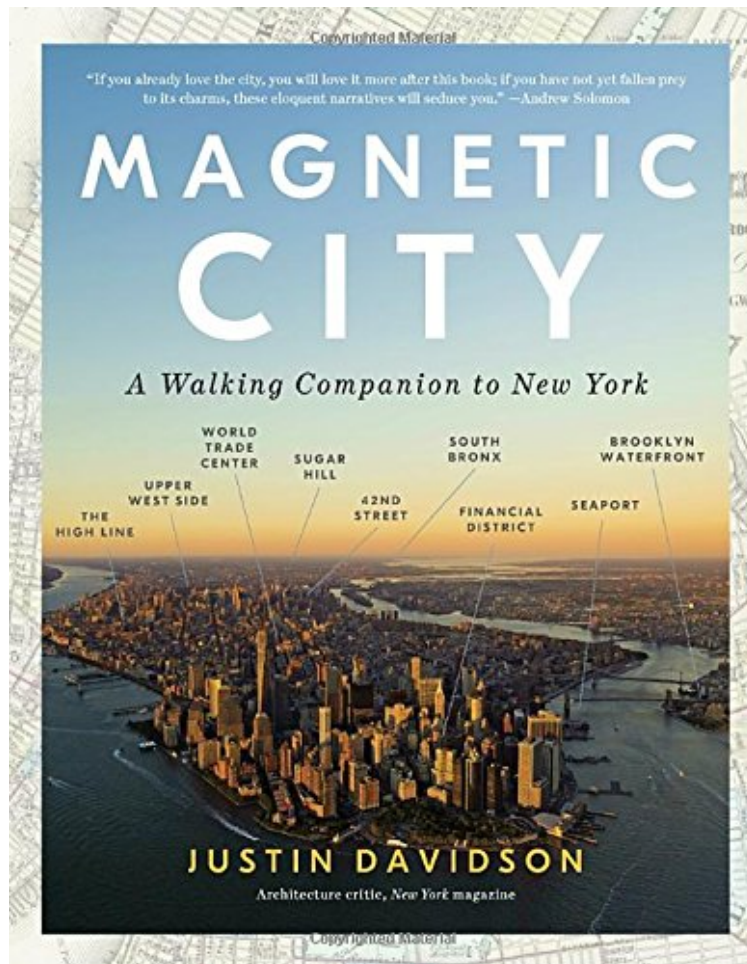


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Magnetic City: A Walking Companion to New York

Justin Davidson

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From New York magazines architecture critic, a walking and reading guide to New York Citya 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 Prizewinning 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 insiders 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 itits designers, visionaries, artists, writersMagnetic 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 Chelsea and the High Line 42nd Street the Upper West Side the South Bronx and Sugar HillPraise for Magnetic CityAn intimate, seductive guidebook.The New York TimesAn enthralling new book makes clear that Im not alone in my home-town infatuation . . . 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 Kazins 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 Yorks hidden monuments. He explains the structure of the city with a clarity that would be bracing even for a Gotham habitu, but more than that, he finds the meaning in every building and byway.Andrew Solomon, National Book Award-winning author of Far from the TreeMr. Davidsons exceptional knowledge of our beloved city is inspiring. Magnetic City is now my official chaperone.Patti LuPoneJustin 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 ThisJustin Davidsons beautiful tours of New York City invoke and redouble our love of the metropolis.Jerry Saltz, senior art critic, New York

An intimate, seductive guidebook.TheNew York TimesAn enthralling new book makes clear that Im not alone in my home-town infatuation . . . 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 PostA street-level celebration of New York City in all its perpetual complexity and contradiction . . . a worthy companion to Alfred KazinsA Walker in the Cityand the American Institute of Architects guides to the architecture of New York as well as a treat for fans of the metropolis.Kirkus s (starred review)Davidson, the Pulitzer Prizewinning 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.Booklist (starred review)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 habitu, 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 ofFar from the TreeFor 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 dont see the environment we live in.Magnetic Citychanged that for me. Now I dont want to go to work. I want to read any chapter in Justin Davidsons absorbing book and get my walking shoes on. Mr. Davidsons exceptional knowledge of our beloved city is inspiring.Magnetic Cityis now my official chaperone.Patti LuPoneJustin 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 ofListen to ThisJustin Davidsons 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 YorkA 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 LibeskindAbout the AuthorJustin 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.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Walk ICity of MoneyThe Financial DistrictFrom the earliest days of urban Manhattan, how much you made mattered more than who you were. The Dutch who arrived in the seventeenth century did not come to do Gods work, or to glorify a king, or civilize

