

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

NEW YORK

THE SECRET ATLAS



BELOW CHAMBERS

CITY SEALS OF THE SURROGATE’S COURT16

THE LIBERTY POLE18

THE CROWN ON ST. PAUL’S PULPIT 20

THE HARBORS OF THE WORLD22

IRISH HUNGER MEMORIAL24

SIDEWALK CLOCK ON MAIDEN LANE26

SCALE MODEL AT THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL BUILDING.....28

TRINITY’S TOMBSTONE RIDDLE.....30

BLAST MARKS ON THE MORGAN BANK.....32

ELEVATED ACRE34

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S TOOTH.....36

THE FENCE AT BOWLING GREEN38

BELGIUM ON THE CUSTOMS HOUSE..... 40

NETHERLANDS MONUMENT FLAGPOLE42

AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINERS’ MEMORIAL..... 44

GRAFFITI COLUMNS OF ELLIS ISLAND.....46

CHAMBERS TO HOUSTON

CROTON AQUEDUCT MANHOLE COVERS50

THE NEW YORK EARTH ROOM52

THE FLOATING MAP ON GREENE STREET54

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE56

HUA-MEI BIRD MEN OF SARA D. ROOSEVELT PARK.....58

THE SLAVE GALLERIES AT ST. AUGUSTINE’S60

SHEARITH ISRAEL CEMETERY62

MMUSEUMM64

HOLLOW SIDEWALKS.....66

THE SPRING STREET SALT SHED68

HOUSTON TO 14TH

A.T. STEWART’S BROKEN VAULT72

THE REWARD POSTER FOR THE CAPTURE OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH74

THE HARE KRISHNA TREE76

LENIN ON NORFOLK STREET.....78

ROOF HOUSES80

NEW YORK MARBLE CEMETERY82

MERCHANT’S HOUSE AND THE GHOST OF GERTRUDE TREDWELL84

“SYLVETTE”86

“TIME LANDSCAPE” 88

THE MEDALLIONS OF THE AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS.....90

IFC CENTER’S PEEPHOLES.....92

“ANGEL IN ADORATION” AT JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH94

TRACKING MINETTA BROOK..... 96

DE FOREST HOUSE98

THE LAST GASLIGHT LAMPPOST100

THE HESS SPITE TRIANGLE.....102

PALAZZO CHUPI 104

“MONEYBAGS”106

FROM 14TH TO 42ND

“7000 OAKS” 110

THE REMAINS OF PIER 54.....112

THE PLAYERS 114

APPELLATE COURT HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL.....116

METROPOLITAN LIFE TOWER 118

THE ROSCOE CONKLING MONUMENT..... 120

GRAND LODGE OF THE FREEMASONS..... 122

STONE FOXES AND THE FUR TRADE.....124

THE EAGLES OF OLD PENN STATION..... 126

DAILY NEWS BUILDING LOBBY.....128

MANHATTAN SOLSTICE130

FROM 42ND TO 59TH

THE BRILL BUILDING134

TIMES SQUARE SOUND SCULPTURE..... 136

THE PIG OF SAINT PATRICK’S.....138

LEVER HOUSE PLAZA..... 140

GREENACRE PARK..... 142

MARILYN MONROE SUBWAY GRATE 144

THE COLE PORTER PIANO..... 146

THE FRED F. FRENCH BUILDING148

THE WHISPERING GALLERY IN GRAND CENTRAL150

THE GRAYBAR BUILDING RATS..... 152

FORD FOUNDATION ATRIUM.....154

U THANT ISLAND156

UPPER WEST SIDE (59TH – 110TH)

