This well written, well designed and essential book records in detail the history of Melbourne-based practice Bates Smart, from its founding in 1852 by immigrant Architect Joseph Reed (later to become Reed & Barnes; then Reed, Henderson & Smart and so forth until Bates Smart & McCutcheon in 1926) to the large corporate practice it is today, based in Melbourne and with a smaller office in Sydney.

Through Bates Smart's various incarnations and collaborations it has produced many of Melbourne's major projects and the book proposes that the history of Melbourne - or even Australian - architecture is inseparable from this practice. This sense was also clear from the lavish book launch at the Bates Smart-designed Crown Promenade hotel where large hanging vertical banners declared 'We designed this city' and depicted the key Melbourne buildings Bates Smart has seen through: from Victoria's State Library (Joseph Reed, 1854-70) to Federation Square (Lab Architecture Studio & Bates Smart, 1997-2002). In between are a host of significant major projects including office buildings, Melbourne University, Cathedrals (Bendigo and St Paul's) and numerous schools and hospitals.

The book details the developments of the practice. Author Philip Goad draws upon Melbourne University colleagues Miles Lewis, Julie Willis and George Tibbits to catalogue the earlier periods of the practice, and there is extensive use of quality photographs and exquisite reproduction of drawings from this period.

Bates Smart is an establishment practice with long-standing connections to the upper echelons of Melbourne society, and it is suggested that these go back to Reed who developed an ability to move in the right circles (particularly those of Redmond Barry, driving force behind the founding of the University of Melbourne, the Supreme Court Library, the Public Library, the National Gallery and the Museum) and developed the office's corporate style culture of collaboration.

Goad points out that this book is not like a conventional architectural monograph. It is a survey of a practice with many joint-authors, many partners from overseas. In one respect Bates Smart reflects another history of architectural tastes as outside collaborators had their Australian projects realised by the firm, such as William Butterfield, SOM, IM Pei, Kurokowa, Glenn Murcutt, LAB. It was, however, Osborn McCutcheon's desire for efficiency and modernity - fuelled by service in the army during the Second World War - that provided the impetus for BSM's (it changed to just Bates Smart in 1997) post-war period of innovation, that is now the source of their architectural style and imagery for this book.

It is only at the end of the book that it departs from a history text and hovers on the edge of office brochure - through the use of photorealistic images of projects in the pipeline. Given the enormous quantity of work the firm has completed and its huge archives, it seems unnecessary to depict projects before their completion, given the volatile nature of architectural practice (and the potential for these projects to be unrealised), which Bates Smart has managed to survive for so long.
Bates Smart has built a skinny skyscraper named Collins House in Melbourne that's 184 metres tall and just 11.5 metres wide at its slimmest point. The apartment building has a footprint the size of a single netball court and has a height-to-width ratio of 16:1. According to Bates Smart this makes skyscraper is Australia's slimmest tower and the third slimmest skyscraper in the world. Collins House has 259 apartments set over 60 floors. Amenities for Collins House include a residents' club on the 27th floor with a private dining room, a gym and a car stacking system. Founded in 1853 by Joseph Reed, Bates Smart is one of Australia's oldest architectural firms. Over the decades, the practice has been responsible for some of Australia's most well known and loved buildings. Bates Smart has launched a book celebrating the achievements of the practice. Renowned architectural commentator, Professor Philip Goad from the University of Melbourne, was inspired to write and edit this book with his colleagues Professors George Tibbits, Miles Lewis and Dr Julie Willis, to tell the story of the firm's pioneering vision, its fifteen-decade journey and its unique contribution to Australian architecture. Published by Thames & Hudson Australia ISBN: 0500 500 142.