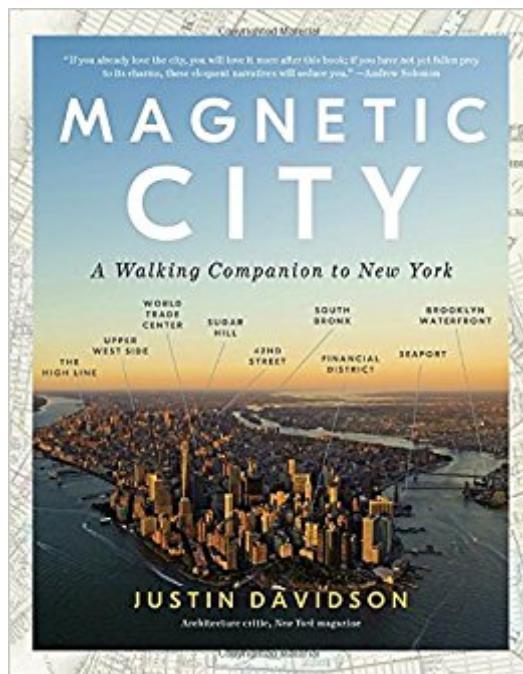


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# Magnetic City: A Walking Companion To New York



## Synopsis

From New York magazine's architecture critic, a walking and reading guide to New York City—a historical, cultural, architectural, and personal approach to seven neighborhoods throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, including six essays that help us understand the evolution of the city. For nearly a decade, Pulitzer Prize-winning critic Justin Davidson has explained the ever-changing city of New York to his readers at New York magazine, introducing new buildings, interviewing architects, tracking the way the transforming urban landscape shapes who New Yorkers are. Now, his extensive, inspiring knowledge will be available to a wide audience. An insider's guide to the architecture and planning of New York that includes maps, photographs, and original insights from the men and women who built the city and lived in it—its designers, visionaries, artists, writers—Magnetic City offers first-time visitors and lifelong residents a new way to see New York. Includes walking tours throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx—the Financial District—the World Trade Center—the Seaport and the Brooklyn waterfront—the Upper West Side—the South Bronx and Sugar Hill.

Praise for Magnetic City:

"An intimate, seductive guidebook." —The New York Times

"An enthralling new book makes clear that I'm not alone in my home-town infatuation . . . It lends nuance, texture and historical perspective to my impression that New York City has never been so appealing or life-affirming as it is today." —New York Post

"[Davidson] combines a keen intelligence, experience, observational skills, expertise (especially but not solely architectural), and an elegant writing style to make this beautifully produced book indispensable." —Booklist (starred review)

"A street-level celebration of New York City in all its perpetual complexity and contradiction . . . a worthy companion to Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* and the American Institute of Architects guides to the architecture of New York as well as a treat for fans of the metropolis." —Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

"Justin Davidson does more than direct our feet to New York's hidden monuments. He explains the structure of the city with a clarity that would be bracing even for a Gotham habitué, but more than that, he finds the meaning in every building and byway." —Andrew Solomon, National Book Award-winning author of *Far from the Tree*

"Mr. Davidson's exceptional knowledge of our beloved city is inspiring." —Patti LuPone

"Justin Davidson has a mind alive to every signal, and his brilliant prose style transmits that electricity in black-and-white type. He is

thus born to the task of capturing the chaotic splendor of New York City on the page.â••Alex Ross, author of Listen to Thisâ•“Justin Davidsonâ•„’s beautiful tours of New York City invoke and redouble our love of the metropolis.â••â••Jerry Saltz, senior art critic, A New York

