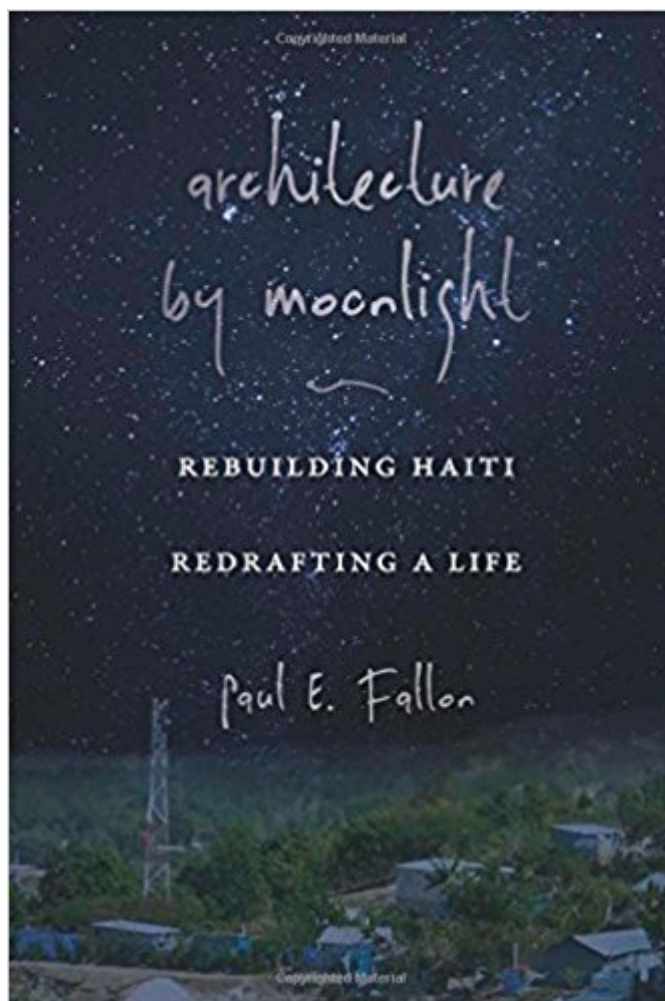


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# Architecture By Moonlight: Rebuilding Haiti, Redrafting A Life



## Synopsis

When a natural disaster strikes, one imposing obstacle always impedes recovery: the need to rebuild. Not just homes, schools, and other buildings but also lives must be reconstructed. Yet amid the horror there is also the opportunity to build back better, to create more resilient buildings and deeper human connections. After Haiti's 2010 earthquake, architect Paul E. Fallon wanted to help rebuild the magic island he had visited the previous summer. Over the next three years, he made seventeen trips to design and supervise construction of an orphanage and a school in Grand Gouvé. In the process, he confronted the challenges of building in a country with sparse materials and with laborers predisposed toward magic over physics. *Architecture by Moonlight* is about much more than construction, however. Readers will also experience the many relationships Fallon developed as he balanced the contradictory demands of a boisterous American family constructing a memorial for their deceased daughter and Evangelical missionaries more interested in saving souls than filling bellies. Dieunison, a wily Haitian orphan, captured Fallon's heart and exemplifies both Haiti's tragedy and its indomitable spirit. Fallon's personal experience is an eloquent tale of an ensemble of incomplete people struggling in a land of great trial and great promise, trying to better understand their place on Earth. He reveals how, when seemingly different people come together, we succeed by seeking our commonality. *Architecture by Moonlight* illustrates our strength to rise above disaster and celebrate recovery, perseverance, and humanity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *Architecture by Moonlight*, architect Paul E. Fallon describes the challenges of rebuilding in

earthquake-devastated Haiti amid missionaries seeking salvation, a family exorcising grief, and a boy testing how to be a man.

Paul E. Fallon spent thirty years as an architect specializing in healthcare design before the Haiti earthquake compelled him to participate in the reconstruction effort and chronicle his experience. A seasoned public speaker, he is the author of the well-read blog [www.theawkwardpose.com](http://www.theawkwardpose.com) in which he has written about his evolving connection with Haiti. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

What picks me up about Fallon's memoir is less about the grim events that start the story. It is more about the way he vividly shows us these fundamentally resilient and happy people. It is about the architecture, the construction, with hands and spirit ... and how it changes everything. This is a good one to read and have in the bookcase.

Having been to BLB as a volunteer I was very interested in this bit of history behind its coming to be. Interesting insight into those that made it happen, as well.

Paul Fallon carefully and honestly looks at the many facets of work in Haiti including the impact it has on all involved.