natives, or escape persecution. They came because they spotted a good business opportunity. In his indispensable book about New Amsterdam, *The Island at the Center of the World*, Russell Shorto traces the tolerant, capitalistic character of modern New York all the way back to its roots as an outpost of the Dutch West India Company. This single-minded preoccupation with finance has its obscene side, a truth you can hardly miss on a quick walk around a city where some people spend more on cuff links in an afternoon than others earn in a decade. But it has also molded a city where fanaticism gets few footholds, where eccentricities and freedoms thrive. To walk around Manhattan is to stroll among piles of unimaginable wealth, transfigured into houses and towers and parks a metropolis ample and weird enough to attract people who don't care about money at all. Money is the juice that nourishes New York's growth. It flows through the world's ducts, converges on the Stock Exchange, and gushes through Midtown banks, where it's converted into Manhattan real estate, luxury goods, and tax revenue. Despite close competition from London and Tokyo, New York remains the world's financial capital, and the cataracts of cash that fall onto the concrete city splash about and irrigate our expensive amenities. The rich drive up prices and wield power in blinkered and capricious ways. But they also enjoy, and pay for, parks and concert halls and hospitals and universities. The sums that circulate through the municipal treasury—nearly \$80 billion in 2016—mean that New York's affordable-housing program, its police department, schools, parks, public library systems, and network of bike paths are all far and away the largest in the country. And so I come looking for New York's grasping but generous soul in the Financial District, where the city began, where the geological force of money has sculpted artificial canyons and laid down sedimentary deposits of architecture. This is where the trade in hemp and sugar and slaves eventually gave way to equities and bonds. It's where, when money fled in the 1970s, art crept in; where, when the money returned, it carried along a new tribe of downtown dwellers, who made room for play in a neighborhood built for work. I wander through the parklet called Bowling Green, the flat clearing where, tradition has it, Peter Minuit bought Manhattan from the Lenape inhabitants in 1626. Some cities trace their identities to an act of conquest (Mexico City), a royal charter (Versailles), the consolidation of political power (Beijing), the course of a river (Cairo), religious fervor (Boston), mythological lore (Rome), or the migrations of refugees (Tel Aviv). New York's founding document is a real estate deal. Each side traded away something of modest value: Minuit handed over a collection of hardware and other European goods. In return, the Lenape recognized the obvious fact that they were sharing an abundant wilderness with a handful of confused whites. From the moment of that transaction, this spot has always been about business. Here the Dutch West India Company built its defensible headquarters, really just a crumbling mound of packed dirt they called a fort. And here began the northbound Native American trail, which the Dutch adopted as their own main drag (Heere Straat, or Gentlemens Street) and the British later called Broadway. I thread my way to the unpromising corner of Pearl and Broad Streets. It's nothing much to look at now: a slightly claustrophobic intersection, presided over by Fraunces Tavern, the eighteenth-century hostelry built on a soggy water lot. (It was already an ancient establishment in 1783, when George Washington went there to celebrate while the last British troops fled.) I can just barely make out Manhattan's original topography in the way the pavement slopes gently down toward Pearl Street and then flattens out where it hits what in the seventeenth century would have been shallows. Pearl Street was called Dock Street then, and it was both the edge of New Amsterdam and its center. This is where I find a wormhole to New York's remotest past. Standing amid the high-rises, inhaling exhaust, I try to conjure up the mingled odors of brine, tobacco, and tar. I strain to understand how the colonists' urgent desire for financial success gave Manhattan its earliest form. Here, Peter Stuyvesant's two-story mansion sat beside serried shops, wooden homes, taverns, and warehouses. Ships were moored at the sole wooden dock that poked into the East River. Sailors unloaded their cargo, hauled it across the dirt road to the Dutch West India Company, and lifted it into the upper-level storeroom by a pulley fastened to the brick facade. Colonists from a country under perpetual threat of drowning knew to keep their valuables raised. Dutch New Amsterdam was hardly more than a rustic hamlet, but already neighborhood dynamics were visibly at play. The Castello Plan, a 1660 map that details the location and function of every one of the 370 buildings, makes it clear that a stretch of waterfront nearest the pier functioned as the epicenter of urban activity. Governors, slaves, and smugglers landed on this hectic stretch of riverbank. A doctor, Hans Kierstede, lived at one end of a row of warehouses; on the other, the hatter Samuel Edsall kept his shop next to Nicholas Jansens bakery. Asser Levy, apparently Manhattan's first Jewish resident, operated a slaughterhouse at the end of Wall Street. (The record is silent on whether his butchering operation was kosher.) But the main attraction sat on the corner with the Heere Gracht canal: Hans Dreper's tavern. Even this tiny nub of the future megalopolis had suburbs. On the map, the gabled houses thin out to the north and west, facing roads but backing onto gardens, yards, and fields. Governor Stuyvesant commuted two miles on horseback every day from his exurban estate in Greenwich (later Anglicized to Greenwich Village). By the time the British took over in 1664, the city had already developed some of the maladies that still pit neighbors against one another: slums, ethnic conflict, and NIMBYism. Poor Dutch holdovers from the old regime clustered along Broad Street's side alleys, and in an early imposition of zoning, authorities insisted that cobblers take their foul-smelling tanning pits and get out of downtown. Ah, the reek of early New York. You could construct a whole alternate history of the city through pollution and garbage. Both have always been plentiful, as always when you cram large numbers of people together. Today, we tend to think of trash as an expensive excretion, shipping it far away and paying other states to take it. In the past, though, New York treated

