

Reviews

Chris Wilson and Stefanos Polyzoides, editors; Miguel Gandert, contemporary photography; José Zelaya, documentary drawings editor

The Plazas of New Mexico

San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2011.

337 pages, more than 300 contemporary photographs, historical images, maps, diagrams, site plans, and elevation drawings.

ISBN 978-1-59534-083-2, \$45.00 HB

Review by Daniel D. Arreola

Plazas are open spaces typically surrounded by buildings. As an architectural form they have been part of urban settlements from Uruk to Tenochtitlán, and part of the morphology of towns and cities whether Roman, medieval, Renaissance, or modern. In the Americas plazas have been associated with place making since aboriginal times, and they have been imported and elaborated across landscapes of the New World by Hispanic and American cultures. In New Mexico, perhaps more than in any other place in the United States, plazas have been integral to the spatial and social organization of communities for Native Pueblo peoples, Hispanic—both Spanish and Mexican—cultures, and Anglo-Americans. The plaza, although varied by type, form, and landscape, is especially common in this southwestern U.S. state where differences can be pronounced, in part, because of the historic and contemporary interactions of Native, Hispanic, and Anglo peoples.

The Plazas of New Mexico is arguably the most ambitious volume ever to document, assess, and investigate this unit of spatial geography for a single region of the United States. The editors insist that, while part of

the goal of the book is to give order to our understanding of the plaza in New Mexico's past, it is also about how we can learn from the form to enrich our present and future. Conceived as a contribution to the "reurbanization movement" (4) that directs attention back to the pedestrian street and public space of cities and away from the auto-oriented development that seems to govern modern lives, *The Plazas of New Mexico* deepens our understanding of public space through historical and cultural inspection, and thereby fosters dynamic design and planning grounded in that understanding.

The book has its genesis in a decade-long project to document the plazas of the state. This enterprise, directed by Chris Wilson and Stefanos Polyzoides through the Historic Preservation and Regionalism Program of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of New Mexico, conducted seminars that engaged many students, one of whom, José Zelaya, became responsible for documentary drawings in the work. The project also expanded to include acclaimed New Mexico social documentary photographer Miguel Gandert, who contributes dozens of contemporary images to the project. Part of the strength of this book is the successful collaboration of committed scholars, creative photographers, and design professionals—three disciplines that do not always make for a smooth compatibility.

The Plazas of New Mexico is a weighty volume, handsomely designed, and imaginatively assembled in four complementary parts—"History," "Cultural Narratives," "Place Making," and "Communities, Plazas, Squares." There is a useful appendix of thumbnail figure/ground plans of plaza communities, notes to the seven chapter contributions, a select bibliography, and an index. Critical to the success of the volume is the large number

of illustrations, including stunning historical photographs, striking contemporary images, color reproductions of selected graphics and design plans, and extremely useful drawings and architectural elevations, all of which enhance the larger story of plazas from past to present.

In part I, "History," cultural landscape historian Chris Wilson serves up a masterful narrative that explores the three traditions of plaza place making in New Mexico: Puebloan village center places, Spanish and Mexican plazas, and Anglo-American courthouse squares. Wilson deftly navigates the reader through the varied cultural meanings of these plaza spaces, sharpening and illuminating our view of how the built forms were created and evolved among the social groups and across the geography of the state. We learn, for example, that the Puebloan and Spanish and Mexican spaces of northern, central, and southern New Mexico, while created through cultural order, were grounded in a spiritual and domestic way of life that contrasts with the speculative geometry of American squares, dictated as they were by their adaptation to the gridiron of streets and railway alignments characteristic of so many eastern New Mexican towns. Also in part I, architect and town designer Mark Childs briefly assesses the plaza tradition in twentieth-century New Mexico, including the application of the plaza idea to a company town—Tyrone—and to civic plazas in the state's largest cities.

