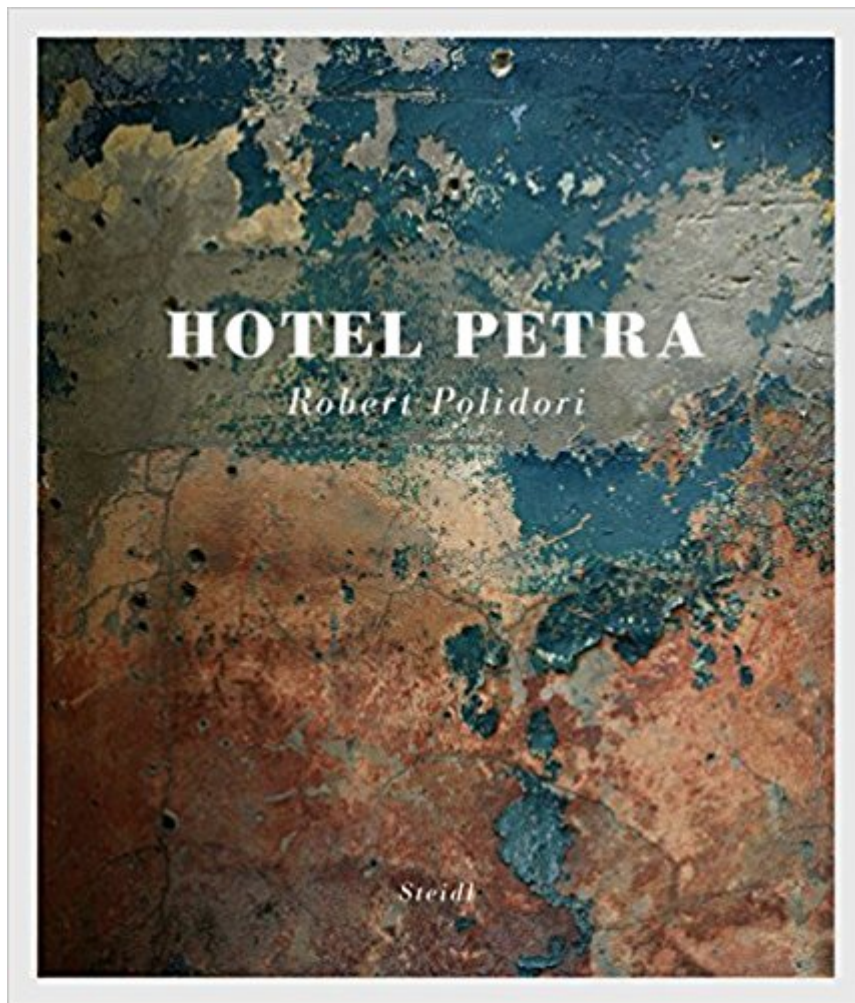


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Robert Polidori: Hotel Petra



Synopsis

This book is Robert Polidori's portrait of the interiors of the now demolished Hotel Petra in Beirut, a grand icon of the city's prewar history. The Hotel Petra was once one of the most popular hotels in Beirut, conveniently located in the city center adjacent to the Grand Theatre. After the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990, Rafiq al-Hariri founded a holding company, Solidere, whose goal was the selective demolition and reconstruction of downtown Beirut's urban fabric. In 1992 the Hotel Petra was set aside for later restoration, and from that moment essentially cut off from any human intervention. Polidori gained access to this site in 2010, and was transfixed by what he discovered: "It's truly rare to find examples of such undisturbed decomposition," he explains. "Usually the normal wear and tear of human traffic would violate and destroy the surfaces of such a delicate ecosystem of layered paint. I came to view these walls as a living process of slow decay whose end effect closely resembled the concerns of many contemporary abstract painters | only in this case their genesis was not fixed or intentional, but the gradual summation of several painters and workmen modifying the wall surfaces at different points in time ... I was quite taken by their beauty and was moved to photograph them for posterity."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hotel Petra, is filled with all kinds of sharp and detailed images that catalog the decay of the space that's happened over the past 18 years...Now demolished, the book "Hotel

Petra, Açã –Â• is one of the only ways to appreciate the greatness of this hotel and the history it once held. (Musee Magazine) Polidori's images, some of which stand six feet high, are ravishing mediations on the concepts of transience and decay, the cracked and peeling walls revealing layers of history. (Stephen Wallis Wall Street Journal)

Mr. Polidori is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest photographers alive today. His large-format camera projects have enchanted me since I first received his spectacular "Havana" book as a gift, and his Katrina hurricane disaster project, "Robert Polidori: After the Flood", is a masterpiece of documentary-as-art photography. My praise for Robert is boundless, and his section of my bookshelf is one that I cherish immensely. This book is perhaps mis-titled in its implication that the photographs will be of the interiors of the Hotel Petra, similar to his "Havana" project, when in fact the photographs making up the majority of this book consist of detailed close-ups of the abstract patinas left on the walls of the hotel after years of decay. The pictures are indeed captivating and not to be missed if you wish to see the literally still-living process that is this progression of decomposition. Mr. Polidori's trajectory has been moving in this direction of exploring pattern and texture, with another recent project being a detailed exploration of the construction fabric of a settlement in Mumbai, India. As to be expected, the book itself is another Steidl treasure, with the textured covers hinting at the subject matter within.

The subject matter here is the deteriorating walls of a once grand hotel. The patterns of decay in the various layers of paint and wallpaper are ready made abstract art for the taking, just add an artist with vision and the right light. Polidori is that artist and he uses the light effectively. This is a beautiful book by any standards. Of course Polidori's photos of texture, color and light are beautiful. But the whole presentation of the photos is outstanding. Begin with the weave in the cover texture that adds the sense of touch to the visual experience of the photo. Then open the book and discover each printed page is reminiscent of matte finish high rag content art papers. The images are superbly presented like those displayed on a gallery wall, without caption whatsoever. Only at the end of the book is any context provided, separate from the photos so as not to detract. Really an excellent presentation only slightly diminished by running several photos across the gutters--a practice I find distracting and unnecessary in a book of these dimensions with several subjects repeated in close detail. Despite these reservations, Steidl is to be commended.

I was a bit disappointed that there were so many pictures of crumbling walls and so few of the

structure itself, I found the book a bit repetitious.

Robert is one of the best living photographers. Every work by him brings hours and hours of enjoyment. A must have for any photography lover

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