33 WEST 63RD STREET160

THE PYTHIAN162

SEPTUAGESIMO UNO PARK..... 164

MILLSTONES OF THE COLLEGIATE REFORMED PROTESTANT DUTCH CHURCH166

JOAN OF ARC ISLAND168

NICHOLAS ROERICH MUSEUM.....170

UPPER EAST SIDE AND CENTRAL PARK

PHRENOLOGY IN CENTRAL PARK174

THE ELM TREES OF CENTRAL PARK.....176

THE WITCH OF BETHESDA TERRACE.....178

KENTUCKY COFFEE TREES180

ROCK TUNNEL TRANSVERSE.....182

GRANITE STATUE OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON.....184

SENECA186

ANDREW HASWELL GREEN MEMORIAL BENCH188

PAINTINGS IN THE STETTMEIER DOLLHOUSE.....190

GARBAGE MUSEUM..... 192

SQUADRON A ARMORY194

THE ZIEGFELD HEAD196

THE MURALS OF BEMELMANS BAR.....198

“DWELLINGS” ON MADISON AVENUE.....200

MOUNT VERNON HOTEL MUSEUM 202

UPPER MANHATTAN

THE PORTALS OF PARADISE.....206

BLESSING OF THE BICYCLES.....208

“THE PEACE FOUNTAIN”210

CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME.....212

HARLEM FIRE WATCHTOWER.....214

THE WISHING TREE.....216

THE HIDDEN OWL OF “ALMA MATER”218

RIVERSIDE CHURCH CARILLON220

RIVERSIDE LABYRINTH.....222

HAMILTON GRANGE.....224

AUDUBON’S GRAVE MARKER.....226

PORTOLAN CHART228

BRUSH STAIRWAY AND OLD POLO GROUNDS.....230

MANHATTAN PETROGLYPHS232

THE LITTLE RED LIGHTHOUSE234

LOEWS 175TH MOVIE PALACE.....236

TOP OF THE HIGH BRIDGE TOWER.....238

BENNETT PARK240

MOTHER CABRINI SHRINE.....242

THE LAVAUDIEU TORSO OF CHRIST.....244

DYCKMAN FARMHOUSE..... 246

MILESTONE NO. 12248

INDIAN CAVES OF INWOOD HILL250

ALPHABETICAL INDEX.....252

06.

Clock: corner of Maiden Lane and Broadway
William Barthman Jewelers: 176 Broadway
williambarthman.com
4 and 5 trains/Fulton Street
N and R trains/Cortlandt Street
A, C, J and Z trains/Fulton Street

SIDEWALK CLOCK
ON MAIDEN LANE

Time ticking underfoot

William Barthman Jewelers on Broadway is the last holdout of a buzzing lower Manhattan jewelry trade that started in the late 1700s. The store has been on the same block for 130 years, a record of service you can see in the historic photos hanging inside, and feel in the unstrained courtesy of the staff behind the counters. But the store’s most inspired public relations move was the sidewalk clock on the corner of Maiden Lane. “People know us by that clock,” says Connie, the manager. Founder William Barthman tweaked the concept of sponsored city clocks by placing his underfoot. The sidewalk seems alive on that corner; the glass crystal and the steadily advancing hands bravely submit to endless stomping pedestrians (50,000 in a three-hour period, according to one count). Regularly serviced and synched, the clock is kept going by an electric motor that had to be replaced after 9/11. Guilo, the Barthman’s bench jeweler, points out a thin crack in the sidewalk that scribbles from the east to contact the bronze setting at the Roman numeral twelve. “September 11 was like a little earthquake,” he says. “The clock is safe because of the caulking, but

there’s still some water leaking.” Connie has a placid outlook. “I think it’ll be there long after we’re gone.” There are screws around the setting that secure the timepiece to the sidewalk but, surprisingly, the way to get to the mechanism is from underneath. Guilo opens a door on Maiden Lane and leads the way down a hot stairwell to a rare tour of the deeper history of Barthman’s: dust, the guts of the HVAC, and wooden cabinets with files going back a century. Under the clock is a small workspace and a desk bristling with tools for cutting, filing, and polishing fine jewelry. Guilo removes a piece of corrugated plastic in the ceiling, and, with pride, reveals the clock’s underside. Daylight bleeds around the rim, flickering to the muted tick-tock of heels on the sidewalk overhead. When the 6 train goes by just a few feet on the other side of the concrete wall, everything rumbles. Back on street level, two cashiers at the vitamin store on the corner who stand not 10 feet from the old clock say they’ve never noticed it before. “I must have stepped on it a million times,” says one. “But that’s New York – you get jaded. Hey, put that in the book.”



