life and work of architect I. M. Pei. Born in China, he came to the U.S. in 1935 to study architecture. Though he never returned to his homeland to live, his later work expressed cultural and artistic values absorbed during his childhood in addition to his education as an architect and the strong influence of Corbusier. After discussing Pei's early

work in urban redevelopment, Rubalcaba focuses on seven later projects around the world: the National Center for Atmospheric Research, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, the Fragrant Hill Hotel, the Bank of China, the redesigned Louvre, and the Miho Museum. Each chapter looks at Pei's approach to one project, the challenges he encountered, and how he achieved his vision for the building. Illustrations include sketches, site models, and photos. Back matter includes a timeline, a bibliography, source notes for quotes, and lists of suggested books and websites. Like Pei's buildings, the book's design has a clean aesthetic that is spacious, functional, and inviting. Color is used sparingly, but effectively. The wide, white pages carry well-spaced lines of type, with red chapter headings, page numbers, and linear borders for illustrations. A fascinating introduction to this significant architect. Carolyn Phelan, Booklist, November 1st Issue --STARRED - Carolyn Phelan, Booklist, November 1st Issue STARRED

Exceptionally attractive bookmaking enhances the story of Pei's career: stylish font with wide leading on generous white space; delicately framed color photographs, plans, elevations, and sketches harmonize with the text layout; bibliography, timeline, notes, resources, major Pei designs, and index enjoy care in design seldom lavished on end matter. This is an essential addition to the 720s and a first choice for adolescents imagining a future in architecture or engineering.

--STARRED - The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, December 2011

Jill Rubalcaba lives in Middletown, Connecticut. Her recent book, *Every Bone Tells a Story: Hominin Discoveries, Deductions, and Debates*, co-authored with Peter Robertshaw, was a finalist for the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults.

Although I know next to nothing about Architecture or I.M. Pei, after reading a cyber friend's review of Jill Rubalcaba's "I. M. Pei: Architect of Time, Place and Purpose," I nearly tore my wallet apart pulling out my credit card at warp speed, placing the order on .com. As fellow reviewer, Don Blankenship would say, "Folks, this is great stuff!" It has great pictures and is written for those twelve and older; however, so is my local newspaper and it is not half as interesting. I love a good biography and this one really fit the bill for me. I spent two hours and 92 pages of pure joy reading and viewing the pictures that document the life and accomplishments of Leoh Ming Pei. Rubalcaba displays a half dozen of Pei's most notable buildings constructed in America, Beijing, Hong Kong, Paris, and Japan where he studied the people and sites before building architecture suitable for those locations, but within the politics, budget and indigenous constraints. Jill follows the times line that begins with Pei's April 26, 1917 birth in China, move to the United States in 1935; graduation

from MIT in 1940; marriage to Eileen Loo in 1942; the birth of his first son, T'ing Chung in 1945; graduation with a Masters in Architecture from Harvard in 1946, the same year his second son, Chien Chung "Didi" was born; the birth of his third son, Li Chung "Sandi" in 1950, becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1955; the birth of Liane, Pei's only daughter in 1960; Pei's retirement in 1990 and beyond. A premier name in architecture, Pei explained that a full understanding of three essential elements--time, place and purpose--is his approach to achieve an ideally balanced structure. I wholeheartedly recommend this clear and concise biographic snapshot of a quiet, unassuming family man who has left his ingenious mark on this planet through creative architecture. Enjoy!

Disappointing attempt at an anthology of a great Architect's life work. Incomplete with mediocre photos.

Very happy!

Young people have a natural curiosity that we best feed if we do not want it to wither. With Jill Rubalcaba has produced a liberating book for us and our young. Compact enough in height, it is a splendid lap book of broad wings like a Red-crowned Crane to transport us. Her archive photographs and other illustrations are open, expansive, Red-crowned because of her lovely calligraphic headings and for the Chinese bird both. The first things she freed me from are his initials, I. M. From now on it is strictly Ioh Ming. Gangsta architect! Yo Ming yo. I knew nothing of his life before America. Ms. Rubalcaba tells it as an old fashioned tale, and with a light touch fitting the man. She has an easy way with introducing architecture invitingly. While mentioning the Beaux-arts school and the general reaction of MIT and Harvard against it, she quietly juxtaposes a photograph of the set piece, Palais Beaux-Arts located in Lille. She saves a proverbial thousand words there (actually that cliché is a planted proverb by one of the Mad Men) letting the school speak for itself. So she fairly presents all topics. Just so she contrasts the appreciation of history that Ioh Ming has, with its rejection by Le Corbu and his tribe. She makes the point politely that Pei was a giant because he left behind the sterile academy to live as a true builder. Her rendering of Zeckendorf is not to be missed, nor the rest of that legendary partnership. Read this book before you let it go into the kid's hands (remove or cover its lovely dust jacket; there is a resilient hard finish cover beneath); besides that you are unlikely ever to get it back. If you care to read it, you are in position to have real conversations about it. And not just architecture, as if "just" were even justified.

Enjoy the read and the talk. Her extensive contact with Pei's partner and with his personal assistant bring a closeness of the text to its subject, so often missing. All the stories, so to speak, of his great buildings are revealingly written. They make you anxious to understand; and they make the life and ideas of an architect make sense. She handles quite a lot at a comfortable pace. By page 45, almost half way through, Pei is finally back in China. Ms. Rubalcaba gives a good view of those complicated times -- a little history, a little geography, a little political science and a good dose of culture from the Forbidden City and its Ming Dynasty to the Cultural Revolution and Ping Pong, even Tiananmen Square. She even makes a well-controlled dig (enough with the puns) at dreadful Soviet Socialist architecture. Feng shui, so 'au courant' these days, was a pebble in Pei's shoe. He says "Feng shui masters are like lawyers here (Hong Kong). They're everywhere. I knew I'd have trouble..." I do not hold much with picking favorites, so I will say only that his work closest to my heart is the Pyramid and Grand Stairway to the Louvre. And those gnatty Feng shui masters had nothing on the French unofficial Ministry of Looking Backwards, stuck in the mud. They hurled their own puns at Pei. But both phases of his additions are the new jewel in the crown that is our Louvre. Ms. Rubalcaba ends with useful supplements, an echo of his Pyramid as his timeline, a bibliography and an appropriate list of suggested reading. The archival photographs and diagrams work together for a first encounter with architecture. The whole design and layout and font used by the old publisher Marshall Cavendish (they still use the category "juvenile") of Singapore are extraordinary. I review few "childrens' books. I wrote this because it is a cut above and because the stellar reviewer of such books, Donald Blankenship is recovering from his adventures under the knife. I had rather he had done the review; and I thank you for your patience.

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