garbage as a resource and managed to squeeze out of it the most valued yield of all: land. That's the reason Pearl Street sits two blocks back from the water now. Soon after England took over, the city began colonizing the damp ground between high and low tides and inaugurated the local tradition of the public-private partnership by turning over this newly created property to owners who promised to improve it with wharves, streets, and a seawall. That didn't always happen. Often the owners just built their houses and ignored the rest. As the island became more urbanized, it produced immense quantities of rubble and refuse. In 1811, the Commissioners Plan decreed that Manhattan would grow along a rectilinear grid, so hills were leveled and cliffs blasted away to make the terrain conform to the map, creating tons of debris. As the population grew, the tonnage of trash exploded: Between 1856 and 1860, its volume increased 700 percent. Huge loads of ash, offal, manure, dead horses, and household garbage were carted to the water's edge and loaded onto floating dumping boards and into the shallows and slips, where they gradually alchemized into real estate. The slow process haloed the city in stink, but in the long run it proved to be the most profitable form of recycling. Big public works have helped the island expand: Every bucketful of dirt and stones scooped out to make the subway tunnels needed somewhere to go, and usually it wound up at the water's edge. It's been rare, in recent decades, for a virgin neighborhood to surge from the muddy flats, but in the late 1960s the western edge of the Financial District did: Battery Park City was mapped out on Hudson River landfill to provide rental housing for workers in the future World Trade Center and the Financial District. Today, the Twin Towers are gone and many of Wall Street's old office buildings have metamorphosed into condos, but Battery Park City has passed through its frontier stage and its antiseptic phase, evolving into a vibrant waterfront district, one of the only residential areas in New York that hug the river quite so close. For most of the city's history, the river was where the money—and therefore the action—was. In 1979, Madonna arrived in New York and told a cabbie to take her to the middle of everything. He dropped her at Times Square. But if she had stepped off a vessel at Burling Slip in around 1800 and wanted the same thing, she would have been pointed toward Tontine Coffee House, at 82 Wall Street. Built in 1793 by the city's first stockbrokers as a place for business, it also served as an inn, a dining room, and a market where dealers traded whatever was for sale: molasses, investments, political influence, news, and, we must not forget, slaves. That pestilential trade predated the building. From 1711 to 1762, the city ran a dockside slave market, collecting taxes on every sale of a human being. The open-sided market hut was torn down, but by then the slave business had moved a few steps away. The steps and balcony [of the Tontine] were crowded with people bidding, or listening to the several auctioneers, a visitor reported. The slip and the corners of Wall and Pearl-streets, were jammed up with carts, drays, and wheelbarrows; horses and men were huddled promiscuously together, leaving little or no room for passengers to pass.... Every thing was in motion; all was life, bustle and activity. Standing in front of the stodgy brick-and-stone office building where the coffeehouse used to be, I can almost experience the scene: the urgent, mysterious rituals of exchange, the sense that greed, ambition, and civic pride were all concentrated on the houses cramped porch. The frenzy accelerated after the 1825 opening of the Erie Canal, when New York Harbor became a vestibule for the American hinterland. Soon, tides of bankers, brokers, lawyers, bookkeepers, and politicians sloshed daily between the docks and the grand new marble Merchants Exchange on Wall Street. The buildings are gone, but the