15.

Battery Park, just northwest of Castle Clinton
nycgovparks.org
4 and 5 trains/Bowling Green
1 train/South Ferry
N and R trains/Whitehall Street

AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINERS' MEMORIAL

All hands!

Out on a stone breakwater, bronze sailors huddle on the deck of a sinking boat. One tries to save a companion who reaches from the lapping waves; another cups his hands to shout for help. The American Merchant Mariners' Memorial has such dramatic immediacy because – strange among monuments – it's based on a photograph. This photograph has its own rich story of contingency and adventure, and at the center of it all is a man whose name appears nowhere at the memorial. George W. Duffy was barely 20 when, in September 1942, his American merchant vessel was sunk by a German cruiser off South Africa. The survivors were transferred to an enemy supply ship where they languished for a month. While leafing through the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Duffy came across a story about a torpedoed U.S. oil tanker; with the story was a photo of seven men in a life raft whom Duffy immediately recognized as fellow merchant seamen. Believing that later they'd be amused by the photo, "and naively thinking," he wrote, "the war would not last very long," he tore the page out and kept it. Duffy and the other prisoners were turned over to the Japanese. For the next three years – in Java, Singapore,

Sumatra – he lived in camps until he was liberated, along with other "walking skeletons," by the British in 1945. All the while, the magazine photo remained stashed in his gear. "After the war," he wrote, "I took this page to as many of the oil tanker companies as I could find in New York. No one could identify the seven men." And so the matter rested for forty years when, in the early 1980s, a historian had the photo analyzed by the FBI. By enhancing a life vest, the name of the merchantmen's ship was made visible for the first time: Muskogee. The photo had been taken by a German journalist from the very submarine that had blown the oil tanker out of the water. The shouting sailors captured on film are the last portraits of dead men: records show the Muskogee lost all hands. "All hands!" wrote Duffy. "And for all those years I had been searching for living survivors."

French-born sculptor Marisol used Duffy's photograph to sketch the monument. It was dedicated in 1991.



08.

Cortlandt Alley between Franklin and White Streets
mmuseumm.com
N, Q, R, J and 6 trains/Canal Street

MMUSEUMM

Exhibits in an abandoned freight elevator

Mmuseumm is an exhibition space, little more than 5 feet square, that occupies an abandoned freight elevator shaft in a downtown Manhattan alley. You can only enter on the weekend, but the steel doors come equipped with viewing ports and a number to call to learn about the odd objects that line the walls (all visible at once), making it the only 24-hour museum in the city. “Welcome,” says Alex Kalman, springing the padlock on the doors and sweeping his arm with self-mocking grandeur. The first thing to say about the tiny space is: it walks a narrow line of what constitutes “museumness.” Trim design, white molding, rich velvet, etched brass plaques. There’s even a “café” (a narrow electric espresso machine) and a “gift shop” (a foot-wide shelf with pencils printed with the tasteful Mmuseumm logo). Because the trappings are so finely observed, it’s a challenge to figure out whether you’re in a parody or not. Kalman comes clean: “We’re absolutely playing with the idea of a museum,” he says. But it’s thoughtful play. Kalman founded the space with his business partners and friends since high school as another outlet

for the ideas the trio explores at Red Bucket Films (the offices are around the corner on Broadway). “We’re saying: Why can’t we call this a museum? But at the same time trying to really respect the key ingredients.” All of this falls apart if the exhibits fail to intrigue, and that you’ll decide for yourself. But expect objects with built-in riddles. Why is that plain brown shoe here? It’s the one hurled at George W. Bush by an Iraqi reporter in 2008. Come also to see ornate soap carvings by gifted neo-Nazi zealots with eternities of free time in prison. Or probably the only collection of Disney-themed children’s bulletproof backpacks. “No art for art’s sake,” says Kalman, stating a cardinal rule. “These have to be artifacts, things that have kind of passed through society as part of our nature. And it’s up to us to look at society through them.” Kalman, curious and good-humored, has created a testing ground for what we consider worth elevating. Mmuseumm isn’t a comment on what an exhibition space should be, only on what it could be if he and his buddies ran it. Which, lucky for Cortlandt Alley, they do.



