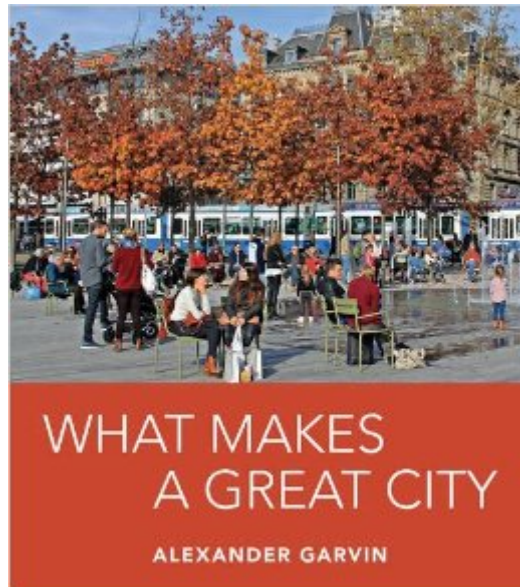


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# What Makes A Great City



## Synopsis

What makes a great city? Not a good city or a functional city but a great city. A city that people admire, learn from, and replicate. City planner and architect Alexander Garvin set out to answer this question by observing cities, largely in North America and Europe, with special attention to Paris, London, New York, and Vienna. For Garvin, greatness is not just about the most beautiful, convenient, or well-managed city; it isn't even about any one city. It is about what people who shape cities can do to make a city great. A great city is not an exquisite, completed artifact. It is a dynamic, constantly changing place that residents and their leaders can reshape to satisfy their demands. While this book does discuss the history, demographic composition, politics, economy, topography, history, layout, architecture, and planning of great cities, it is not about these aspects alone. Most importantly, it is about the interplay between people and public realm, and how they have interacted throughout history to create great cities. To open the book, Garvin explains that a great public realm attracts and retains the people who make a city great. He describes exactly what the term "public realm" means, its most important characteristics, as well as providing examples of when and how these characteristics work, or don't. An entire chapter is devoted to a discussion of how particular components of the public realm (squares in London, parks in Minneapolis, and streets in Madrid) shape people's daily lives. He concludes with a look at how twenty-first century initiatives in Paris, Houston, Atlanta, Brooklyn, and Toronto are making an already fine public realm even better—initiatives that demonstrate what other cities can do to improve. *What Makes a Great City* will help readers understand that any city can be changed for the better and inspire entrepreneurs, public officials, and city residents to do it themselves.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like its forbearers, this latest chapter in Alex Garvin's oeuvre is marked by the author's clear and at times pointed prose, smart and informed perspective, and always well-substantiated argument. As is characteristic of the author, what is refreshing about this analysis is its fusion of historical, primary sources with analysis and observations culled from the author's visits to the places about which he writes. For Garvin cities are never just about a subjective review of physical character; instead he first defines and then applies a framework for evaluating successful urban areas, which permits this book to take on an almost scientific and much more objective character in its presentation of urban comparisons and contrasts. The empirical perspective is buoyed by the international selection of cities used in the analysis. While geography and politics are both surely important parts of urban areas, great cities transcend location in their advancement and development of a dynamic public realm. Finally, although no less important than the comments above, both the graphics and size of the book are noteworthy. This is not a dry piece of academic literature: it is both a well-argued text and a well-presented photo album in which pictures, maps and other graphics "most of which were either taken by the author or developed by him" are as much a part of the argument as the text. Indeed, the graphics and overall presentation render it right as comfortable as a coffee table complement as a contribution to an academic library.

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