

Preface

Making a book about our work is no less complex or exciting than making the work itself.

Originating out of conversations with our publisher and among ourselves, the act of creating this volume gave us an opportunity to pause and consider where we came from, where we are now, and where we might be headed after thirty years in existence. It compelled us to revisit and reflect on the stories we tell ourselves and others about what it is we do and why we do it.

As discussions around the book advanced, the very idea of these stories and of the conscious act of storytelling emerged as an essential tool for self-examination and expression. From there, the direction of the book diverged from that of a traditional monograph, which tells a unifying story about a body of work, to one that explores selected works around a number of foci. As a result, the pages that follow hold neither an encyclopedic presentation of our projects nor a detailed examination of the motifs, materials, or technologies they may share. Instead, this book gives a voice to the underlying motives and considerations, which, while highly influential to any project, are rarely foregrounded in the standard narrative or photographic depiction of work appearing in architectural publications.

Our stories involve the origins, contexts, and ambitions of our work in the most personal and also in the broadest senses. Often they contain stories within stories, weaving together everything from memories and daydreams to ancient myths and histories. Told over and over, they have become embedded in our group consciousness or inherited to their specific geographic place. Rather than dissect our designs, we hope to animate them by invoking these stories. Rather than analyze the projects “as built,” we hope to depict them “as lived”—that is, as imagined and inhabited.

Partly the result of our reflection and partly an expression of our firm’s values, three themes emerged to describe and loosely categorize the work in this volume: Integration of Disciplines, Political Space, and Generosity and Collective Ownership. Roughly speaking, these groupings relate to the methodology, typologies, and undergirding beliefs that have created, and continue to guide, both the work and the culture of our firm.

Snøhetta: Collective Intuition is thus a compendium of projects created by Snøhetta during its first thirty years; it is also a benchmark in the unfolding of a practice which, in the dramatic structure of its evolution, is still in the thrall of its rising action and self-definition. The projects contained within these pages are just some of many we could have chosen to present; projects absent from this book could also have been included to expand one or more of the book’s themes, had room allowed. And almost any of the featured projects could have been discussed within more than one category. Ultimately, what we offer the reader is a slice of our body of work—one we acknowledge as partial and exploratory, while at the same time representative of who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

With this in mind, we invite you to explore these works for yourself and to develop your own interpretations of their themes and stories as you go.

Snøhetta
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