

Impressions of Arabia: Architecture and Frescoes of the Asir Region



With its awe-inspiring landmarks, its dense woodlands, and the delightful coolness of its mountain-tops, the region of Asir stands in sharp contrast to the usual patterns of Saudi Arabian landscape. This could have been the site of the Garden of Eden, wrote St. John Philby in the 1930s, and as this extraordinary book of photographs demonstrates, the claim still holds true today. The story of the authors two journeys around the Asir region is told through the architecture, frescoes and lifestyles of the people. Granted royal approval for his second project, Thierry Mauger has been able to gain access to previously unseen interiors and to win the trust of the people. In the process, he reveals how the art of the Asir region, the handpainted, brightly colored interior decoration, the painted facades, the symbolism of the architecture, and the unique landscape form a complex code which provides valuable insights into understanding this little-known culture. In the midst of Westernizing trends, the author demonstrates the strong traditional forces which imbue the art and architecture of Asir today. New architecture is taking up forms and ornamentation from traditional regional styles, and as the author shows, the painted interiors by Asir women resonate with the traditions of magic and religion, blended with new images drawn from the contemporary culture.

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