



A History of Future Cities

By Daniel Brook

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A History of Future Cities By Daniel Brook

One of *The Washington Post's* "Favorite Books of 2013"

A pioneering exploration of four cities where East meets West and past becomes future: St. Petersburg, Shanghai, Mumbai, and Dubai.

Every month, five million people move from the past to the future. Pouring into developing-world “instant cities” like Dubai and Shenzhen, these urban newcomers confront a modern world cobbled together from fragments of a West they have never seen. Do these fantastical boomtowns, where blueprints spring to life overnight on virgin land, represent the dawning of a brave new world? Or is their vaunted newness a mirage?

In a captivating blend of history and reportage, Daniel Brook travels to a series of major metropolitan hubs that were once themselves instant cities? St. Petersburg, Shanghai, and Mumbai?to watch their “dress rehearsals for the twenty-first century.” Understanding today’s emerging global order, he argues, requires comprehending the West’s profound and conflicted influence on developing-world cities over the centuries.

In 1703, Tsar Peter the Great personally oversaw the construction of a new Russian capital, a “window on the West” carefully modeled on Amsterdam, that he believed would wrench Russia into the modern world. In the nineteenth century, Shanghai became the fastest-growing city on earth as it mushroomed into an English-speaking, Western-looking metropolis that just happened to be in the Far East. Meanwhile, Bombay, the cosmopolitan hub of the British Raj, morphed into a tropical London at the hands of its pith-helmeted imperialists.

Juxtaposing the stories of the architects and authoritarians, the artists and revolutionaries who seized the reins to transform each of these precociously modern places into avatars of the global future, Brook demonstrates that the drive for modernization was initially conflated with wholesale Westernization. He shows, too, the ambiguous legacy of that emulation?the birth (and rebirth) of Chinese capitalism in Shanghai, the origins of Bollywood in Bombay’s American-style movie palaces, the combustible mix of revolutionary culture and politics that rocked the Russian capital?and how it may be transcended today.

A fascinating, vivid look from the past out toward the horizon, *A History of Future Cities* is both a crucial reminder of globalization's long march and an inspiring look into the possibilities of our Asian Century.

12 illustrations; 4 maps

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, February 2013: When East meets West, the results can be surprising. Nowhere is this better displayed than in journalist Daniel Brook's *A History of Future Cities*, a book about Mumbai, Dubai, St. Petersburg, and Shanghai--four cities perched at the delta between Western and Eastern civilization. In these metropolises, imperialist and nationalist influences have layered, mixed, and aggregated into unusual new forms. Identity crises abound in St. Petersburg, built by Peter the Great, who fell in love with Amsterdam and tried to re-create it on a frozen Russian swamp; in Shanghai, propelled into the modern world as a foreign-dominated, no-passport-needed, economic and moral free zone. Brook explores cross-cultural politics, architecture, and ambitions reflected in four places that not only shaped history but may also indicate the future of many crossroad cities. --*Amazon Editors*

From [Booklist](#)

As different as the origins of St. Petersburg, Mumbai, Shanghai, and Dubai are, they share a characteristic as historical outposts of Western trade, architecture, and culture. Author Brook explores the ramifications in chronicles of each city, prominent among which are tensions between the modernizing influences of these cities and the traditional customs of the countries in which they are situated. If these four cities have looked outward as nodes of international commerce, at their backs in their hinterlands were always social forces and political movements with the potential to throttle the capitalist festivities. Within general narratives of when this happened--the Communist revolutions in Russia and China; socialist economics in India--Brook expresses a visual sense of each city's major streets and landmark buildings, describing and interpreting them through their builders' ambitions for the future, be it a grand train station in colonial Bombay or the world's tallest building in Dubai. Priming readers with the histories of these cities, including their politics and cosmopolitan demographics, Brook enthusiastically engages at the intersection of urban affairs and globalization. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

In these deft portraits of St. Petersburg, Russia; Bombay, India; Shanghai, China; and Dubai, UAE; journalist Brook (*The Trap*) artfully condenses and illustrates three centuries of revolutionary urban development and globalizing impulses.

An intimate, canny comparative study of four of the great world cities--St. Petersburg, Shanghai, Mumbai and Dubai. . . . [With an] accessible, entertaining generalist's perspective . . . Brook looks at these metropolises as a testament to human imagination and as a barometer of future promise. . . . Enormously elucidating and relevant. --Kirkus Reviews

Persuasive and lushly detailed.

Uncommonly interesting and intelligent.

The pleasure in Mr. Brook's unusual history is in his descriptions of the creation of these cities. The deeper message, though, is about the tensions such cities create.

An interesting thesis about the city's role in fomenting political change in the modern era.

'Instant cities' like Shenzhen, China, may seem like twenty-first-century twins of 'disposable cities' like rust-

belt Camden, New Jersey. But in this probing new book that is at once both charming and reflective, Daniel Brook tells the story of urban hybrids conceived to fuse Western cosmopolitanism and local culture. His close but never pedantic reading of these metropolises puts the city back at the center of our vision, reminding us that in new and old towns alike, the urban amalgam of creativity, diversity, and mobility offers a key that not only unlocks the past but also opens the door to our future. --Benjamin R. Barber, author of *Jihad vs. McWorld*

[An] inspired tour of the postmodern city. . . . Invigorating. "

Persuasive and lushly detailed. "

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