

Perfect City: An Urban Fixer's Global Search for Magic in the Modern Metropolis

Joe Berridge

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Embracing cities as permanent, desirable features, Perfect City turns a potentially dry urban survey into a heady, thought-provoking tour of eight distinctive cities.

Joe Berridge's *Perfect City* ruminates on the purpose, delights, and challenges of cities.

Berridge's search for the perfect city began in a small village in England, from where he moved to Toronto for his education. He's visited cities around the world, working on large projects as a consultant and city planner. After introducing this personal background, the book focuses on eight diverse cities around the globe.

These cities represent various aspects of urban wealth, opportunity, age, youth, and crisis. They include New York, which is poised as the reigning capital of the world, and London, which is treated as Rome's heir as the acolyte of Western civilization for the last two thousand years. The book also focuses on Singapore, whose enviable city came to be through methods unfathomable to most westerners, and Toronto and Sydney, which are ethnically diverse.

Shanghai, with its explosive growth and ability to mix the old and with the new, is treated as the exemplar of future greatness, while Belfast and Manchester, cities that have outlived their original economies and have suffered crippling setbacks, are captured in the midst of striving to create new identities.

While the book compares and contrasts these cities well, each chapter is strong enough to stand on its own, too. Striking energy goes into conveying the notion that cities are wealth creators, wonderful places to live, and magnets for pools of talent that fuel competition in a way that smaller, more isolated communities can not.

The narrative approach is personal and sometimes idiosyncratic. The book focuses on personalities and bits of history, and is subjective about what it considers noteworthy; everything else is skimmed over. It asserts that restaurants and libraries are key indicators of urban vibrancy and even recounts some menus as it mandates visits to both.

Chapters meander sans subheadings, and references are made to fellow city planners and analysts in a way that takes knowledge of them for granted. Some terms will be best understood by insiders. Though the book is politically evenhanded, it also expresses strong opinions regarding Trump, Brexit, and immigration. Not every position feels nuanced.

Strong descriptions vivify settings that are not pictured via art or photographs, conveying the arched recesses of Grand Central's Oyster Bar and the clamorous charm of Shanghai's close-packed vendors. Embracing cities as permanent, desirable features, *Perfect City* turns a potentially dry urban survey into a heady, thought-provoking tour of eight distinctive cities.

SUSAN WAGGONER (May 13, 2019)

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