10.

336 Spring Street
1, 2, A, C and E trains to Canal Street

THE SPRING STREET SALT SHED

A house for salt

At Pier 34 on the west side, where the Holland Tunnel dives into Manhattan, passers-by have long wondered about the matching pairs of bare brick towers that rise several stories at the water’s edge. They look important, but clearly weren’t built for housing people: no balconies, few windows, no lights.

The towers (one pair visible in the background of the photo) are in fact ventilation shafts for the unseen tunnel, but their status as reigning enigmas was recently demolished. In 2015 this giant block of brute concrete, faceted like a crystal, rose at the same location. Both old and new are humble infrastructure – but how far we’ve come. The towers are of warm brick with subtle detailing to satisfy the elegance demanded by the 1920s. The new building looks like it fell from Planet X. What is it?

A place to store salt. Around 5,000 tons, or a small mountain. When snow and ice hit Manhattan, sanitation trucks – “salt spreaders” – stock up here on their rounds. The volume and jutting angles are inspired by the structure of salt itself. Here the concept of form

following function is taken to a literally granular level; the salt shed is a blown-up crystal. The building follows a manifest logic, but its beauty seems detached from comfort and emotion. This is a house for salt. It’s looking out for salt. It does what salt wants. The side facing the river is taller than the other, and the walls slope out. Yes, this decreases the footprint to leave more room for pedestrians, but the slope is precisely calculated from the angle that a mountain of salt assumes when the crystals naturally stack on one another in repose. Again, the tiny grain is the determining factor.

The work of Dattner Architects and WXY Architecture & Urban Planning, the salt shed has bewitched architecture fans and won numerous awards. Richard Dattner stresses the hidden power in the humble (the next time you don’t skid into a pole, thank the Sanitation Department) and seems to be just getting used to the idea that his building has become an object of wonder. “It’s a form that is so abstract,” he says, “Everybody can read their own meaning. I love hearing different interpretations.”



04.

178 Norfolk Street
F train/2nd Avenue

LENIN ON NORFOLK STREET

Communism, New York style

The bronze statue of Lenin, 18 feet tall, arm raised to salute the Workers of the World, used to crown the roof of a luxury apartment building on Houston Street. The father of communism faced south, and as you gazed up at him, it was hard to overlook that within the scope of that confident salute teems the original hive of unchecked Kapital, Wall Street. In fact, a New York monument to Lenin pointing any direction but upside down is hard to reconcile. The statue, then, is some kind of joke. Not quite. Lenin is a later addition to the building, which was constructed in 1988 when Houston Street fell on the fault line between gentrifying East Village and a much poorer Lower East Side. The 70s were hard on Black and Puerto Rican communities here; with a hot real estate market in the 80s, the money marched in and the streets became a class war battleground. M&CO, the design firm that created the building’s “identity,” thought the name should have a touch of dread to attract those magical New York animals, “people with resources who wanted to live in a hip, extreme and even dangerous neighborhood.” The name they settled on: Red Square. The Lenin statue, then, is nothing

more than marketing savvy. Not quite. The developer of Red Square, Michael Rosen, was once an NYU professor of radical sociology with a course called “Power and Politics.” A guy like that knows from Lenin. Also, Rosen’s post-Red Square activity – subsidized housing for the poor, people with AIDS victims of domestic violence – is not the résumé of a cynic. The 18-foot statue, then, is more like the icing on a luxury apartment publicity stunt by a developer with an eye on a longer goal of social responsibility. But where did it come from? In 1994, an associate of Rosen’s found Lenin in the backyard of a *dacha* near Moscow. Originally commissioned by the Soviet state, it was hardly finished when communism went south. When you already have a quirky luxury building in Manhattan called Red Square, you snap your fingers at the shipping costs.