The second part, "Cultural Narratives," consists of three insider views of Native, Hispano (Spanish American), and Mexican American plazas, where each contributing author reflects upon the experience of being raised in and also having studied the place. Rina Swentzell, a native of Santa Clara Pueblo, shares personal and cultural insights

into the indigenous symbolic and spiritual meanings of *bupingeh*, the native word for plaza in the Pueblo world. Don Usner, who spent part of his youth in Chimayó, presents the varied *antepasados*, or ancestral reminiscences, of the Plaza del Cerro in the historic and contemporary village, reinforcing how celebration and preservation of a space is not always uniformly appreciated even within such a small community. And anthropologist Sylvia Rodríguez, whose hometown is Taos, confronts the mystery of tunnels underneath the town's plaza, a metaphor, perhaps, for the tendrils of racial contestation and lost memories in the community from Spanish-Mexican through Anglo-American eras of habitation. These contributions breathe life into the overall story of New Mexico plazas, complementing the historical and more contemporary narratives presented in the first section of the book.

In part III, "Place Making," the narrative pivots from historical and cultural context to questions of design and planning. What is the relevance of the plaza in contemporary and revitalized communities, and how do we incorporate past traditions into new developments? Stefanos Polyzoides, one of the founding members of the Congress for the New Urbanism, delivers a comprehensive typology of plaza forms for New Mexico, suggesting lessons about the diversity of forms that have emerged in the long tricultural heritage of the state. Polyzoides's typology uses detailed inspection of variable landscape and architectural elements of plaza form to reconstruct how Pueblo-Hispanic-Anglo influences shaped the spatial, functional, and ornamental qualities of these spaces. A separate brief contribution by architect and urbanist Chris Calott and planner Meghan Bayer surveys new and revitalized plaza projects in the communities of Doña Ana, Monticello, Gallup, and Ohkay Owingeh (formerly San Juan Pueblo), as well as several master plan plaza undertakings in Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

"Communities, Plazas, Squares," part IV, comprises a series of twenty-two vignettes

edited by Naomi Sachs and Chris Wilson that discuss the histories, contemporary settings, and celebrations in plaza spaces in selected Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo communities. Entries are supplemented by diagrams of each plaza in its place and with appropriate line drawings, as well as historical and contemporary images that fill out these plaza biographies. While all the vignettes are valuable to the goal of the volume, those for Albuquerque, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe stand out as exceptionally well-crafted and comprehensive stories.

The Plazas of New Mexico is an inspired, monumental contribution and its value to the scholarship on the Southwest cannot be overstated. It will remain a seminal reference on the subject for generations to come. Present-day and future *Nuevomexicanos* will be able to attest that through this touchstone volume a treasure trove of knowing now exists that both illuminates and expounds upon a fundamental component of their celebrated cultural heritage. At the same time that this book captures the rich and multicultural record of Pueblo, Hispanic, and Anglo public spaces for New Mexicans, it challenges them to imagine how an appreciation of plazas can enhance "heritage tourism in the service of, rather than at the expense of, local quality of life and community sustainability" (5). Achieving that goal will further the educational worth of *The Plazas of New Mexico* to the benefit of us all.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Daniel D. Arreola is a cultural geographer who resides in New Mexico and works in Arizona, where he is on the faculty of the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning at Arizona State University. His research interests are in historical and cultural landscapes of the Mexico–U.S. border and in Mexican ancestry communities in the United States.

Lauren F. Winner

***A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith:
Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite
Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia***

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010.

288 pages, 39 black-and-white illustrations.

ISBN 9780300124699, \$45.00 HB

Review by Jennifer Cousineau

In his classic study of Virginia's Anglican churches, Dell Upton described elite Anglicans as "a proud and unlovely people," showy, self-absorbed, and impious. Like Upton, I have found it difficult to enter the imaginative world of eighteenth-century Anglicans with any sort of sympathy, though I am often moved by the stunning beauty of the houses, churches, and landscapes they left behind. Lauren F. Winner's *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* does not so much redeem Virginia's early gentry as create a multidimensional and often intimate portrait of a community of religious practitioners and people of faith. The inner or spiritual life of eighteenth-century Anglicans has been somewhat overlooked, wedged temporally between more dramatic forms of religious expression in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. With this study, Winner disrupts a well-established characterization of early elite Anglicans in Virginia as essentially secular. She characterizes Anglican spirituality as quotidian rather than rapturous, ordinary, subtle, and also beautiful, even though some of the structures that underwrote Anglican domestic religion were ugly. As an affirmation of early Anglo-Virginian piety, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith* might insightfully be read alongside Louis Nelson's *The Beauty of Holiness*, another work that draws readers' attention to the spiritual life of eighteenth-century