



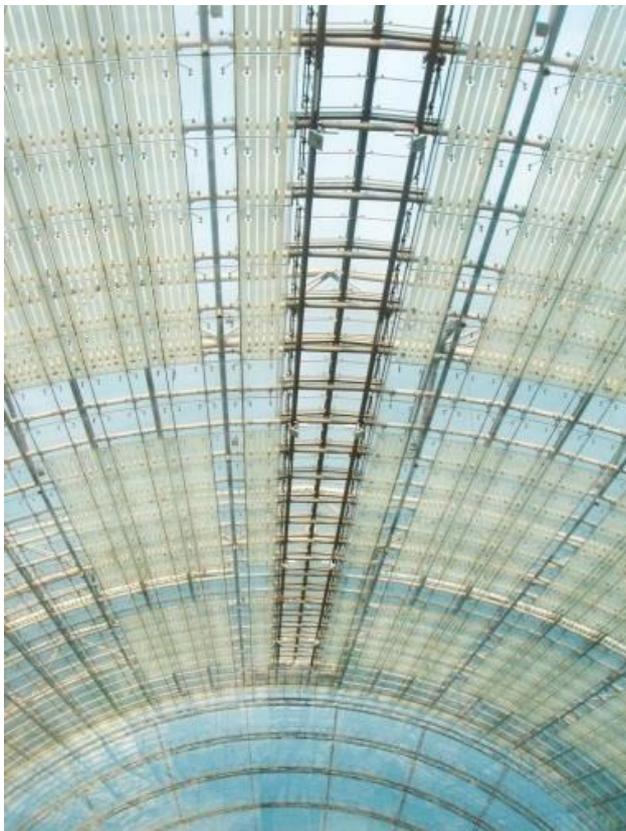
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# An appreciation of Ian Ritchie's autobiography by Richard Coleman

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Richard Coleman on *Being: an Architect* by Ian Ritchie

Few architects write an autobiography. Few architects have as much to say about their biography as Ian Ritchie and in as many ways as he has now. In this two volume beautifully designed and printed tome, published by the Royal Academy of Arts, Ritchie opens up access not only to the creative and technological processes for which he is well known but also to his mind, his inner being and reveals his personal thoughts and feelings around what it is to be an architect. It is also full of his poetry, over 30 distributed at relevant points in the text.



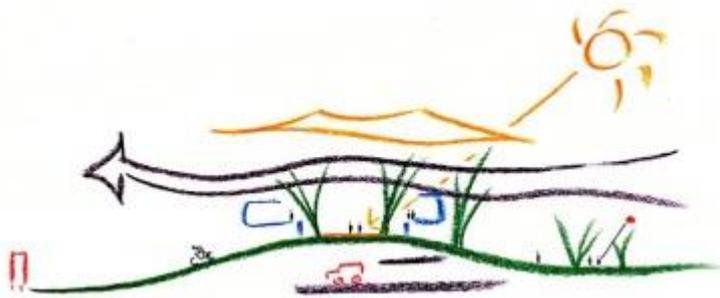
*Interior view of the Leipzig Glass Hall looking up at the glass vault and the apex 'butterfly' ventilation panels (photo 2007).*

Those who know him well will have experienced his passion and the deep sense of love he has for architecture. These qualities commit him to examine every aspect of the art and science to be found in each project. This is illustrated by a detailed biographical story of his life, from the beginning to the present, including endless collaborations, successes and failures and projects which may not be executed but are just as real to him. There are photos, drawings and sketches, but this is not a monograph. It is the story of a man who's destiny was set from age 13 to realise his talents as an artist, scientist, poet, team member, mentor, teacher and family man. To evidence his beguiling sensitivity one can do no better than enjoy the sketch of his new born son, Inti, in the depths of volume 1.



*Jubilee Line Extension, 1999. Culling Road vent shaft (photo 2012)*

The body of the two books traces scheme after scheme, invention over invention, practice identities galore and top-range product designs. Ian has been involved internationally in solving no end of technically challenging designs at the Louvre and the Cite des Sciences in Paris, as well as Leipzig's Glass Hall and Madrid's Reina Sofia Museum of Modern Art. He was the first to use a 'gabion wall' as an architectural proposition. All these and many others are treated as study projects beautifully illustrated with his evocative sketches. The chronology at the back of volume 2 illustrates in summary over 250 intriguing projects and 36 technical inventions, many of which are world firsts.



*Concept sketch for Whitercity 'hill'. Drawing by Ian Ritchie, 1998.*

There is a great deal of analysis in these books, but what sticks particularly in my memory is the chart analysing the path of creativity through to design development. Ian has made a break-through here and encapsulates the essentially human processes going on in the conceptualising mind. He talks about the human 'percept' and clearly understands it as though a philosopher. When I first heard a philosopher advise architects how best to design, the answer was simply, 'You must ask yourself "what will happen"', which is far from simple, but a concept the simple terms of which Ian Ritchie patently understands.

Sadly, what it is to be an architect for Ian, is the exception rather than the rule in a profession which disappoints its receptors more often than it elates them. Whatever it is that inspires a young person to consider the study of architecture, these books will certainly provide the momentum to dive in or steer clear. Hopefully they will be drawn to fully commit as Ian has, and thereby help make a better world, as Ian goes on doing.

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