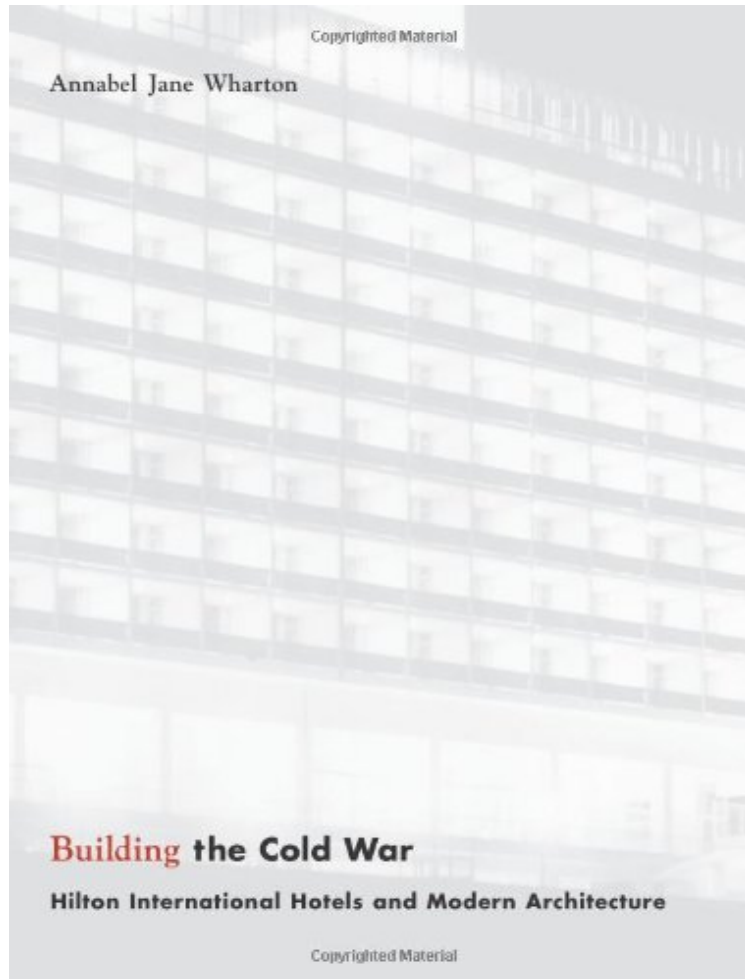


Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture

Annabel Jane Wharton

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Annabel Jane Wharton : Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Modernist architecture and anti-communismBy Yaakov Ben ShalomThis book is a fascinating analysis of how the Hilton hotel chain spread into Europe and the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s. The key is that by building architecturally modernist (and highly modern) hotels, Conrad Hilton thought he was fighting the Cold War. Locals and guests were to be impressed by American technology and American style. Case studies are Istanbul, Athens, Cairo, Berlin, London, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Rome, and Florence. Historians of the new "international history" and architectural historians will find this book very intriguing.However,

there are some real problems with the book, too. The chapter on Berlin is *full* of factual errors. Incorrect names are given for places and institutions. Incorrect dates for historical events are given. Her translations from German are not good. (Some other chapters might have similar mistakes, but I don't know much about Turkish or Greek history.) Wharton is the author of other books on Jerusalem, and the chapter on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is very interesting from an architectural standpoint. Unfortunately, she also loads up that chapter with snide- or amateurish-sounding political comments that don't relate to architecture and only marginally relate to urban planning. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is complex and requires more nuance than it gets here.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Surprisingly Fascinating

By Ryan Witte

A coworker who's not particularly interested in architecture sort of snorted when she saw that I was reading this. But this book is astonishingly well-written and compelling. Wharton examines the evolution of hotel design in America, siting inside of existing and often ancient urban fabrics, the symbolism of architectural style, planning, interior decor, and how this whole campaign was completely political, intimately involving domestic and foreign governments, and was fully charged with capitalist imperialism. Before the USA colonized the world with MacDonald's, Hilton Hotels did it. A must read.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Hotels as Armaments

