

A house in the sun: modern architecture and solar energy in the Cold War

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Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=20470067&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

A House in the Sun describes experiments in solar house heating in American architectural, engineering, political, economic, and corporate contexts from the beginning of World War II until the late 1950s. Solar houses were built across the United States, and also proposed for sites in India, South Africa, and Morocco. These experiments developed parallel to transformations in the discussion of modern architecture, relying on new materials and design ideas for both energy efficiency and claims to cultural relevance. These experiments also developed as part of a wider analysis of the globe as an interconnected geophysical system. Perceived resource limitations in the immediate postwar period led to new understandings of the relationships among energy, technology, and economy. The solar house, both as a charged object in the milieu of suburban expansion, and as a means to raise the standard of living in developing economies, became an important site for social, technological, and design experimentation. A House in the Sun argues that this mid-century solar discourse was one of the first episodes in which resource limitations were seen as an opportunity for design to attain new relevance. Furthermore, discussion of and experimentation in solar technology established both an intellectual framework and a funding structure for the articulation of global environmental concerns in subsequent decades. In presenting evidence of resource tensions at the beginning of the Cold War, the book presents a new perspective on the histories of architecture, technology, and environmentalism, one more fully engaged with geopolitical and geophysical pressures.