

THE DARJEELING NARRATIVE

WES ANDERSON

SET DESIGN

THE DARJEELING LIMITED



WES ANDERSON'S LATEST FILM, THE DARJEELING LIMITED, CREATES FEELING THROUGH THE MANIPULATION OF SPACE, LIGHT AND MATTER.

TEXT TINO SCHAEGLER AND ALICE CHARLOTTE
PHOTOS FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

The lyrical depiction of a train journey through India in *The Darjeeling Limited* shows off director Wes Anderson's talent for visual storytelling. But it is the staged choreography, and the magical and memorable moments, which can be the source of great inspiration for architects. In this visually demanding homage to the landscape and spirituality of India, the story traces three reunited brothers on a spiritual quest that quickly turns into a series of unplanned events. The most poignant and cinematically revealing moment

in the film is when the brothers are stranded in a remote village, attending the funeral of a young boy. The shot follows the three main characters walking in slow motion alongside the pyre to the strumming guitar of 'Strangers' by the Kinks. The choreography shows a well-defined composition of the three main characters walking in the midground with staged relatives and scenery in the foreground and background. The arrangement creates visual depth and parallax, like watching an animated version of a vast Renaissance painting portraying several religious stories by traveling from one side of the painting to the other. This shot tells a complete story on its own. This visually fine-tuned composite creates a moment of real emotion that engraves it in our memory; this technique has become Anderson's trademark and similar shots in *The Royal Tennenbaums* or *The Life Aquatic* work

to similar affect.

Architects have, throughout history, explored similar aspects of narrative. Buildings have the potential to instigate these unforgettable moments of emotional response that leave us in awe. Daniel Libeskind perhaps is the master here – the spatial technique shown in Berlin's Jewish Museum where the drama and progression of space is constantly framed to elicit a highly constructed emotive response. As much as Anderson's cinematography does without any dialogue, the spatial sequence of the Jewish Museum beautifully unfolds its story to the visitor.

The set design of *The Darjeeling Limited* adds a layer to the scenes, gives hints and leaves comments. In architectural terms that would be best described as rich material texture.