By Rob Hardy

The weapons that won the Cold War include ICBMs and nuclear bombs flown on B-52s. These were threats, but never had to be deployed into action. But one weapon that did go into action was hotels. Hilton hotels. This is the surprising demonstration in *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (University of Chicago Press) by Annabel Jane Wharton. What is even more surprising is that Hilton hotels did not just participate in the capitalist boom that eventually dislodged the Soviet Union. They were deliberately placed, designed, and run to make a profit, to be sure, but also to dislodge the Red Threat. This is not just the author's speculation. Conrad Hilton made it explicit: "Let me say right here, that we operate hotels abroad for the same reason we operate them in this country - to make money for our stockholders... However, we feel that if we really believe in what we are all saying about liberty, about Communism, about happiness, that we, as a nation, must exercise our great strength and power for good against evil. If we really believe this, it is up to each of us, our organizations and our industries, to contribute to this objective with all the resources at our command." He was careful not to disparage our country's military, but said, "I will tell you frankly, satellites and H-bombs will not get the job done."

Wharton has done an excellent job of giving a broad history of the overseas Hilton, while giving case studies of specific ones. The Istanbul Hilton, for instance, had all the usual amenities, like lawns (completely foreign to the area), tennis courts, and a swimming pool. It had the extraordinary feature, common in foreign Hiltons, of iced water piped into every room. However, the marquee covering cars that drove up to the entrance was a wavy horizontal structure that was referred to as the "flying carpet." The interior lobby had a series of domes in the ceiling, a bow to mosque designs, and there were teakwood screens and Turkish carpets. Work by local artisans decorated the public spaces. Nonetheless, you can see in the pictures (and in this book, there are many useful ones) that the Istanbul Hilton is still a concrete, metal, and glass box like nothing else around it. Old hotels concentrated on public rooms inside; the Hiltons looked out, with lots of glass in every room to supply a view. The view was carefully chosen. In Istanbul, it faced East, toward the Soviet Union, daring those Commies to look American modernity and wealth in the eyes.

Wharton is a historian of medieval art. Her family used some of these hotels when she was growing up, and she has returned to them to give an architectural history of the Hilton overseas effort. (She could not visit two Hiltons now lost, the one in Havana and the one in Tehran.) It is a remarkable history, no longer active because the Cold War is over, and because others followed Hiltons into the modernism market. The Hilton hotels still exist, but they are just hotels now, not unique as architecture nor as Cold War armaments. They shaped the way American visitors viewed foreign capitals, and boosted American economic (and therefore political) policies. Conrad Hilton may not have won the Cold War, but he did more than plenty of the generals.

In postwar Europe and the Middle East, Hilton hotels were quite literally "little Americas." For American businessmen and tourists, a Hilton Hotel with the comfortable familiarity of an English-speaking staff, a restaurant that served cheeseburgers and milkshakes, trans-Atlantic telephone lines, and, most important, air-conditioned modernity offered a respite from the disturbingly alien. For impoverished local populations, these same features lent the Hilton a utopian aura. The Hilton was a space of luxury and desire, a space that realized, permanently and prominently, the new and powerful presence of the United States.

Building the Cold War examines the architectural means by which the Hilton was written into the urban topographies of the major cities of Europe and the Middle East as an effective representation of the United States. Between 1953 and 1966, Hilton International built sixteen luxury hotels abroad. Often the Hilton was the first significant modern structure in the host city, as well as its finest hotel. The Hiltons introduced a striking visual contrast to the traditional architectural forms of such cities as Istanbul, Cairo, Athens, and Jerusalem, where the impact of its new architecture was amplified by the hotel's unprecedented siting and scale. Even in cities familiar with the Modern, the new Hilton often dominated the urban landscape with its height, changing the look of the city. The London Hilton on Park Lane, for example, was the first structure in London that was higher than St. Paul's cathedral.

In his autobiography, Conrad N. Hilton claimed that these hotels were constructed for profit and for political impact: "an integral part of my dream was to show the countries most exposed to Communism the other

side of the coin the fruits of the free world." Exploring everything the carefully drafted contracts for the buildings to the remarkable visual and social impact on their host cities, Wharton offers a theoretically sophisticated critique of one of the Cold War's first international businesses and demonstrates that the Hilton's role in the struggle against Communism was, as Conrad Hilton declared, significant, though in ways that he could not have imagined. Many of these postwar Hiltons still flourish. Those who stay in them will learn a great deal about their experience from this new assessment of hotel space.

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