

PORTMAN PRESS KIT

LOG LINE...

SHORT DESCRIPTION...

PRESS RELEASE/ FULL SYNOPSIS...

PHOTOS...

Link to TRAILER...

POSTER...

LOG LINE (1-sentence description of the script)

Once a maverick who was nearly run out of the American Institute of Architects, John Portman is now recognized as one of the most innovative and imitated architects ever.

SHORT DESCRIPTION (100 words)

Once a maverick who was nearly run out of the American Institute of Architects, John Portman is now recognized as one of the most innovative and imitated architects ever. Over 45 years, Portman's iconic urban statements and eye-popping interiors have risen in 60 cities on four continents to redefine cityscapes in America, and skylines in China and the rest of Asia. The film captures Portman's approach in an intimate portrait that, by turn, assesses and appreciates Portman's work. Dramatic time-lapse footage shows off Portman's buildings at their best—often in moving sunlight that washes over his facades and spaces.

PRESS RELEASE/ FULL SYNOPSIS

May 5th, 2011

John Portman: A Life of Building

Thursday, June 16, 7p.m. at the High Museum of Art

If you've ever walked into a hotel with a soaring atrium and looked upward, then you know the work and legacy of one of world's most daring architects, John Portman. Once a maverick who was nearly run out of the American Institute of Architects, Portman is now recognized as one of the most innovative and imitated architects ever.

Over the last 45 years, John Portman's iconic urban statements and eye-popping interiors have risen in 60 cities on four continents to redefine cityscapes such as Times Square in New York and Embarcadero Center in San Francisco, and skylines in Shanghai and Beijing. Eschewing industry standards, Portman has changed what is possible in architecture. His approach is now embraced by the industry's top critics and taught at the country's leading architecture schools.

"Architecture is life!" declares the 86-year-old wunderkind at the outset of "John Portman: A Life of Building," a breathtaking new documentary by two-time Emmy winning producer Ben Loeterman. The film captures Portman's approach in a portrait that by turn assesses and appreciates Portman's philosophy and work.

Forgoing a traditional narrator, the film instead relies on interviews with architecture and art critics, business associates and Portman himself to tell his story. Dramatic time-lapse footage shows off Portman's buildings at their best— often in moving sunlight that washes over his layered facades and grand spaces. The film's score captures the modern yet classical themes of Portman's designs. At times, the architect's buildings feel tailor-made for film.

"All of Portman's work is theatricality," says Paul Goldberger, former critic for the New York Times who now, writing for The New Yorker, is widely considered the country's preeminent architecture writer. "There's a flamboyance to most of it. He thinks very much in terms of how you move through it. It's cinematic in a way."

Today, Portman's major credits include imprints on urban environments including New York's Marriott Marquis in Times Square, Renaissance Center in Detroit, the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles, Embarcadero Center in San Francisco, Shanghai Centre in Shanghai and Yintai Centre in Beijing.

But it was Portman's first hotel, the Hyatt Regency in his hometown of Atlanta, which vaulted him to fame. In 1967, "modern" hotels were dull, boxy designs with double-loaded corridors and unimaginative facades. As he has done so many times since, Portman saw a chance to redefine the genre. At tremendous financial risk, the young developer undertook to build a new hotel— then hired himself as its architect.

It was a brash move, one that won him the scorn of his peers. “The old-timers wanted to drum him out of the corps,” says Mickey Steinberg, Portman’s long-time associate. Undaunted, Portman proposed a radical concept— rooms lining a 27-story high atrium with an exposed elevator core and lighted glass cars zipping up and down. It was visionary. But when he tried first to sell it to leading hoteliers, all the big ones turned him down.

“The Hilton, Sheraton, all had a standardized formula,” and viewed Portman with the suspicion of an inexperienced outsider, says Goldberger. With one look, Conrad Hilton concluded, “This concrete monster will never fly.”

But an unlikely operator recognized Portman’s design for what it was: revolutionary. Until then, the Pritzker family of Chicago had run a little chain of nondescript airport motels called Hyatt. They quickly saw that Portman provided a way to prominence. “Put their name on this Portman hotel, everybody would suddenly know about Hyatt, and that’s exactly what happened,” says Goldberger. “It was a building that changed a whole way of thinking, changed a whole industry. Not many buildings can say that.”

Not only did the Hyatt fly, the form soared worldwide. It has made Portman “one of the most copied architects I can think of,” says Harvard professor Michael Hays. It was a building-type that made the Pritzker name synonymous with the very best in architecture.

