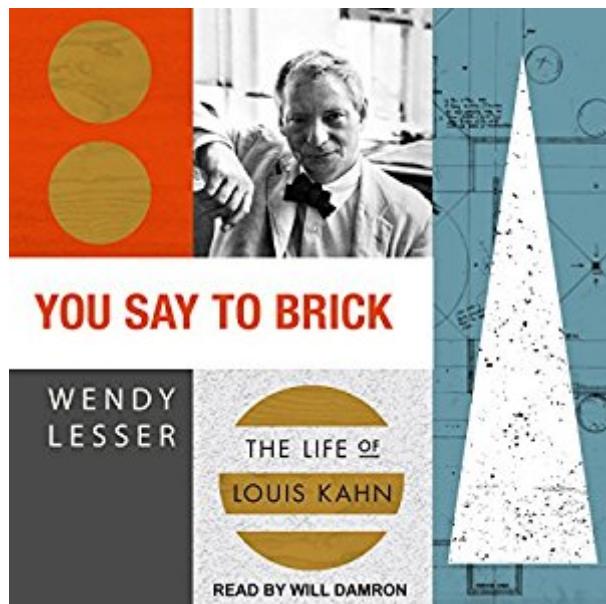


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You Say To Brick: The Life Of Louis Kahn



Synopsis

Born to a Jewish family in Estonia in 1901 and brought to America in 1906, the architect Louis Kahn grew up in poverty in Philadelphia; by the time of his death in 1974, he was widely recognized as one of the greatest architects of his era. Yet this enormous reputation was based on only a handful of masterpieces, all built during the last 15 years of his life. Perfectly complementing Nathaniel Kahn's award-winning documentary, *My Architect*, Wendy Lesser's *You Say to Brick* is a major exploration of the architect's life and work. Kahn, perhaps more than any other 20th century American architect, was a "public" architect. Eschewing the usual corporate skyscrapers, hotels, and condominiums, he focused on medical and educational research facilities, government centers, museums, libraries, parks, religious buildings, and other structures that would serve the public good. Yet this warm, captivating person, beloved by students and admired by colleagues, was also a secretive and mysterious character hiding behind a series of masks.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great book but, for those who have never seen some of Kahns buildings, it could use some photos of his work

The best book about the motivations of Kahn.

best bio tet

Thank you!

In 2001, in the *New Yorker*, Paul Goldberger lamented the absence of biographies of Louis Kahn, the enigmatic mystical immigrant architect who died in 1974. Wendy Lesser's biography fills the void with *You Say To Brick*, a thought-provoking, wide ranging, unparalleled explication of his person, his life, his architecture and supreme artistry. She masterfully blends his complicated life and personal relationships (a marriage, a child by that marriage, and at least two extra marital affairs and two children from those affairs) with a thorough examination of four of his masterpieces; the Salk Institute, the Kimbell Art Museum, the Phillips Exeter Library, the National Assembly Building in Dacca, Bangladesh, and the Indian Institute of Management in India. She also analyses his two Yale art museums; describing the Library Court in the British Museum as "the acme of a gentlemen's-club perfection . . . [punctuated] by a massive concrete cylinder" a giant piece of the ancient world plunked down in an upscale London interior. Lesser is humorous, rhapsodic and even reverential in personalizing one of this country's artistic geniuses. This book will send you scanning the Internet for videos and images of his works and watching his son's mesmerizing movie *My Architect*. This is biography at its finest.

Wendy Lesser's "You Say to Brick: The Life of Louis Kahn", is one of the finest biographies I've read. Her subject, Louis Kahn, was a complicated man who lived an ultra-complicated life. As a world-renowned architect, Kahn designed public buildings from Fort Worth to New Hampshire to India and Pakistan. Those are just a few of the ones seen to completion; many other designs - both public and private - were never built but live on in design reviews. He died in his early 70's, alone in a New York train station, from a heart attack. But his designs live on, long after his death, both in the structures themselves and in books and movies about him. Does creativity bring with it some negative factors along with the positive? Louis Kahn immigrated to the United States from the Baltic area as a child and was raised in a working class family in Philadelphia. His face and hands had been badly burned as a small boy, but his mind and his confidence seemed to override the problems that such severe scarring might inflict. Like his fellow architect Frank Lloyd Wright, Kahn was a great ladies man, fathering a child each with two women he worked with. This was in addition to his wife and daughter. He was self-admittedly a lousy business man and his architecture firm was in great debt at his death. But he was a man who inspired loyalty and good work from those he

employed. He was a man who left his mark on the world. Wendy Lesser's book is a well-written, even-handed look at both Kahn's public and private life. She also highlights five of Kahn's most famous buildings; the Salk Center, the Kimbell Museum, the library at Phillips Exeter, and two buildings in India and Bangladesh. She also explains the title of her book, which is quite interesting because it's a glimpse inside Louis Kahn's thoughts about building. For the armchair architecture buff, Lesser's book is a great read.

This book is Outstanding. I was a student of Mr. Kahn's and have been an admirer for decades. This book presents a number of new facts of his life that aren't common knowledge. Would have liked to have had a greater exposure of his other projects. More on the Trenton Bath House would have been of interest, possibly a discussion of one of his house designs, insights on how the Richards Towers are a glowing piece of architecture but falls short on supporting biomedical research, but lessons learned were applied at Salk. On Salk would be interested to learn more about the relationship between owner/architect/engineer. Overall found the book of great interest, could put it down, and finished it in a few days.

This book is the perfect complement to Nathaniel Kahn's documentary "My Architect". The author accomplishes the difficult task in an architectural biography of linking the work to the person and writing well about both. Like the subject of the book, her writing invites contemplation through its not strictly chronological flow. Beginning with his lonesome death in Penn Station she explores his lives and work. I say "lives" because this is the first print volume to really look at the parallel families he established and what they meant for his work and the persons involved. For me, as an architect in Philadelphia starting soon after he died, this book fills in voids from the first hand recollections that were shared by his clients and colleagues. A real accomplishment!

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