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## Customer Reviews

â•“An intimate, seductive guidebook.â••The New York Timesâ•“An enthralling new book makes clear that Iâ•„’m not alone in my home-town infatuation . . . . It lends nuance, texture and historical perspective to my impression that New York City has never been so appealing or life-affirming as it is today.â••New York Postâ•“A street-level celebration of New York City in all its perpetual complexity and contradictionâ•„’ . . . a worthy companion to Alfred Kazinâ•„’s A Walker in the City and the American Institute of Architects guides to the architecture of New York as well as a treat for fans of the metropolis.â••Kirkus Reviews (starred review)â•“Davidson, the Pulitzer Prizeâ•„’s winning architecture critic for New York magazine, is a resident, student, and passionate lover of New York, and he has done right by a subject that, fittingly, has been essayed many times before. He combines a keen intelligence, experience, observational skills, expertise (especially but not solely architectural), and an elegant writing style to make this beautifully produced book indispensable.â••Booklist (starred review)â•“In this exquisitely crafted book, Justin Davidson does more than direct our feet to New York’s hidden monuments. He explains the structure of the city with a clarity that would be bracing even for a

Gotham habitué, but more than that, he finds the meaning in every building and byway. If you already love the city, you will love it more after this book; if you have not yet fallen prey to its charms, these eloquent narratives will seduce you in. It would be glorious to go on the walks Davidson prescribes, but even those who read the book in an armchair a thousand miles away will be swept up by this evocative, pellucid, charming, and exuberant paean to the city that never sleeps.

•Andrew Solomon, National Book Award-winning author of *Far from the Tree*“For those of us who primarily work in the city, we leave home, take the most direct route to our place of employment, and rarely look up or down, just straight ahead. We don’t see the environment we live in. *Magnetic City* changed that for me. Now I don’t want to go to work. I want to read any chapter in Justin Davidson’s absorbing book and get my walking shoes on. Mr. Davidson’s exceptional knowledge of our beloved city is inspiring. *Magnetic City* is now my official chaperone.

•Patti LuPone“Justin Davidson has a mind alive to every signal, and his brilliant prose style transmits that electricity in black-and-white type. He is thus born to the task of capturing the chaotic splendor of New York City on the page.

•Alex Ross, author of *Listen to This*“Justin Davidson’s beautiful tours of New York City invoke and redouble our love of the metropolis. His observations of landmarks, in-between places, and layered histories, delivered by an amazing kindred-spirit of architecture, make us feel like royal presences in the city.

•Jerry Saltz, senior art critic, *New York*“A fascinating and insightful companion for a walking tour of New York City. I particularly enjoyed the rich interweaving of the contemporary and the historical.

•A book worthy of the 21st century flaneur!

•Daniel Libeskind

Justin Davidson is the architecture and classical music critic at *New York* magazine, where he writes about a broad range of urban, civic, and design issues. He grew up in Rome, graduated from Harvard, and later earned a doctoral degree in music composition at Columbia University. As a classical music and cultural critic at *Newsday*, he won a Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 2002. He lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

I thought it was more illustrated

A delightful bookSo well written, and so evocative story of NYC for all who love it or want to understand it. Bravo, Justin Davidson!

Current and up to date review of many of the nearly unlimited venues of the Big Apple... that I would like to explore when I can find the time.

I've never lived in New York, but I've visited many times, and I always enjoy that first view of the monumental skyline. New York is a city best appreciated on foot, where you can be alive to its vibrant street-level sensations. Everywhere you look, there are extraordinary buildings and streetscapes, and I always find myself asking, "How did Tudor City come to be where it is?", or "Why does Broadway cut across the grid as it does? For that matter, why is there a grid?", or "Why is there so much art deco styling here, anyway?" I had read many of Davidson's pieces on architecture for New York magazine, so I was eager to see what he could do with a whole book devoted to walking around this magnificent city. Well, quite a lot, it turns out. The book is organized around a set of walking tours of various neighborhoods, which open your eyes not only to the physical environment of the city today, but also to the historical background that shaped what you see, as well as the social concerns of the time and how those came to be reflected in the architecture and layout. It's incredibly interesting reading. I'm not a keen student of history, but I find that knowing the past-tense why and how makes it far more interesting to see what is there now. Interspersed with the walking tours are a handful of interludes that consider city-wide themes. Probably my favorite is "City of Towers", in which Davidson explores the history and development of New York's most iconic building form, the skyscraper. He goes into the history, of course, but also into the urge to build ever higher, economics be damned, and the technological developments that make these displays of raw ego possible. It's an amazing chapter, that ranges from the enormous, blocky 432 Park residential tower to the Burj Dubai, currently the world's tallest building, and considers the possibility of even more lofty perches. But Davidson's true genius lies in illuminating the psychology of these towers. What is it like to perch in a \$100 million penthouse suite, 1400 feet in the air? How does it affect ordinary New Yorkers to watch their skyline change, as it always has and always will? What kind of social culture emerges from a city that is lived at street level and high in the clouds? If you buy this book and use it as a guidebook to discover a fascinating city (perhaps one you think you know well already), you won't be disappointed. But what elevates this book to a much higher level is Davidson's extraordinary writing. You don't win a Pulitzer for nothing, and while his prose is not showy, it is always entertaining, vibrant and thought-provoking: "The city's glory is its perpetual complexity and contradiction, which is why those who love it most do the most complaining. If you stay long enough, you get to grumble in one decade about junkies and criminals