Just about the middle of the enlightening and at times luminous memoir, *Architecture by Moonlight*, Paul Fallon deftly encapsulates Haiti, its people, and his time as a volunteer architect there. As a new chapter begins, he is quite taken with a visiting free-spirit advocating the joy of hula hoops for an antidote to the country's woes. A few paragraphs later, it's his "worst day in Haiti." Paul relays all the complexity of the island and his relationship to it with an assurance marked by vivid precision (some scenes are set up cinematically) and frank self-disclosure. His story includes "ascal" children (one who becomes "the jewel of my heart"); jaw dropping gaps between Haiti's basic needs and what prime donors wish and will to give, and evocative scene setting. (A midnight beach scene is indeed lost in the stars). *Moonlight* never devolves into the prevalent self-regard of the genre, even as the author engages with his self-assessment throughout. There's a real ebb and flow as the author relates to himself relating to the natives. You soon realize that *Moonlight*'s simple, direct, and discrete prose will coalesce into a compelling narrative pull. As you would expect, the author has a real facility writing about the process of building a school and orphanage there. More striking-- when

describing his loneliness, his frustration, and his gradually expanding perspective, he charts these amorphous sensations so concretely that they become palpable. Paul doesn't swoon with his feelings, he analyzes them. There is also an off-beat humor at play here as relief to the ever-present grit and muck. Paul captures personalities in deft and intriguing phrases which leaves you anticipating these individuals' next appearance. He doesn't skirt his own flaws: he lets you know he's moody and rigid and that his tolerance for incompetence has a threshold. He's also stalwart in fulfilling his accepted Haitian duties and very much a good scout. You can believe it when he writes, "I'm a hard nut, but I'm not unlovable." And you can trust the capacious world-view which nods to the history of cement, the myth of Sisyphus, and Sondheim. The author writes as an MIT graduate (three degrees), an over achiever, and an affirmed secularist. With a fair mind, he acknowledges the benefits of Haiti's cavalier work ethic as well as the need for Haiti's evangelical Christianity. Some of the more pointed sections parse his discussions with missionaries who lead the efforts. He recognizes that their beliefs are core to their service while he maintains his own humanist concepts for living a good life with integrity. And he lives among the faith-based with deep affection for his comrades. The book moves to some stunning final words delivered with genuine parity to a Sunday morning congregation. Paul exhorts the group to remain strong in their faith while declaring that some of other faiths (or of no faith) have been integral to the success of the building project. The spirit and message in these words caps a story of genuine and thorough commitment. Deep-seated differences have been transcended in realizing a goal, and everyone understands everyone else maybe just a little bit better. It's a thrilling summation of all that's proceeded. The speech should become part of diversity curriculums everywhere. I suspect you'll think the same "after you've wiped away the tears that come when you learn about someone who has found his place in an alien world, confronted futility with singular grace, and touched you deeply with his vision.

Paul E. Fallon took me to Haiti in the world into which he found himself, first, before the 2010 earthquake, and then, in two projects he began after the earthquake. It is an evocative account of his deepening involvement with the country and with the people he meets as he works to build an orphanage and a hospital in the town of Grand Goave. This is also a story about how Haiti changes Fallon's outlook on life, and about the apparent conflicts between the American and Haitian perspectives on life between which Fallon feels growing tension as his involvement deepens. Fallon also correctly describes the superficiality of television news as he recounts his involvement with a

news crew's coverage of the collective enterprise in which he is engaged, and goes into illuminating descriptions of the difference between building on an earthquake-prone treeless island and building in the United States. I never wanted this book to end, as I loved returning to it every night to see what happened to Paul, Dieunison. Rex, and the other beautifully described characters in his narrative.

Throughout 2012 a Boston architect made biweekly trips to design and oversee construction of an orphanage and a school in an island country devastated by a 2010 earthquake. The architect is Paul Fallon, and the country, of course, is Haiti. This true story lurches us between two worlds. We encounter construction teams who operate in ways bewildering to Mr. Fallon: much time and effort are spent imprecisely installing construction elements, followed by "...conflicts [that provide] the enjoyable opportunity to stop work and negotiate who is at fault for the problem, a pastime they love and I loathe with equal passion." We come to know two spirited boys who capture our narrator's heart while challenging his patience and shattering his understandings of how the world works. Along the way, he confronts us with difficult questions while inviting us to experience the beauty of Haiti -- and perhaps to love it as he has come to do.

The Author provides a clear, moving and insightful reading experience of Haiti's struggles after one of the worst natural disasters in modern times. It is inspirational in that shows how people of different backgrounds can come together to rise above their own needs to create a difference. There is an amazing Humanitarian spirit shown in this Book. It exists in the author, the American Family that made his experience and this book possible and the Haitian's people who helped build and form his community while there. The author had visited the Country prior to the earthquake and spent several years after it helping to design and build structures that would help the survivors, both adults and children move forward. This book is worth reading. Written by a true humanitarian, with a bent on reflection who will probably always search for a way to make a difference.

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