The Hyatt Regency Atlanta begat a string of successes across the country. But by 1989-90, the looming U.S. savings and loan crisis nearly took down Portman’s firm. It crippled his investments, forcing the architect to reinvent himself yet again— this time in another hemisphere. “I got up and said, ‘To hell with this. To hell with this! I’m going on. I’m getting out of here,’” he says.

Portman’s new outlook coincided with his son Jack’s pioneering effort to navigate the Chinese real estate market. Their first project together was a multi-use complex with housing, office space, an exhibition hall, hotel and restaurants. “At the time, it was the largest foreign-invested project, real estate or otherwise, in the country,” notes Central Atlanta Progress president A.J. Robinson. “So it was a real icon of what was to come.”

As the camera pans today’s Shanghai skyline, we see that Portman helped lead perhaps the biggest commercial building boom ever. His Tomorrow Square is the centerpiece of Shanghai’s neon-buzzing downtown. A set of twin office towers will anchor the central business district about to open in Hangzhou, China. Seven more projects are in the works across Asia, including a new Hyatt in Hyderabad, India and the world’s second tallest building, set for Incheon just outside of Seoul, South Korea. Admits the architect, “The Portman name is better known in China than it is in the United States!”

His name may not have the celebrity ring of some contemporaries, but critics consider his work among the best. “There are a lot of people [in architecture] who didn’t take him that seriously,” Goldberger says, “because he’s a real estate developer. Yet, his work has always been very serious. He cares passionately about form, he cares passionately about aesthetics.”

Not a bad review for someone from local, humble beginnings. A product of Atlanta’s public schools, Portman says, “I couldn’t graduate without taking mechanical drawing. So I went

in there and— low and behold— it was like a duck to water, and I had a natural affinity for it. And the teacher said, ‘son have you ever thought about architecture?’ I didn’t even know how to spell it!”

John Portman: A Life of Building

A FILM BY BEN LOETERMAN

Editor **Peter Rhodes**

Director of Photography **James Callanan**

Time Lapse and Animation **Handcranked Productions**

Original Score **John Kusiak**

Featured Interviewees: John Portman, former Atlanta Mayor, Andrew Young, architecture critic Paul Goldberg, Harvard professors Mack Scogin and Michael Hays, business associates Mickey Steinberg and A.J. Robinson, architect Jacque Robertson, art critic Robert Craig; with children Jarel, Michael, Jana, Jack and Jeff Portman.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Ben Loeterman is an accomplished writer/director/producer of historical and public affairs documentaries who founded Ben Loeterman Productions, Inc. (BLPI) in 1996. His last effort, “The People v. Leo Frank” broadcast nationally on PBS and received extraordinary reviews in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*. Loeterman’s work appeared on the first eighteen seasons of the PBS current affairs series FRONTLINE and includes three films for the PBS history series AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. He has won two national Emmys and two duPont-Columbia awards.

Run Time: 52 minutes

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Link to TRAILER

URL: <http://vimeo.com/blpi/johnportmanfilmtrailer>

PHOTOS



John Portman's Renaissance Center in Detroit. Arthur Drexler, longtime curator of Architecture and Design at New York's Museum of Modern Art declared that John Portman was the only important architect of the seventies. © Michael Portman



Looking up at the 22-story atrium of the Hyatt Regency hotel, with its central elevator core, built in 1967. Portman's atrium designs have made him one of the most copied architects of his time. © Michael Portman



Entelechy II is John Portman's magnificent beach house, in Sea Island, GA. Portman's homes served as the laboratories where he first experimented with design ideas later played out in cityscapes from New York's Times Square to San Francisco's Embarcadero Center. © Michael Portman



Yintai Centre in Beijing is, "my favorite of Portman's Asian projects so far," says architecture critic Paul Goldberger. The group of skyscrapers meet the ground nicely, and they meet the sky particularly nicely." © Beijing Yintai Property Co., LTD.



Architect John Portman among the buildings of his signature project, Peachtree Center in Atlanta. © Michael Portman



Architect John Portman with a model of his signature project, Peachtree Center in Atlanta. © Tom Hamilton

