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Gotham Restored: The Preservation Of Monumental New York



Synopsis

James Rudnick moved to Brooklyn, New York, in 1977 to attend graduate school and almost immediately began to photograph two nearby landmarks: the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge. Both structures were approaching their centennials, and Rudnick was soon drawn into the resulting restorations as a documentary photographer. He followed this work, in the 1980s and 1990s, with similar projects at the New York Public Library and Grand Central Terminal. These four monuments are emblems of America's transformation at the end of the nineteenth century and, more particularly, of New York City. Rudnick's photographs -- both color and black-and-white -- are a unique exploration of the great architecture of New York, from "before" shots showing sadly ignored structures to fascinating in-progress images of craftspeople and techniques to spectacular views of the gleaming, post-restoration monuments. Accompanying the photographs in this beautifully designed volume is text by Thomas Mellins that discusses the history of New York City, notably the period from 1865 to 1915 in which the four landmarks were built, as well as the development of the city's historic preservation movement, both popular and institutional. Rudnick himself describes the details of each restoration in informative captions; his evocative afterword beautifully recounts his own engagement with the spectacular architectural legacy of New York.

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Customer Reviews

In this remarkable book, Rudnick parses the history, shape, and majesty of some of the city's most cherished landmarks. -- Ken Burns
James Rudnick's photographs document the intimate connection

between four of New York's greatest monuments and the life of the city. -- Paul Goldberger

Gotham Restored: The Preservation of Monumental New York gathers more than 150 of Rudnick's photographs; from close studies of dedicated conservators at work to vertigo-inducing panoramas taken high in ceilings or atop towers; into a unique exploration of the great architecture of New York. The comprehensive portfolios not only present compelling evidence of the vital importance of historic preservation but also lovingly portray four masterpieces that represent the American character nationally and internationally, four architectural icons that are integral parts of and outstanding works in the spectacular cityscape of New York. For Rudnick, architecture is not merely the subject at which he points his camera; it is, in a sense, the camera itself. Architecture provides the lens through which larger issues of urban culture can be isolated and examined. ; Thomas Mellins

With one astounding and beautiful photograph after another, this book shows us why public monumental architecture is important. More than just documenting the restoration process (as fascinating as that is), it gives us striking yet unfamiliar images of these familiar structures. Although the WTC towers aren't the subject of any of these restoration projects, their incidental portrayal in both of the outdoor sites (bridge & statue) is very beautiful and powerful, and serves to underscore the importance of preserving and documenting these other great monuments.

We love this book and give it as a gift to friends who are new to New York City.

This book looks at the restoration of four iconic sites in New York City: the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, the New York Public Library, and Grand Central Terminal. The text is well written and the photographs are quite impressive. Most of the preservation work took place in the 1980s and 1990s. Looking at the NYPL section is especially important, as the library has scrapped its plans to take out the stacks and put in a circulating library inside the building due to great public outcry. The earlier plans by Norman Foster have not been well received by architecture critics at the NY Times and the Wall Street Journal. As a whole, the book provides an excellent overview of the important work of restoration in remaking icons of a great city.

Rudnick's book is monumental both figuratively and literally. In photographing the restorative work performed on New York's most recognizable structures, Rudnick has forever preserved an

important piece of Americana. With a discerning and creative eye, he juxtaposes images of exquisite detail and grandiose sweep, of human form and man-made object, of decay and renewal. One of my favorite shots is that of Liberty's internal spiral staircase (p. 75). This photograph could just as easily be a study in abstract form; three ghostly lights punctuate an array of metallic angles and curves in an enormously deep field of vision. Another stand-out is a view of Liberty through scaffolding (p. 67). The torch rises dramatically above the gridwork, suggesting that American freedom can never be constrained. There is obvious forethought to Rudnick's work -- as in a shot of ironworkers on the Brooklyn Bridge perfectly framed by the Twin Towers (p. 49) -- but his photographs never appear cliched or stilted. Gotham Restored offers up new rewards with each viewing. It should serve to place Rudnick among the pantheon of living photographers. Highly, highly recommended.

This beautifully designed book presents monumental icons in a way that is both insightful and inspirational. The subject matter in this work is so very familiar (the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, Grand Central Station and the NY Public Library) that it would have been temptingly easy to trivialize and display these structures as they are frequently seen in glossy calendars and travel books. In contrast, Rudnick's exquisite work transcends these more commonly seen depictions. His intimate knowledge of, and obvious reverence for, the structures allows him to share with the reader unique perspectives that revitalize our appreciation for these great national treasures. The book celebrates the exhaustive and impressive work that the restorations entailed and the presence of the various craftspeople in the shots allows one to appreciate the enormous scale of the projects. Those who spend time with this book will never look upon these colossal structures in quite the same way again.

A curious thing happened to me as I read the text and looked at these photographs. They made me feel somehow comfortable and pleased. I realized this after going through the entire book. It was comforting to see how these standard landmarks are rejuvenated to be enjoyed for time to come. Far more than a "coffee table" book on famous sights (or sites), the images are imbued with the author's sensitivity to the aesthetic of the structures and the city. If you love New York you will enjoy this volume. Wonderful book and a great gift for anyone who knows NYC.

Thomas Mellins provides the text for Gotham Restored: The Preservation Of Monumental New York, an impressive survey of photographer James Rudnick's works on New York. Rudnick's

images gave him a reputation as a documentary photographer, and his projects following landmark buildings and structures in New York provide fine shots from 'before' and 'after' their reconstruction. New Yorkers in particular will find this packed with memories and familiar images.

James Rudnick has created not only an everlasting memorial and tribute to New York, but has set the standard of excellence by which all others must attempt to meet. The book design is elegant and exquisite. The photographs are some of the most beautiful of the city I've ever seen. Philip Bogdan

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