



Makeshift Metropolis: Ideas About Cities

By Witold Rybczynski

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In this new work, prizewinning author, professor, and *Slate* architecture critic Witold Rybczynski returns to the territory he knows best: writing about the way people live, just as he did in the acclaimed bestsellers *Home*, *A Clearing in the Distance*, and *Now I Sit Me Down*. In *Makeshift Metropolis*, Rybczynski has drawn upon a lifetime of observing cities to craft a concise and insightful book that is at once an intellectual history and a masterful critique.

Makeshift Metropolis describes how current ideas about urban planning evolved from the movements that defined the twentieth century, such as City Beautiful, the Garden City, and the seminal ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright and Jane Jacobs. If the twentieth century was the age of planning, we now find ourselves in the age of the market, Rybczynski argues, where entrepreneurial developers are shaping the twenty-first-century city with mixed-use developments, downtown living, heterogeneity, density, and liveliness. He introduces readers to projects like Brooklyn Bridge Park, the Yards in Washington, D.C., and, further afield, to the new city of Modi'in, Israel—sites that, in this age of resource scarcity, economic turmoil, and changing human demands, challenge our notion of the city.

Erudite and immensely engaging, *Makeshift Metropolis* is an affirmation of Rybczynski's role as one of our most original thinkers on the way we live today.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Rybczynski (*A Clearing in the Distance*), professor of urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania, offers a glimpse of an urban future that might very well serve as a template for cities around the world. Just as the dense and green Israeli city Modi'in mixes old and new modes of urban planning, this book integrates history and prediction in its survey of the development of the American city. A brisk look back takes us from colonial town planning through the Garden City and City Beautiful initiatives of the early 20th century that defined and delivered the distinctive aesthetic character to such cities as New York and Chicago to the big box era. He also examines how contemporary urban designers and planners are revisiting and refreshing older urban ideas, bringing gardens to a blighted Brooklyn waterfront. Rybczynski's study is kept relevant by his focus on what the past can teach us about creating the "cities we want" and "cities we need." The prose is instructive and always engaging, and the author's enthusiasm for the future of cities and his enduring love of urban settings of all kinds is evident. He not only writes about what people want from their cities, he inspires the reader to imagine the possibilities.

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From [Booklist](#)

So much of modern American architecture, for good or ill, derives from twentieth-century movements dubbed "city beautiful" and "the garden city" as well as the tumultuousness of highly regarded architects, from Le Corbusier to Frank Lloyd Wright. Acclaimed architecture writer Rybczynski begins with a review of nineteenth- and twentieth-century movements that produced magnificent parks and grand classical structures that continue to dominate the downtown areas of many American cities. He examines the fierce debates among architects and planners searching to balance grand design and practical use, a debate fueled by Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Lewis Mumford's contrasting views on urbanism. Rybczynski goes on to examine the trend toward arcades, malls, and big-box retail stores and to critique mixed-use development projects in a variety of cities in a never-ending search to find the right mix of aesthetics and practical, user-friendly spaces in an era of scarce resources and emerging environmental issues. An engaging look at changing perspectives on urban architecture and development. --Vanessa Bush

Review

"*Makeshift Metropolis*" is a wonderful book. It shows us how cities have been shaped by an unplanned dance between urban planners and the demands of ordinary consumers. Rybczynski is the ideal expositor of urban design, blessed with an abundance of inside knowledge."--Edward Glaeser, Fred and Eleanor Glump Professor of Economics, Department of Economics, Harvard University

"Rybczynski offers a glimpse of an urban future that might very well serve as a template for cities around the world... Instructive and always engaging... He not only writes about what people want from their cities, he inspires the reader to imagine the possibilities."--"Publishers Weekly"

"*Makeshift Metropolis*" is a deceptively slender distillation of some of the best thinking of one of the best thinkers about cities and urban planning. It's a terrific meditation on the past, present, and future of cities--a critical subject now that human life, increasingly, is urban life."--David Owen, author of *Green Metropolis*

"Impressive... [Rybczynski] writes with disarming ease... Our finest architecture critic."--Francis Morrone, "Wall Street Journal"

Users Review

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