



America by Design

Spiro Kostof

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What is the pattern of America? How did we mark our land throughout our history with towns and farms, factories and railroad lines? And what does all this activity say about who we are and what we have been? In this book, a beautifully illustrated companion volume to a new PBS series, one of our most highly acclaimed architectural historians confronts these questions as he takes us on a thoughtful and wonderfully engaging tour of America's built environment.

In preparing the series and the book, Spiro Kostof set out to see America as one design, made from a whole cloth, and to review the enduring themes that determined the main features of its landscape. Each chapter, like each program in the series, focuses on one of these themes: the house, the workplace, the street, the public realm, the shape of the land. Kostof's curiosity touches on everything from suburban tracts to canal systems, from company towns to office towers. His aim throughout is to help us *see* America and not to take anything we see for granted. With Kostof as our guide, such apparent banalities as factory windows and street pavements take on a new significance, as do more obvious monuments, from state capitols to dams and long-span bridges. Embracing a truly democratic view of his subject, Kostof regards all buildings, the standard and the fancy, as worthy of study, and his consistent emphasis is on their social importance--who uses them and how they are used. From first chapter to last, Kostof brilliantly conveys the processes of designing, building, and using by which we have imprinted the landscape throughout the course of our long tenancy.

"In the ways we use what is designed and built, in the demands we make and the changes we bring about," Kostof writes, "we are all designers of America. On us all falls the blame for what is ugly in our surroundings, what is inhumane and derelict. To us all belongs the credit for the beauty we fashion and the love, the excitement, the grace we allow it to contain."



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