A Must Read For Any Architect.

1973 edition. Softbound. Fathy demonstrates very powerfully that it is possible to build for the poor, cheaply and humanly. Profusely illustrated.

My Personal Review:

'Architecture for the Poor' by Dr Hassan Fathy Sometimes a book is so ahead of its time it can sink beneath the waves before it's appreciated. Such a book was 'Architecture for the Poor', written in 1969 and originally published by the Ministry of Culture in Cairo. Written with the help of a fellowship from the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs it was published in America by the University of Chicago in 1973 and in a second impression in 1976. But even then it was only taken up by the fringes of the solar energy movement as a neat idea for a different culture and climate. Currently its out of print. The author died in 1989 having received some praise in his home country of Egypt but having seen no actions to take up his ideas for helping peasants take control of their lives by taking charge of the creation of their homes and communities. Dr Fathy was officially an architect but his talents as an amateur anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist, inventor, and economist are what make him great. His holistic approach to solving the housing problems of a poverty level community (and his vision to see how they could be applied to a whole country) takes in the gamut from reviving the craft of mud brick making (along with the traditional masonry building of vaults and domes to roof simple mud structures) through to solving the problems of parasitic worm infections that debilitate entire populations infected through their water supply systems. Every aspect of village life receives his attention: how to adapt an Austrian heating system to make a cooking stove more efficient, how to share a house with cows more hygienically, where to do laundry, how to build a better school, how to provide an alternative income from tomb robbing for the peasants, and how to tactfully delouse peasants using the luxury of a Turkish bathhouse rather than the chilly chemicals of a government mandated cold shower. His appreciation that some inefficiencies are functional within a society makes the changes he does make even more impressive. Fetching water from the village pump in water jars is one of the few occasions a girl has to be seen out in public in Moslem society. Providing running water to every house would derail the marriage process within that society. However he is happy to create
plumbing inside the home? running pipes to the kitchen from rooftop storage jars across the middle of rooms, so if they leak the occupants will have to fix them not ignore the drips until the wall is eroded. Fathy's changes are not just improvements to make a peasant's life more like a modern westerners life? that is impossible given the astonishingly low income of these people. They are changes that make life easier or healthier while striving to maintain traditions and strengthen society because they understand what is behind the tradition. For example splitting the village up into single home farmsteads would expose the individual families to roaming bands of thieves, so it's necessary to let houses huddle together for protection and for cows? more valuable than children? to stay inside the house. Yet this book is not just about practicalities of house or village building? it's also about the need for beauty in the life of even the poorest amongst us. Dr Fahey's desire to restore an appreciation for craftsmanship to all members of society especially by restoring the ability of the poor to control the creation of their own homes is inspiring. An architect can help the process along only if he or she can learn to see life outside the urban world of modern design. This book shows how an architect with an academic education can be of some help to a peasant faced with grinding poverty but only if equipped with the ability to move to the world of that peasant and see how alien western technological solutions can be. Fahey's ideas are not just applicable to Egyptian society, reading this book made me aware of the similarities of problems faced by peoples in many middle eastern countries, particularly Afghanistan which is trying to rebuild itself and could use Dr Fahey's techniques to rehouse its population cheaply and empoweringly. It's even possible to extend his ideas to other hot dry climates such as Southern California, and the desert states of the US, to Mediterranean countries and to many parts of Africa, South America, and Australia. Wherever issues of building cost or those of insulation, shelter and energy efficiency in a hot dry climate need addressing Dr Fahey's solutions should be considered. This book needs to be reprinted; clamor for copies and see if we can make it the bestseller it should have been the first time around. ISBN 0-226-23916-0

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Architecture for the Poor, An Experiment in Rural Egypt by Hassan Fathy - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!