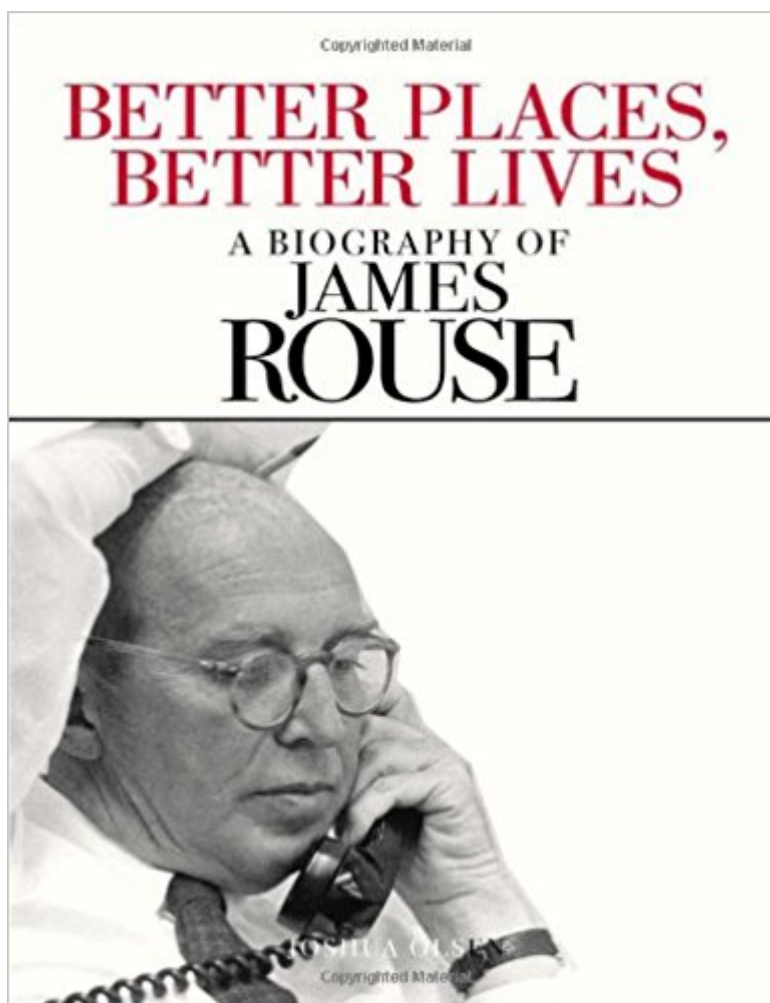


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Better Places, Better Lives: A Biography Of James Rouse



Synopsis

A visionary developer and master planner, James Rouse was a key figure in the story of how and why the United States was built the way it was during the last half century. This engaging biography touches upon all aspects of Rouse's life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"James Rouse—realtor, visionary, philanthropist, and urbanist—comes to life on the pages of Joshua Olsen's biography." —Alexander Garvin, New York City Planning Commission, author, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*

Joshua Olsen is a Fulbright Scholar and graduate of Yale University. He works for a development company in Washington, DC.

Fascinating story of James Rouse (actor Edward Norton's maternal grandfather) who helped pioneer the planned community with his forward thinking community in Columbia, Maryland. The book is very well written and covers Rouse from his childhood to his death. Rouse was a genius in urban planning and development and had a brilliant vision to make a community that didn't deteriorate into urban sprawl. He also invented the covered shopping mall and did work in Santa Monica, California on the 3rd Street Promenade. Brilliant man, fascinating, well-told story. I highly

recommend it for those interested in history and urban planning.

This is a fine book, well organized and written, giving a very comprehensive account of the career of financier-developer-builder-planner James Rouse. His career spanned the most formative years of post-War American urban policy, and he was involved in most of the major initiatives that occurred. While the author does not attempt to delve deeply into what made Jim Rouse tick, he presents a thorough account of the various initiatives he undertook, his motives for doing so, and the good and bad results that ensued. Rouse's most notable accomplishments, including the new community of Columbia, MD, and the festival marketplaces in Boston and Baltimore, by themselves warrant providing an account of his life. What is remarkable is how much more he did, in both suburban and central city environments. He also interacted with and occasionally partnered with many of the other urban visionaries during the last half of the 20th century. I come away from reading this book with admiration for what Rouse accomplished but awareness of the limits and consequences of his work. In some respects, he demonstrated how to do very well the major new phenomena that emerged in American urban life in the post-War period, including shopping centers and suburban subdivisions, but by and large the architecture of these developments was bland and they ended up having many of the same negative consequences for American urban life that their less successful examples did. He also, to his credit, tried to tackle the negative impacts these suburban phenomena had for central city life, understandably with mixed success, ranging from major demolition and clearance projects under urban renewal, to neighborhood rehabilitation, to the festival marketplace.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was a fascinating look at both the "for profit" and "not for profit" sides of the development industry. An enjoyable story of one man's life and his contribution to this world.

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