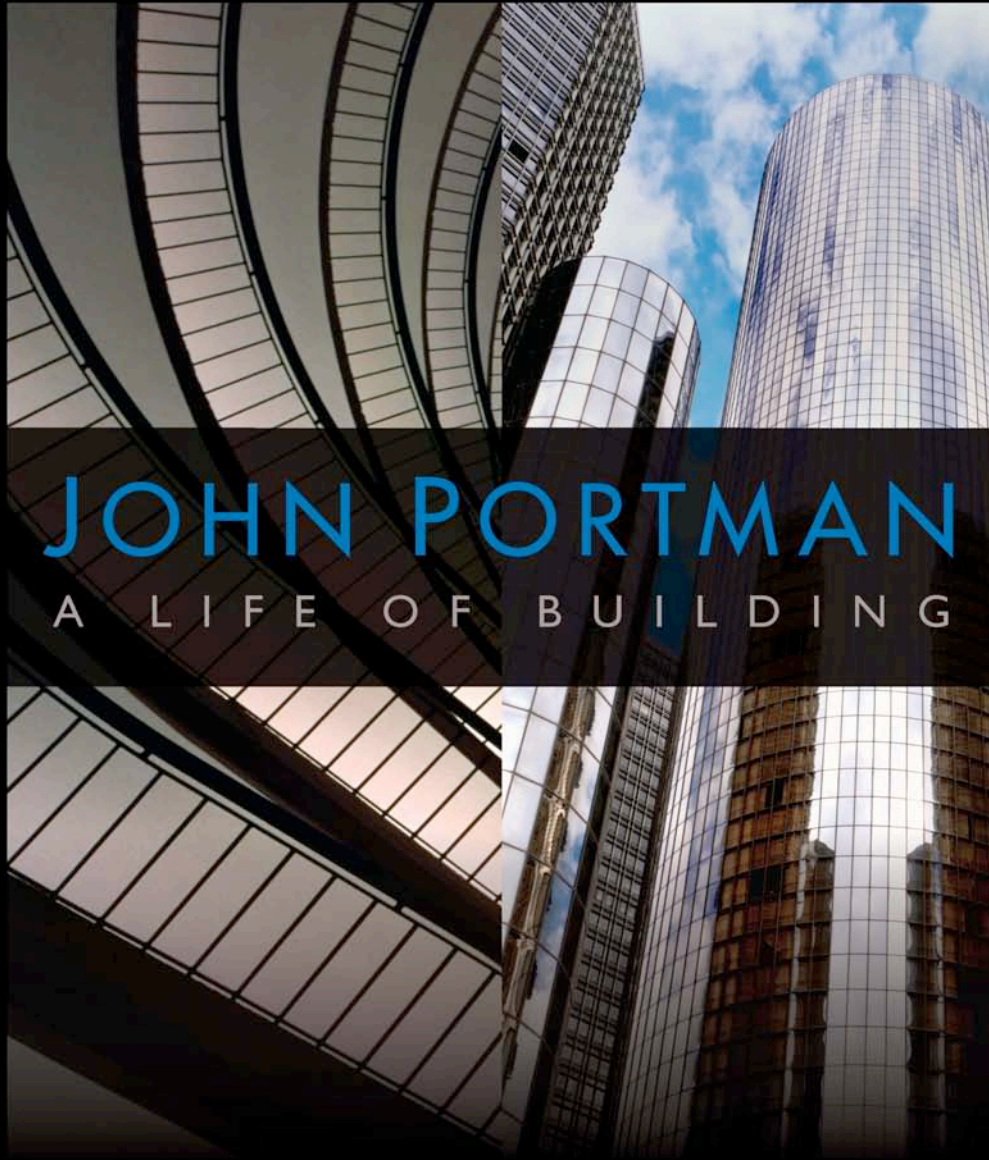


The atrium of the Atlanta Marriott Marquis is one of John Portman's most dramatic. Architecture critic Paul Goldberger calls Portman's architecture, "cinematic in a way. His buildings unfold as you go through them." © Michael Portman



Architect John Portman talking with Ben Loeterman, director of *John Portman: A Life of Building*. © BLPI

POSTER



JOHN PORTMAN

A LIFE OF BUILDING

A FILM BY BEN LOETERMAN

FEATURED INTERVIEWEES: JOHN PORTMAN, ANDREW YOUNG, PAUL GOLDBERGER, MACK SCOGIN, MICHAEL HAYS,
MICKEY STEINBERG, A.J. ROBINSON, JACQUE ROBERTSON, AND ROBERT CRAIG; WITH JAREL, MICHAEL, JANA, JACK AND JEFF PORTMAN

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY: BEN LOETERMAN EDITOR: PETER RHODES CINEMATOGRAPHY: JAMES CALLANAN

TIMELAPSE & ANIMATION: HANDCRANKED PRODUCTIONS ORIGINAL SCORE: JOHN KUSIAK

SUPPORT PROVIDED BY: CENTRAL ATLANTA PROGRESS, INC.

BLPI To learn more visit: www.JohnPortmanFilm.com

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