In 2016 the statue was moved just across from the Red Square to the roof of 178 Norfolk Street.



17.

360 West 11th Street
palazzochupi.com
1 and 2 trains/Christopher Street

PALAZZO CHUPI

A palazzo atop a former horse stable

Ask the average New Yorker to design their own apartment on a limitless budget, chances are they would come up with something a tenth as fantastic as Julian Schnabel’s real digs in the West Village. People love it or hate it, but the Palazzo Chupi blazes with what hardly exists anywhere in the city: real whimsy.

Schnabel, most recently famous for his Oscar-nominated direction of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, and famous well before that for his painting and sculpture, can hardly be blamed for knowing what he likes. At the Palazzo Chupi he perched an oversized Venetian palazzo atop a former horse stable in the West Village and painted it radioactive scarlet. Then he filled the place with beautiful things: sculpted fireplaces, Moroccan tile, timbered ceilings, dozens of works of art, and a 40-foot basement pool. The singleness of aesthetic purpose has become a selling point. “Every element and detail in this extraordinary new building [was] created and designed by Mr. Schnabel,” claims the realtor’s promotional video. It’s not just a place to live.

It’s a “residential work of art.”

For many neighbors, it’s something of a graphic nightmare. They hate the color, they hate the incongruity, they hate the name. “I have no idea what ‘chupi’ means,” said Andrew Berman to the Villager, “unless it means ‘big, ugly building that never should have been built.’” Berman is the director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, and his beef with Schnabel goes beyond personal: it’s a matter of taste.

“He’s obviously trying to pretend that this looks somehow Florentine or Venetian, when, really, it looks like a Malibu Barbie house that exploded or something.” If Berman strikes you as a man unaccustomed to getting exactly what he wants from life, he’s one voice in a chorus: after construction began in 2005, demonstrators gathered outside the building site to protest. Schnabel, who currently lives in the palazzo, met the uproar with ego intact. “In principle, the protesters are right,” he’s quoted saying in *Vanity Fair*, “but they’re wrong about me and this building.”



01.

22nd Street between 10th and 11th Avenues
A, C and E trains/23rd Street

“7000 OAKS”

The transformation of all life, on 22nd Street

“7000 Oaks” by German artist Joseph Beuys is a collection of basalt pillars, each installed next to its own tree, lining a whole block of 22nd Street. The work is deliberately quiet, almost secretive. Beuys’s goal in art, as far as it can be summarized, was to trigger a spiritual response in people, to remake the world as a great forest. He also took the long view: the trees were planted as saplings, but the artist thought they would create “a very strong visible result in 300 years.”

The trees and their stones line both sides of the street. They weren’t put there by Beuys himself: “7000 Oaks”, installed after his death, is an extension of a much more ambitious project of the same name in the town of Kassel, Germany.

The first tree was planted there by the artist in 1982, the 7000th by his son Wenzel five years later. Most of the trees are oaks, to which Beuys was particularly attracted (“it has always been a form of sculpture, a symbol for this planet”) but there are also chestnut, ginkgo, ash, maple, walnut. Each tree received an enigmatic marker: a basalt column around four feet high. Basalt

is born in volcanoes, and can spontaneously create columnar forms, sometimes with uncanny regularity like, Beuys said, “perfect, beautiful organ pipes.” Each planting is an event that marks the transformational connections between ecology, society, and life in general. The tree grows; the stone, if it changes at all, can only grow smaller through weathering. The relationship between tree and marker is thus continually evolving, and it’s the change that is the real subject of the work.

This is not necessarily a pitch that the Chelsea crowd finds readily audible. One of the more engaging aspects of “7000 Oaks” is how unframeable, how uncollectible, how unsellable it is. Dia Art Foundation, which financed the original project in Kassel, started installing this extension in 1988 on 22nd Street, where it keeps its main offices.

Now the work is very much a part of the neighborhood. “You mean it’s ... a thing?” says a smoking man in a delivery uniform, and he shrugs himself off the basalt marker as though it has become suddenly electric.



10.

