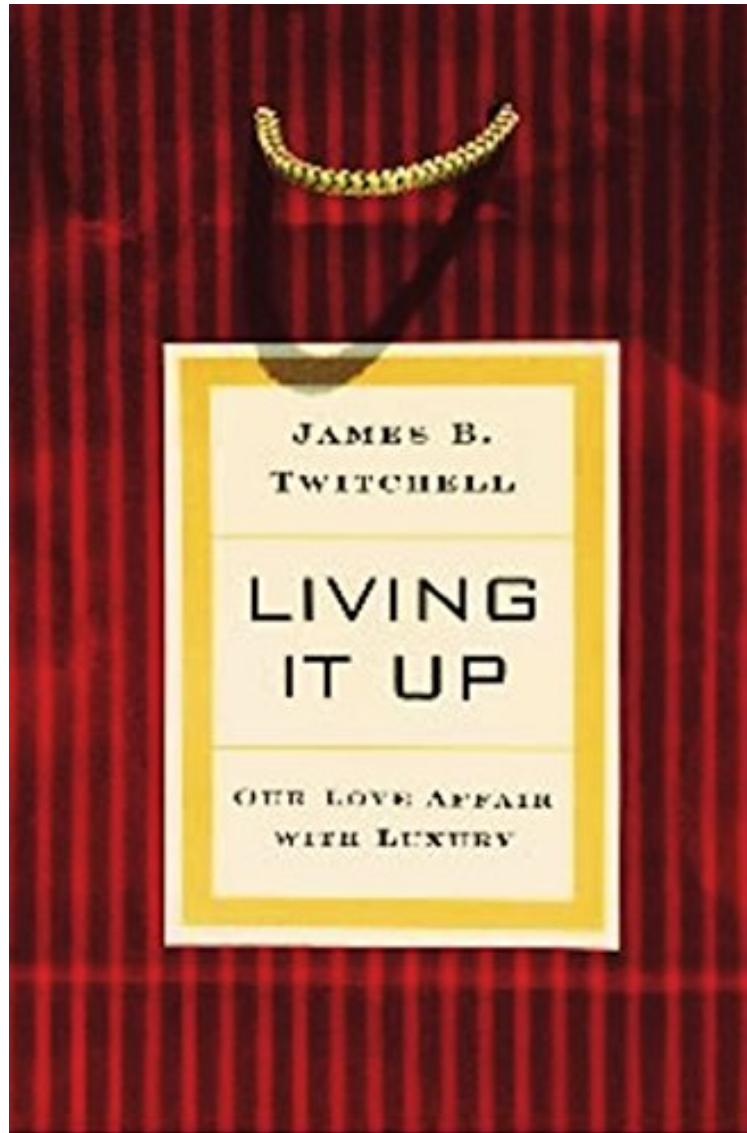


Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury

James B. Twitchell

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James B. Twitchell : Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. engaging and informativeBy EmilyI purchased this book for a study on luxury, and it's by far the most entertaining source I've read. Recommended.11 of 14 people found the following review helpful. very smart, very thoughtfulBy A CustomerMany writers have taken on the subject of luxury spending. The issue seems to have growing weight these days given the spread of luxury products through a very broad income range. Many approach the question as if it were one of morals, or one of emptiness. The refreshing thing about

Twitchell is that he understands that people simply like things and always have. 30 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Another Contribution to "Lux Lit" By Robert Morris The subtitle attracted me to this book: "Our Love Affair with Luxury." I assumed that the first-person plural pronoun refers to Americans in general and to affluent Americans in particular; that Twitchell views the relationship between a consumer (or consumer wannabe) and material objects resembles a love affair; finally, that luxury denotes both material objects and the lifestyle (if not quality of life) they collectively create. After having read the book, I concluded that my assumptions were essentially sound. Twitchell conducted extensive research for this book. He traveled throughout the country, roaming around various upscale retail establishments, observing salespeople and engaging in conversation with many of them. For Twitchell, what is luxury? He suggests "a mallet with which one pounds the taste of others" (does this preclude the appreciation of luxury for its own sake?) and "those things that you have that I think you shouldn't have" (does this include a terminal illness?). If I understand Twitchell (and I may well not), his research leads him to several conclusions. For example, that contemporary values are influenced significantly by advertising; that the the shoppes along Rodeo Drive and Fifth Avenue are "cathedrals" of consumption in which their customers are guided to "epiphanies" which determine purchase decisions; and that experiences with faux luxury (e.g. those found in the opulent casinos of Las Vegas) are better than none at all. When determining social status, Twitchell views what he calls "opuluxe spending" as a more relevant criterion than is one's ancestry: You are what you can afford to own. Not all would agree with him. I don't. However, few (if any) of Twitchell's readers have conducted the research he has on all this. My own experience suggests that distinctions between Old Money and New Money are less informative than the matter of taste. (Twitchell suggests few such distinctions.) Vulgarly cuts across all economic levels but, in general, the consumption of those in the Old Money category is less conspicuous than consumption by those in the New Money category. (If Twitchell has read *The Millionaire Next Door*, I wonder what he thinks of Tom Stanley's conclusions.) Almost all of the affluent people I know collect and redeem coupons, are constantly alert for bargains, try to get the maximum number of shaves from a razor blade, etc. Early in life, I learned that those referred to as "tightwads" are relentlessly frugal but not opposed to "opuluxe spending" per se. Unlike most others, they maintain tight control of a "wad" which permits them to purchase just about anything they may desire. What to make of this book? First of all, it's highly entertaining. Also, its general subject is one which has not as yet received as much attention as I think it deserves, although a number of other books ("Lux Lit") have also been published in recent years. Moreover, I think that Twitchell is really on to something important when suggesting (or at least implying) that expanding consumerism on a global basis will create greater access to "the finer things in life." Who knows? That may well raise taste levels, require higher quality and greater value from those who design and manufacture consumer products, and perhaps (just perhaps) increase both the standard of living and quality of life. Given the current War on Terrorism as well as the hostilities in the Middle East and throughout much of Africa, the sooner the participants stop shooting and start shopping, the better.

Economic downturns and terrorist attacks notwithstanding, America's love affair with luxury continues unabated. Over the last several years, luxury spending in the United States has been growing four times faster than overall spending. It has been characterized by political leaders as vital to the health of the American economy as a whole, even as an act of patriotism. Accordingly, indices of consumer confidence and purchasing seem unaffected by recession. This necessary consumption of unnecessary items and services is going on at all but the lowest layers of society: J.C. Penney now offers day spa treatments; Kmart sells cashmere bedspreads. So many products are claiming luxury status today that the credibility of the category itself is strained: for example, the name "pashmina" had to be invented to top mere cashmere. We see luxury everywhere: in storefronts, advertisements, even in the workings of our imaginations. But what is it? How is it manufactured on the factory floor and in the minds of consumers? Who cares about it and who buys it? And how concerned should we be that luxuries are commanding a larger and larger percentage of both our disposable income and our aspirations? Trolling the upscale malls of America, making his way toward the Mecca of Las Vegas, James B. Twitchell comes to some remarkable conclusions. The democratization of luxury, he contends, has been the single most important marketing phenomenon of our times. In the pages of *Living It Up*, Twitchell commits the academic heresy of paying respect to popular luxury consumption as a force that has united the country and the globe in a way that no war, movement, or ideology ever has. What's more, he claims, the shopping experience for Americans today has its roots in the spiritual, the religious, and the transcendent. Deft and subtle writing, audacious ideas, and a fine sense of humor inform this entertaining and insightful book.