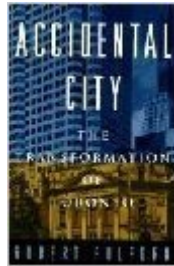




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Accidental City: The Transformation Of Toronto



Synopsis

The old city of Toronto in the 1950s was a gray lady - "a good place to mind your own business," as Northrop Frye said. Built on the shore of Lake Ontario by generations of architects in a strange and challenging ravine-threaded landscape, the city is now the home of the Canadian National Tower, of an extraordinary subway system, of the Blue Jays and their SkyDome, of the Royal Ontario Museum, of Roy Thomson Music Hall. Today Toronto bristles with vitality, glitters with everything that architecture, planning, and cultural and intellectual life can give to a city. It has saved itself from the worst mistakes of urban planning, for its development over the past thirty years has been a tale of chance and fortuitous accident. Robert Fulford's graceful narrative, moving from one region of Toronto to another, paints a portrait of the city, its recent history, its urban planning, and its economic development. The chosen home of the great architectural and social critic Jane Jacobs (who has ha

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Customer Reviews

Toronto is "like San Francisco upside down," says Fulford, a columnist for the Globe and Mail and a disciple of noted urban sociologist Jane Jacobs. Built on steep, wooded ravines, the city was until recently a colorless provincial town, despite its varied topography. Within Fulford's lifetime, and thanks to both the successes and failures of central planners, Toronto has become a cosmopolitan center. Fulford describes ferocious struggles by its various ethnic communities to retain their different identities in the face of attempts to homogenize them, and he cites efforts to preserve the natural wilderness that has made present-day Toronto "a city within a park rather than a park within

a city." Horrendous errors in architectural and planning decisions notwithstanding, Fulford claims it is now a city of vitality and beauty and feels that Toronto, in its haphazard, contentious development, has become one of North America's most livable cities. His book provides a witty, incisive study in urban development. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book walks the reader through the history of Toronto with special emphasis on its architecture and city planning. We're introduced to various neighborhoods, and Fulford discusses specific buildings that he regards as either assets or eyesores, often including a bit of historical background on how that building came to be. The great flaw of the book is that there are only 16 pictures. When Fulford discusses a building (for instance, the Commercial Bank of the Midland District at 15 Wellington Street) we're supposed to be able to picture it in our mind's eye, a daunting challenge even for Toronto residents. In the same vein, an entire chapter is dedicated to criticizing the CBC Broadcasting Centre, but nowhere is there any illustration of it.

Robert Fulford has a love for Toronto, which I share absolutely. I found it fascinating to peek behind the curtain and learn some of the stories that explain how Toronto came to be what it has become. I only wish this book were longer. I could happily have read a lot more. As it is, I went back to the start and dove into re-reading it.

Fulford grew up in Toronto. I purchased his book "The Best Seat in the House" and never put the thing down. This is another great read. He was a childhood friend of the great pianist Glenn Gould, and his memories of the City of Toronto are priceless. His look at Toronto today is unique, especially as the City transforms into the new Megacity in January 1998.

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