taking over the streets and, in the next, that they have fled, taking authenticity with them."I can't recommend this book highly enough. I couldn't put it down, and now I can't wait to get back to New York and see it with fresh eyes.

Justin Davidson's "The Magnetic City" purports to be a walking guide like the wonderful "Paris Walks" book of the 80s that got you poking around inside gates and down narrow alleys to discover fabulous hidden architectural and historical treasures. But it is much more than that. It is a beautifully written elegy to one citizen's city and culture (perhaps the mirror image of J.D. Vance's hillbilly one), a sophisticated series of essays of architectural criticism and an overview of contemporary ideas about city planning and development. Its most important quality is its quiet, serious thoughtfulness about many issues where partisans can be highly polarized, the rhetoric is often hot and hyperbolic and there is mostly heat generated without much light. Davidson holds these questions up in his scrupulously careful hand, turning them slowly and examining them from a range of angles all informed by a deep, deep knowledge of New York City history, literature, buildings and neighborhoods. Davidson has done an astonishing amount of both walking and reading in and around New York City. The book is full of wonderful nuggets of information. It makes a grand walking companion in some of the city's most economically and architecturally interesting neighborhoods with a particular focus on downtown Manhattan. But it is also a fine companion for the armchair tourist. Davidson colorfully conjures up the places about which he writes and his deeper goal is to talk about preservation, development, architectural quality, gentrification and the changing city. What's particularly remarkable about the book's discussions, particularly the thematic chapters that Davidson calls "Interludes" about streets, towers, glass and apartments, is its even-handedness. Davidson obviously cares deeply about these issues but he's no zealot: and that's likely to upset some readers. I say, "great." For example, preservationists in this town for the most part have a "take no prisoners" approach. You are either for them or against them. No one can doubt Davidson's commitment to great design and public spaces but he recognizes the tradeoffs and ironies that are inherent in the preservationist project. Not only does preservation of existing structures and neighborhoods inhibit

economic growth, but it also makes building housing more expensive. Preservationists need to be wary of simply engaging in the protection and enhancement of property values of upper middle class neighborhoods, homeowners and the position of entitled rent stabilized tenants. It can be argued that such efforts contribute to the city's economic inequality. One of the great ironies of the thinking and work of Jane Jacobs, as Davidson points out, is that the lively, diverse West Village she vehemently tried to protect now constitutes some of the most expensive residential property on the planet. Good policy-making and design in the public sphere are always questions of balance physically, politically and economically. Davidson makes this case well and carefully lays out the tradeoffs: between artistic integrity and the pedestrian experience and urban context; among the use of glass, masonry and steel; and between development and preservation. Yes, historic preservation is essential to the character of the city. The streetscape needs both high design structures and vernacular buildings. This is not a zero sum game a growing city needs some of all of these elements. The Magnetic City is a great read, a useful guide and provides thought provoking and important analysis of some of the most pressing issues facing the city.

This book is beautifully written and provides a fascinating explanation of New York neighborhoods. Having long been a fan of New York, living there, I found this book to be completely engaging. I look forward to taking some of the walking tours .

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