

**Clay: Contemporary Ceramic Artisans**

by *Amber Creswell Bell*  
 New York: *Thames & Hudson*, \$40  
 256 pages, 231 illustrations (228 color)

“[We] are now answering to the current ‘Digital Revolution’ with a hunger for the authentic”

This wonderfully fresh and highly personal collection is the work of a writer for the Australian blog *The Design Files* who has also curated shows of emerging ceramic artists at a number of Sydney galleries. Accordingly, more than half of the 53 artists here are Australian. The rest are truly international, representing the U.K., Ireland, France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Israel, Egypt, Iran, Japan, Canada, and the U.S. Only 11 are men.

Pieces shown are widely varied: some functional vessels, some wholly abstract forms. Individual tastes, training, techniques, work habits, and attitudes are all explored via biographies, quotations, and photographs, including many images of the artists in their studios. “[N]o one can achieve greater happiness than clay makers,” Danish artist Steen Ipsen says. “You simply have to love it, and be completely absorbed by working with this medium.” Though this is not a book celebrating the most widely known ceramists, it does identify two of the U.K.’s mid-century potters, Lucie Rie and her protégé, Hans Coper, as “enduring muses.”



**Old Cuba**

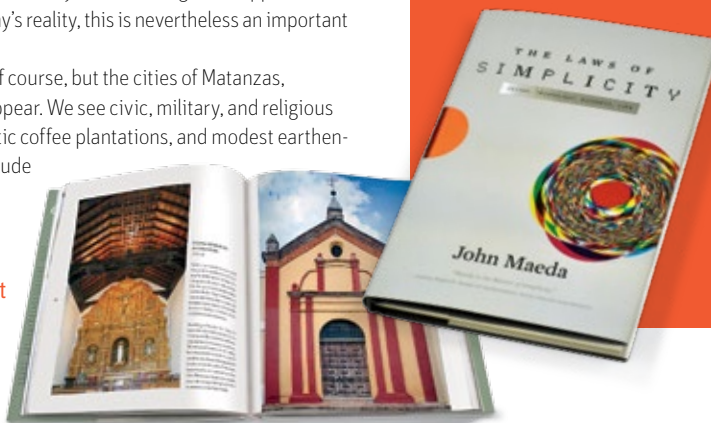
by *Alicia E. García*  
 New York: *Rizzoli International Publications*, \$55  
 208 pages, 180 color illustrations

Never having been to Cuba except for a three-day visit to the U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, decades before its notoriety, I have experienced the country, as most Americans have, only vicariously. My impression from other sources is that a powerful and

poignant aspect of Cuba today is the clash between the past and the present, with aged cars, interiors, and buildings valiantly maintained despite grave difficulties. The emphasis in this handsome book, with photography by Julio A. Larramendi, is steadfastly on the old Cuba—with not a candy-colored car, gum wrapper, or cigarette butt in sight. Perhaps not today’s reality, this is nevertheless an important record of the reality that was.

Havana and its bay are prominent, of course, but the cities of Matanzas, Trinidad, and Santiago de Cuba also appear. We see civic, military, and religious buildings as well as grand palaces, rustic coffee plantations, and modest earthen-walled houses. Prominent delights include a 1730 church and convent, a 1740 chapel, and an 1890 theater.

“Note that ‘traditional’ does not mean any lack of originality”



**What They’re Reading...**

**The Laws of Simplicity**

by *John Maeda*  
 Cambridge, Massachusetts: *MIT Press*, \$24  
 117 pages, 30 black-and-white illustrations

During one of her frequent visits to New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art, Nicole Migeon discovered this slim volume at the museum store, and the subject matter struck a chord. “The professors in my master’s of architecture program at the New Jersey Institute of Technology used to call my design projects ‘simple.’ In a different context, this might be interpreted as ‘bad.’ But all the students knew this was our teachers’ way of saying the solution was so *simple* that it was actually *brilliant*,” Migeon explains. She adds that John Maeda, member of the advisory council for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Media Lab, has found the ideal way to explain this phenomenon in his book. “Maeda’s first law states that one must ‘achieve simplicity by thoughtful reduction.’ As an architect, I must constantly reduce and order information to achieve the best solutions for any given project,” she says. “What is most interesting is when a design seems simple yet has layers of complexity.” She recently completed New York’s Oon Arvelo salon, a simple, minimalist box—with a complex composition of boxes and objects inside.

—Nicholas Tamarin

**Nicole Migeon**

Principal of *Nicole Migeon Architect*



RIGHT: COURTESY OF NICOLE MIGEON ARCHITECT