money-fueled intensity remains. One December night in 1835, a security guard smelled smoke. In one of the many jammed warehouses downtown, some scrap of wealth awaiting shipment caught fire: a bale of cotton, maybe, lit by a dropped cigar or a spilled oil lamp. In minutes, the frigid wind off the harbor tossed the flames from window to window and roof to roof. Firefighters flailed and pumps seized up; near the shore, the East River was frozen solid. Crowds frantically hauled valuables to the Old Dutch Church, a solid brick building. It was said that a couple of hours later, when the fire swept into the nave, feeding on pews and salvaged ledgers, someone rushed to the doomed organ loft and played Mozart's Requiem as the flames rose. More likely, hot air rushed through the pipes, producing eerie unmanned blasts. When the fire finally burned itself out on the second day, Lower Manhattan was a charred hellscape. The Merchants Exchange and the Tontine Coffee House were gone. Dozens of ships, cut loose so the flames wouldn't leap aboard, drifted offshore like so many Flying Dutchmen. Lower Manhattan has been shaped by crisis and rebirth: the Depression, the fiscal crisis of 1975, the 9/11 attacks, the financial meltdown of 2008, Hurricane Sandy. Each time, the city has retooled. And as we try to prepare for the next onslaught, it's worth recalling the devastations of the past and how resiliently New York reacted to them. In fact, the 1835 fire like the Chicago fire and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake jolted the city into foresight. Two centuries after the city's founding, this was still a rough, hurried place slapped together out of salvaged timber and hand-molded brick. The generations who built New York had their eye not on posterity but on the immediate future, when loans came due and investments might pay off. After the fire, with most of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century city wiped out, New York reseeded itself. Businessmen built a more lavish and durable set of storehouses, banks, and exchanges. They began to think in terms of permanence. Fire codes were rewritten. Water was piped in from upstate. Two days of total destruction were a blip when what mattered most was that the flow of goods, people, and credit remain unobstructed. Just three years after the fire, in 1838, the SS Sirius chugged into New York Harbor, eighteen days out from Ireland, winning a transatlantic race with the Great Western, which came from Bristol, England. The era of the steamship had begun, and the pace of commerce accelerated again. It's hard to look back on those years without admiring the creative energy of capitalism. Fires recurred, and destruction was a fact of life but so

was the craving for wealth that expressed itself in urban design.No single building represents the tenacity, adaptability, and grandiosity of the post-fire spirit more than 55 Wall Street, built in 1842. With their exchange incinerated, the city's merchants needed a new place of business, and so they immediately commissioned the architect Isaiah Rogers to design a temple to trade. The four-story, full-block structure, fronted by a row of massive Ionic columns carved out of Quincy granite, has the look of timeless stability.For decades, the neoclassical style had been the standard for town halls, schools, and, of course, banks, reassuring the public that ancient aesthetic principles translated into equally conservative practices. A few older merchants may have remembered the rickety riverside enclosure where slaves, flour, and cornmeal were bought and sold; this new white monument to staid permanence drove home the point that trade had outgrown its grubby bazaar phase and begotten its own upstanding institutions. Merchants could no longer operate by dint of informal gatherings on a crowded porch or in a noisy tavern. They now had echoing hallways, high ceilings, massive columns, ornate cornices, and enormous quantities of granite. That's what real money looked like.