



The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Skyscraper Design and Cultural Change in the 1920s (Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity)

By Katherine Solomonson

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The Chicago Tribune Tower competition was one of the largest, most important and most controversial design contests of the 1920s. The international competition generated 263 entries for the design of the new Tribune office building, and they represented a broad constellation of approaches to the skyscraper at a time of transition. In the decades following the competition, the design entries have often been evaluated in terms of the rise and demise of particular conceptions of modernism. This study examines the various contexts in which the Chicago Tribune Tower design competition took place and how they shaped the event. Analyzing how the competition contributed to changing concepts of the skyscraper, it also demonstrates how it engaged with the production of consumer culture, with conflicts of national identity and cultural unity, and with a newspaper's efforts to produce a civic and corporate icon during the turbulent years following World War I.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The Tribune Company's 1922 competition to design the "world's most beautiful office building" as its headquarters captured the interest of an international audience of architects, business leaders, and the public at large. Solomonson (Univ. of Minnesota) argues persuasively that the competition, now often relegated to the footnotes of architectural history, was a vortex around which swirled the major currents of debate on skyscraper design, city planning, and the role of business in an industrial/capitalist society. Based on her doctoral dissertation, this thoroughly documented study inspects Hood and Howells's winning entry, runner-up Eero Saarinen's ultimately more influential design, and a host of other proposals, from historicist to avant-garde. A brief and unsatisfactory final chapter tentatively raises the issue of the competition's enduring influence. Architect Stanley Tigerman reenacted the competition in his idiosyncratic Chicago Tribune Tower Competition and Late Entries (1980. o.p.); Solomonson, however, offers the first well-rounded examination of this important episode in the development of the urban skyline. Her fine book is recommended for academic libraries. David Solt sz, Cuyahoga Cty. P.L., Parma, OH
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Review

'In Solomonson's careful and many-sided account, Tribune Tower becomes a pole around which the whole pattern of a society turns. Building up from details, she draws together a fascinating social and material history ... The book represents a landmark effort to connect architectural discourse to the larger culture of which it is a part ... this fine social history offers an exemplary model for anyone seeking to understand what buildings mean to people.' Chicago Tribune

'Solomonson ... Understands the issues and writes engagingly not only about the competition itself, but about the architectural and commercial cultures - both European and American - that formed its backdrop.' The Times Literary Supplement

From the Inside Flap

In 1922, the *Chicago Tribune* sponsored an international competition to design its new corporate headquarters. Both a serious design contest and a brilliant publicity stunt, the competition received worldwide attention for the hundreds of submissions--from the sublime to the ridiculous--it garnered.

In this lavishly illustrated book, Katherine Solomonson tells the fascinating story of the competition, the diverse architectural designs it attracted, and its lasting impact. She shows how the *Tribune* used the competition to position itself as a civic institution whose new headquarters would serve as a defining public monument for Chicago. For architects, planners, and others, the competition sparked influential debates over the design and social functions of skyscrapers. It also played a crucial role in the development of advertising, consumer culture, and a new national identity in the turbulent years after World War I.

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