

## Book review

### Traces of Peter Rice

Edited by Kevin Barry. Lilliput Press Ltd., Dublin, Ireland, 2012, ISBN 978-1-84351-386-5, £18-00, 135 pp.

Peter Rice is famous for his key input in many landmark projects such as the Sydney Opera House, the Pompidou Centre, the Pyramid in front of the Louvre and the delicate tensile 'clouds' suspended below the Grand Arch in La Defense, Paris. *Traces of Peter Rice* was written and published as a companion piece to an exhibition of his work, which in the past year, has travelled from London to Paris and finally Dublin. The book comprises a set of essays, reminiscences and impressions of Peter Rice and the legacy he has left.

The first chapter, 'Memories of Peter' is written by Peter's brother Maurice. In the second chapter Jack Zunz looks at Peter's 'route to the very summit of his profession'. The chapter concentrates on Peter's early career as an engineer on the Sydney Opera House.

The third chapter, 'Renzo Piano in conversation', written by Kevin Barry and Jennifer Greitschus, is a free-flowing account of Renzo Piano's reminiscences of working with Peter. Their collaboration dated back to the Centre Pompidou and continued in various forms for the rest of Peter's career. This and the other similar interviews explore Peter Rice's personality and give the reader a glimpse, or many glimpses, of what made him such an extraordinarily creative engineer.

The fourth chapter, 'Peter Rice, lighting engineer' is written by Andy Sedgwick, who worked as a specialist lighting engineer in Arup. As an engineer who worked so closely with architects it is unsurprising that Peter Rice was so passionately interested in the treatment of light in buildings but the description of his involvement in the Full-moon Theatre shows the extent of his interest. This project involved the construction of a small experimental outdoor theatre for Humbert Camerlo, an opera director and longstanding friend of Peter's, who lived on an ancient estate near Montpellier. The concept was that the theatre would be used for performances where the only light sources would be mirrors reflecting light from the full moon.

Chapter 5, 'Richard Rogers in conversation' is written by Jonathan Glancey. Like Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers' collaboration with Peter Rice dates back

to the Beaubourg, Centre Pompidou, project and later included the Lloyds of London Building. Roger's comment that 'Peter brought a humanity and poetry to contemporary architecture' is echoed by many of this book's other contributors.

Chapter 6, which is written by Kevin Barry, the book's editor, borrows the title of, and explores, Peter Rice's much sought-after autobiography 'An Engineer Imagines'.

Chapter 7, 'The Peter Rice I knew' is written by Ian Richie and Chapter 8 'Working with Peter Rice and Frank Stella' is written by Martin Francis. Richie, Rice and Francis created the firm RFR and these close collaborators give an insightful picture of Peter Rice the engineer and the man.

Seán Ó Laoire took four words from the start of Finnegans Wake, Commodious vicus of recirculation, to form a title for Chapter 9. Ó Laoire's short essay looks at Rice from an Irish perspective and observes how Rice's international legacy has in turn influenced Irish architecture. Chapter 10, 'Listening to the idea' is written by Sophie Le Bourva who worked for Peter and presents Rice as a mentor who was happy to surround himself with talented young people who were enthusiastic and free from prejudice.

The final chapter 'On first looking into Rice's engineering notebooks' by Philip O'Kane is hardly longer than the short cameos that separate the chapters. The chapter title's reference to Keats is appropriate and acknowledges the ability of great works of engineering and art to create an epiphany in those who encounter them.

This bijou publication is a fitting tribute to Peter Rice. The book succeeds in celebrating his legacy and exploring the source of his inspiration. Although the intention is not to provide a chronology of the major projects in which Rice participated, many of his key works are discussed. Peter Rice was the second engineer to be awarded the RIBA's gold medal (Arup being the first) and this book celebrates his collaboration with both architects and engineers. Rice did not see himself as an architect, but instead recognised the creative enabling potential that engineers could bring to design.

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