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## In Print: *Street Design: The Secret to Great Cities and Towns*

By David R Godschalk

October 13, 2014

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### Street Design: The Secret to Great Cities and Towns

John Massengale and Victor Dover

John Wiley & Sons Inc.

111 River Street, Hoboken,

NJ 07030-5774; [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

2014. 448 pages. Hardback: \$85.



A revolution in street design is unfolding across America. Twentieth-century street layout was aimed at solving the technical engineering problem of moving cars swiftly and efficiently. Today's street design solutions focus instead on turning streets into attractive and walkable public places that activate urban neighborhoods. This radical switch from the needs of drivers to the needs of pedestrians uses lessons from traditional great streets to shape contemporary urban development.

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*Street Design: The Secret to Great Cities and Towns* is the revolution's handbook. Its promise is clear: invest in urban streets that slow vehicles down and create shared spaces where pedestrians feel safe and comfortable, and your neighborhoods shall prosper. This encyclopedia of beautiful and profitable streets belongs in the hands of every designer, developer, and planner seeking to create sustainable development projects.

*Street Design* analyzes great urban streets from around the world in text, pictures, and drawings. These range from the iconic Champs-Élysées in Paris and Las Ramblas in Barcelona to important but lesser-known streets such as Main Street in Nantucket, Massachusetts, and Church Street in Charleston, South Carolina. Each historic street is thoroughly analyzed to demonstrate its artful but simple blend of key elements: parking, signage, street trees, travel lanes, sidewalks, and building frontages.

The book then applies essential lessons from traditional to contemporary street design showing how great individual streets fit into and undergird overall community street networks. It places Church Street within the overall grid of shaded tree-lined streets that people associate with the architectural and urban image of Charleston. It explains how a special street such as the Cap at Union Station in Columbus, Ohio, comprises an arcade of shops and restaurants spanning an interstate expressway to link a split neighborhood with a pedestrian high street—a contemporary version of the Ponte Vecchio spanning the Arno River in Florence, Italy.

Retrofitting turns streets into places for people instead of merely conduits for cars. For example, New York City converted Madison Square at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Broadway from an ugly and awkward roadway into a pedestrian plaza complete with outdoor furniture. Using "tactical urbanism" to test changes with inexpensive materials, city crews working overnight put out bollards and movable chairs and painted the street brown where it was closed to vehicles. New Yorkers started occupying the new spaces immediately.

Authors John Massengale and Victor Dover are leaders in the movement to humanize streets at both the individual project level and the influential professional level. Members of the Congress for the New Urbanism, they have collaborated with the Institute of Transportation Engineers in preparing a new manual that breaks through



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professional silos to link walkability with urban thoroughfare design. Massengale is an architect and urban designer in New York City; Dover leads Coral Gables, Florida-based Dover, Kohl & Partners Town Planning and is lead designer of more than 150 neighborhood, revitalization, and regional plans. Dover's firm produced the wonderful scale plan and section drawings that accompany the book's photographs.

The authors believe that streets are the public realm "glue" that holds good cities and towns together. Great streets must "make people want to get out of their cars." They are impatient with the design standards published by the Complete Streets Coalition for not being complete enough, pointing out that these standards recognize all street users but still may encourage fast driving and unsightly appearance. They represent good engineering but poor urban design because their garish signs and markings diminish the space and beauty of the street for the walker.

Street Design is a book to read and savor. With 547 images—53 in color—almost every page features graphics that enhance the reader's learning and understanding. Special inserts discuss how to tame the grid, select street trees, and measure walkability. Additional authors write mini case studies of unique streets. Eleven essential street types are identified and analyzed, including various boulevards, avenues, parkways, pedestrian streets, and promenades as well as main streets, downtown streets, and neighborhood streets.

The one thing that might have made this a better book would have been the inclusion of some summary and comparison tables. Confronting such a rich and wide-ranging variety of street stories is somewhat disorienting, almost like a too-rich dessert tray after a gourmet dinner. A few well-designed tables, identifying key characteristics of similar streets, would have aided intellectual digestion. But this is a minor issue.

In the final analysis, this book makes unique and valuable contributions both to urban design and to sustainable development. Creating more great streets means more people will be attracted to urban living, where they will be able to walk and bike more, reducing sprawl and air pollution from commuting by automobile, and resulting in smaller urban footprints with fewer negative climate change impacts. This is a revolution that benefits everyone.

*David R. Godschalk is professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and coauthor of Sustainable Development Projects: Integrating Design, Development, and Regulation, published by APA Planners Press in 2013.*

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**Doug McCraw**  
October 13, 2014

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**Brett Widness**  
October 13, 2014

It is available on Amazon, but this is not a ULI publication.

Brett Widness, Online Editor, Urban Land Online

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