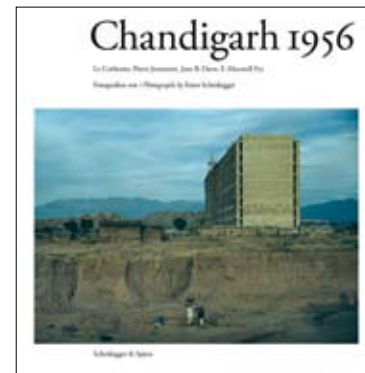


CHANDIGARH – Over 50 years after being built, Chandigarh, the double capital of the Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, rises from the foothills of the Himalaya as a concrete anomaly, a bit withered by age but still splendid. Conceived as a symbol of a nation’s modernity and of good architecture’s ability to effect social change and progress, Chandigarh was planned entirely from scratch by Le Corbusier and his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret. It is a testament to their farsightedness that the city is still often referred to as the face of modern India, and indeed it stands as a marvel of planning with its broad streets, extensive open areas and impressive buildings. Its appeal is universal: the Swiss Federation displays a Chandigarh elevation on its 10-Franc money bill. And the idealism embodied by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret’s grand, holistic design prevails in practice: in 2007, Chandigarh became the first Indian city to officially ban smoking in public areas.

There was a time when a smoke-free Chandigarh was unthinkable. In 1956, a young Magnum photographer travelled to India with an ambitious project in mind. Chandigarh was one of the most exciting places on earth, a multi-disciplinary laboratory that transferred old-world notions of civilization to a new post-colonial frontier. Ernst Scheidegger’s intention was to use his camera to document the erection of the new capital in stages and publish the pictures in a series of books. The project went unrealized and since, incredibly, no magazines were interested in Scheidegger’s work, the photographs were archived and remained unpublished for half a century. Finally, a gorgeous new book, *Chandigarh 1956*, collects the images, along with texts and other materials, and brings the original project to completion. Classic photo-reportage at its best, it provides a personal account of a crucial moment in social and architectural history. Some of the best images are of the government buildings during construction, poised in a poetic state of what an essay in the book calls “Ruins in Reverse”. These uncompleted palaces of bureaucracy are indeed akin to ruins, of a time when architecture, urbanism and politics came together in a heroic, unrepentantly progressive way that is hard to imagine today. Lushly produced and lovingly edited, *Chandigarh 1956* captures the genesis of this grand, humanistic experiment.



Chandigarh 1956,
Photographs by Ernst Scheidegger,
Scheidegger & Spiess, Zürich 2010
www.scheideggerspiess.ch