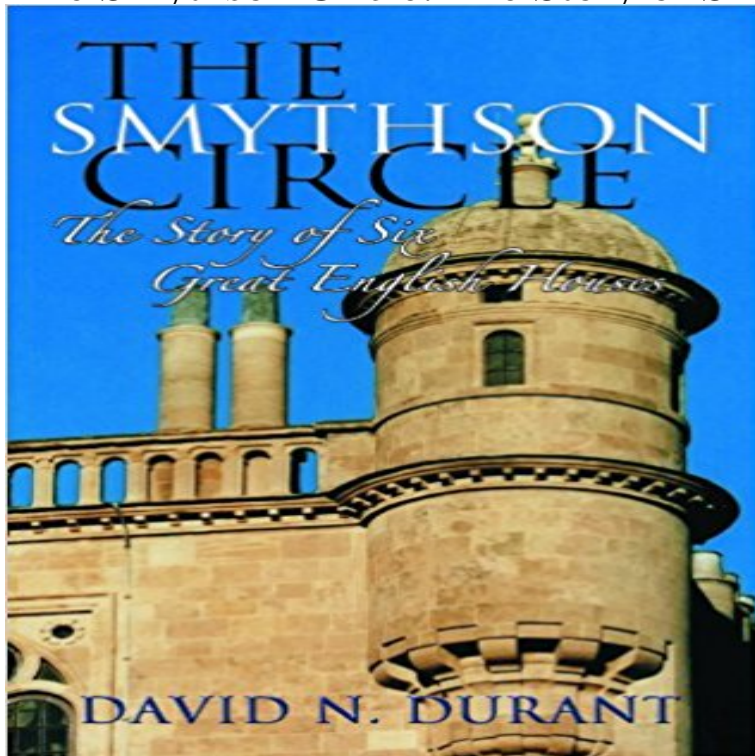


The Smythson Circle: The Story of Six Great English Houses



In an absorbing narrative stretching from 1541 to 1614, charting the creation of the first Renaissance buildings in England, the author of *Bess of Hardwick* describes how Chatsworth, Old and New Hardwick Halls, Wollaton, Bolsover Castle, and Longleat all came to be built in this vital period in architectural history. *Bess* is once again a central character as the patroness of this astonishing burst of activity, but this is also the story of a host of unsung heroes who worked on the buildings mainly under Robert Smythson, who can be seen as the godfather of English architecture. With painstaking study, the author has uncovered a wealth of personalities who created these buildings, English supermen who were seemingly lost to history. Far from being a dry architectural study, this is a detective story and quintessentially Elizabethan drama, full of grand schemes and sometimes dashed hopes, taking in marital sagas, financial ruin, sudden fires, and a host of unforgettable characters.

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