

BOOK REVIEW

Clifton Stanley Lemon

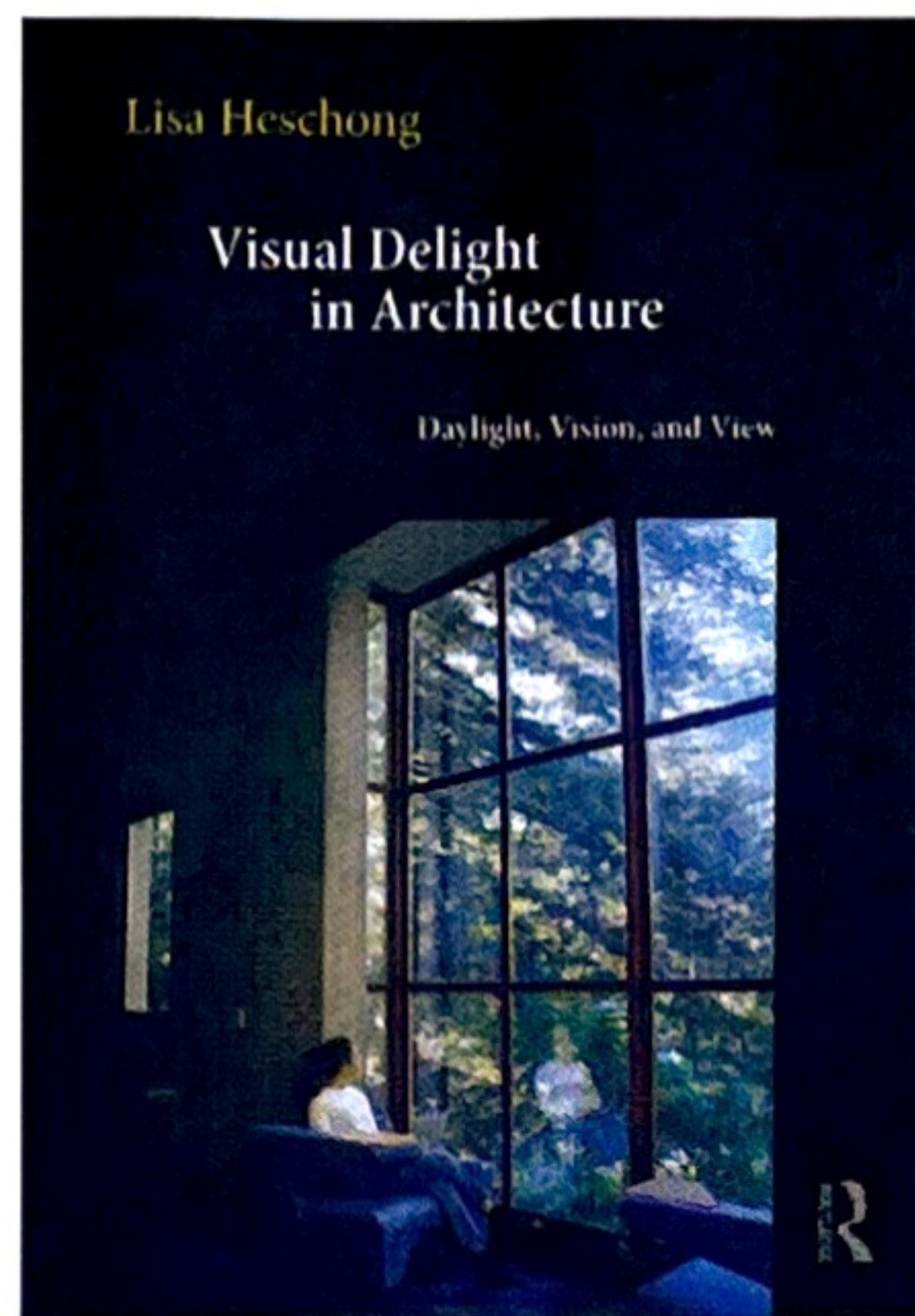
Visual Delight in Architecture: Daylight, Vision, and View

By Lisa Heschong

Lisa Heschong's *Visual Delight in Architecture: Daylight, Vision, and View* (Routledge, 2021) is possibly the most significant book on architecture and lighting of the past two decades—a foundational text that lays crucial groundwork for the evolution of research and design practice for a healthier built environment. A companion to her concise, elegant *Thermal Delight in Architecture* (MIT Press, 1979), *Visual Delight* is an extensive and deep meditation on our visual experience of buildings, based on over four decades of research, analysis and design practice. It encompasses an ambitious inquiry into the science of vision; chronobiology; health and wellness; and the meaning of nature, and it's backed up by excellent research and analysis of the impact of views and daylight on productivity, health, real estate value, learning and cognitive function.

Architect, consultant and researcher Heschong is a graduate of the University of California Berkeley and MIT, and is of a generation of architects that were trained in a much more holistic approach to design than is common today. Many of the ideas that have driven the green building movement of the past two decades have precedent in earlier movements. True sustainable design means first making use of the available resources from a site, including sunlight, thermal mass, rainwater, natural heating and cooling opportunities, views and many others. Unfortunately in practice today, lighting is mostly an afterthought: lighting professionals are largely concerned with engineering high-tech electric lighting, and architects often don't think of daylight and views as primary design concerns.

One concept that Heschong adds to considerably is the "Prospect and Refuge" theory developed in 1975 by Jay Appleton, an English



Read it:

If you want to understand the future of architecture, lighting and a healthier built environment.

Don't read it:

If you are fine with windowless buildings, and prefer technological nature over actual nature.

geographer and academic, who proposed that humans are hardwired to prefer spaces where they have views and feel protected. The author also pays considerable attention to biologist E.O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, which has considerable currency today. But Heschong cautions that our understanding is still incomplete in many areas—we're still discovering new surprising aspects of the biology of vision, for instance. As Peter H. Kahn Jr. points out in his book *Technological Nature* (MIT Press, 2011), biophilia isn't really a testable hypothesis as much as a general construct.

In that spirit, inspired by *Visual Delight*, I advocate for *vistaphilia*, a term first used by artist Gary John Gresl to describe the human need for views and daylight. In past decades most of our design attention has been on the management of daylight illumination inside of buildings. However, a window view that attracts your gaze is likely to provide even more circadian stimulus and health benefits.

Visual Delight is crucial reading for all design professionals working on the built environment today. While common sense may dictate that views and daylight should be essential, the economic and cultural exigencies of making buildings on budget and on schedule and putting technology first often get in the way. Heschong makes a powerful case for the primacy views and daylight: "Daylight should become the primary illuminant for any space where people spend a substantial part of their day, and access to an outdoor view must be readily available to everyone—whether rich or poor; very young or very old; active, infirm, or bedridden; working, learning, or relaxing."

A marketing consultant, researcher and educator, Clifton Lemon is CEO of Clifton Lemon Associates, program director for the LightSpec Conferences and a member of The Lighting Agora.