



Michael G. Imber: Ranches, Villas, and Houses

SPANNING TWO DECADES, THE BROAD PORTFOLIO OF TEXAS ARCHITECT MICHAEL G. IMBER collectively reflects a deep-rooted appreciation for ranch life and a sincere understanding of the region, its culture, and its traditions that all began in his hometown of Midland. As a boy, Imber would kick up dust along the winding country roads, spending weekends with his father in search of old abandoned ranches, pioneer ruins, Indian flint camps, and remote historic markers. It was also there amid the flat Southern Plains that he was introduced to the architectural library of vernacular modernist Frank Welch, who made Imber realize that the humble West Texas ranch house could be a basis for elegant yet functional design.

But even before his exposure to Welch, Imber recalls the first stirring of his architectural passion at Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, on one of his family's many travels west. Captivated with how the ancient ruins seemed hewn from the mountainside, Imber re-created Mesa Verde for a school project, constructing an intricate model by carving every stone and detail from plaster.

His focus on vernacular forms—created in response to the local climate, landscape, materials, and traditions—would serve him well for the rest of his career. The recently released *Michael G. Imber: Ranches, Villas, and Houses* (Rizzoli, 2013) combines images of Imber's distinctive regional architecture with an in-depth analysis of his unique approach to design, which author Elizabeth Meredith Dowling, a professor emerita of architectural history at the Georgia Institute of Technology, describes as a “blend of rugged Texas vernacular with refined and ordered classicism that grows directly from his appreciation for his native land of Texas.” The result is a compellingly beautiful testament to West Texas ranchers who, seeking a little shade and shelter, created a perfect design.

—Holly Henderson

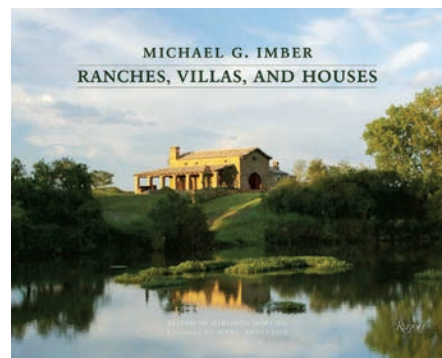


THIS SPREAD: Butcher Ranch, Gonzales County, Texas. NEXT PAGE: T-Anchor Ranch, Medina, Texas.



“The ranch is the physical connection between a family and their country; whether it’s the Texan escaping to his South Texas Ranch or the New Yorker connecting to the heritage of the American West—it’s the knowing of a place that tells us who we are.”

—Michael G. Imber



Text excerpted from Michael G. Imber’s personal statement in Ranches, Villas, and Houses (Rizzoli, 2013) by Elizabeth Meredith Dowling. To purchase the book and view the architect’s book tour schedule, visit www.michaelgimber.com.

A photograph I once took of a small stone structure along Route 66, somewhere between Texas and New Mexico, sits on a shelf above my desk. It reminds me of a man toiling under the vast dome of the Southwestern sky, a nameless man, proudly placing one crooked stone upon another, until finally he could look with pride upon the simple, yet beautiful, building he had made. His life now long passed, he has left us with a gift, a small piece of our cultural landscape along a lonely, wind-blown stretch of highway. ...

If my work is deemed nostalgic, or romantic, I take no offense. Our homes are meant to be the most comforting physical realization of our lives. They are what nourish our spirit and soul. They are who we are, and they should embody both our personal and cultural memories. They should connect us to the generations that have brought us here to this place, and they should form the memories for the generations that will follow. ... This cultural memory is at the root of our architectural practice. It is our past that informs us, and it is what forms the genetic code of our built environment. A building should say to us, “This is our history and our aspirations, this is our landscape and environment, our resources, our craft. This is how we build.” By these principles buildings and places become authentic to their nature. ...

Our buildings are influenced by all those who shape them. They embody the knowledge, pride, and passion of the carpenter, mason, and ironsmith. The buildings they build are a testament to their art and their sense of beauty, and it is their hand that remains long after they are gone. As with the long-lost soul who built the stone building along Route 66, the buildings we are left with embody their lives and spirit—a gift greater than any.