

**BOOK REVIEW:** “IN/FORMED by the LAND” reveals

# The Wonderful Lucidity of Carl Abbott

By Marty Fugate, Herald-Tribune / Monday, July 2, 2012



Carl Abbott's "Dolphin House"

*“The land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, worth dying for, because it's the only thing that lasts.”*

*—Gerald O'Hara, from Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind"*

Architect [Carl Abbott](#) agrees with Scarlett O'Hara's father on that score. In the tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright, he always begins with the land and lets the site dictate the form of his buildings, not the other way around.

"In/Formed by the Land," the current exhibit at [Selby Gallery](#) at Ringling College of Art and Design, offers a retrospective of the buildings Abbott's design philosophy has shaped.

Selby Gallery's last architectural exhibit was its seminal "Sarasota School of Architecture" back in 1996. This is its first art show devoted entirely to a single architect's work.

This exhibition reveals the wonderful lucidity of Abbott's structures. The viewer experiences a series of models, architectural renderings, and blow-ups of Abbott's energetic preliminary sketches. You see his work; more importantly, you see his mind at work.

Some buildings are built. Some are still gleams in the architect's eye. Abbott's Casa del Cielo is oriented towards the sight lines of the Gulf of Mexico like iron filings in a magnetic field. His Caribbean hilltop residence seems to float like a flying wing. His design for the St. Thomas More Church is much more grounded -- its masses hug the

earth, evoking a sense of calm, contemplation and meditation.

Abbott speaks with a design vocabulary all his own. You know at a glance if Abbott's mind is at work behind a building. His statements are unmistakable. But they're never the same statement. He doesn't repeat himself.

He lets the land do the talking for him.

It doesn't repeat itself, either.



Carl Abbott's Putterman House

*This exhibition coincides with the publication of a book by the same title, offering a comprehensive, sequential retrospective of Abbott's work. "Informed by the Land: The Architecture of Carl Abbott" will be available this fall.*

*Carl Abbott will lead a director's tour of the exhibition at 11:30 a.m., Monday, July 9.*

*Abbott also will lead bus tours of three of his structures. The July 14 bus tour is sold out. The next tour takes place from 1-5 p.m., Saturday, July 28. The bus will depart from and return to Selby Gallery. Cost: \$15 per person. Registration deadline: July 15.*

*For an in-depth interview with the architect, please click the link below:*

[A Conversation with Carl Abbott](#)

[Photo gallery of the Dolphin House](#)