Lexington Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets
4, 5, 6, 7 and S trains/Grand Central – 42nd Street

THE GRAYBAR BUILDING RATS

Art Deco pests

Often mistaken for an eastern extension of Grand Central Terminal, the Graybar Building on Lexington Avenue has its own identity, and a pioneering one. After completion in 1927, the brick and limestone headquarters of the Graybar Electric Company became the largest office tower in the world. The facade is aligned to the Assyrian geometries that informed 1920s Art Deco (see page 148), and while the titanic curly-bearded allegories of Transportation and Communication on the east face set a distinctive tone, the building’s uniqueness is best expressed lower down, on the struts that hold up the awning. There you’ll find New York’s only architectural rats.

The rats are easy to miss; it wasn’t until 1933 that they came to the attention of the New Yorker. “When plans for the building were being developed,” The Talk of the Town reads, “the architects thought they ought to strike the maritime note somewhere in its decorations.” This note is found in the bas-relief albatrosses that decorate the facade, but the architects Sloan & Robertson also

brilliantly marked a parallel between the awning struts and the hawser lines used for mooring or towing ships. It goes beyond rats: the ones scampering up the front of the Graybar are frustrated by “bafflers” – the funnels that guard real rats from stowing away on ships in harbor.

Made of cast iron, and segmented into angular planes that would appear modern to the Jazz Age passerby but robotic to the modern one, the rats look like they’re up to no good. And there are more: each of the iron struts connects to the building at a rosette composed of rat heads.

The Graybar was an A-rated building in its early life, with offices of publishing giants Condé Nast, Vogue, and Vanity Fair, as well as those of Remington typewriters. Over the years the address slipped in status, and one by one the cast-iron varmints disappeared. When the building was restored in 2000, among the special instructions on the technical drawings was the irregular phrase: “Replace missing rats.”



02.

Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine
Amsterdam Avenue and 112th Street
stjohndivine.org
1 train/110th Street – Cathedral Parkway

BLESSING OF THE BICYCLES

You are performing a good work

Throughout the year St. John the Divine hosts events that some have complained are unchurchly. The criticism is less an indictment than a signal that where special programs are concerned, the cathedral gets New York. It gets the zombie-lovers who attend the Procession of the Ghouls every Halloween, and the pet owners who bring their dogs, cats, birds, ferrets, llamas, elephants, etc. to the yearly Blessing of the Animals, and the cyclists who roll their bikes into the church every spring for the Blessing of the Bicycles. There are thousands of brave cyclists in the Death Race of New York City streets, and not all of them escape unscathed. In 1998, Glen Goldstein, the organizer of the Blessing of the Bicycles, approached St. John the Divine’s leadership to see if some ceremony might be held in the interest of bicycle safety. The church gladly offered to allow bikes in the cathedral for a blessing with holy water. It’s the kind of arrangement that would grate on the less tolerant: the cathedral is Episcopal, Goldstein is Jewish, and attendees are what-have-you (the event website: “Regardless of your religious beliefs – or lack thereof – you are welcome.”). More come every year. Led by a trio of bagpipers (one of them in Lycra), hundreds of cyclists wheel their

rides through the cathedral’s sculpted portico to the polished stone central aisle, forming orderly rows. The atmosphere is more comradely than solemn or even reverent. And though it’s likely more bikes than you’ve ever seen under any roof, let alone a church roof, the Gothic enormity of the cathedral sweeps awesomely all around with room to spare, and the words of Reverend Tom at his podium rebound with echoes. “Whether you cycle for recreation or sport,” hums the reverend, “whether you commute to work, or for whatever reason you cycle...or roll in any way that does not involve internal combustion ... you are performing a good work.” When the speech is over, a shimmering chorus wells up as the cyclists, following an unspoken cue, ring their bells in unison.

The first recorded traffic accident in American history happened in New York, and involved a bicycle. Henry Wells lost control of his horseless “wagon” on upper Broadway, “going in a zig-zag fashion” until he knocked Evylyn Thomas off her bike. She survived.



NEW YORK

THE SECRET ATLAS

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