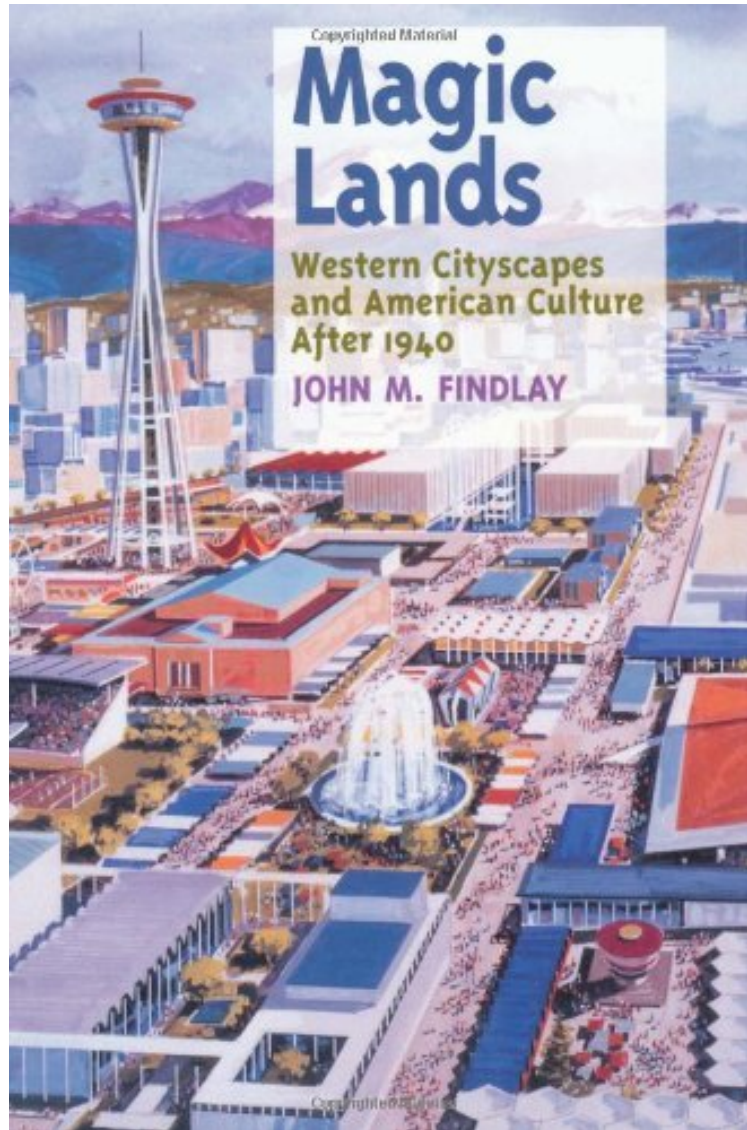


# Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940

John M. Findlay

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**John M. Findlay : Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Book Review of John M. Findlay's Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940. By Alexander B. Wathen Findlay describes Western cities by pointing out among other things that they, having grown most of their growth since World War II during the age of the automobile, are not set in structure like the ones in the East. What he means is that because these cities were built from smaller beginnings much more recently their structure is a reflection of new trends. The West has a much higher

proportion of its population in urban areas than other parts of the country. The Great Basin not being a hub of agriculture this is easy to see. When you drive out of Phoenix, once you leave the urban sprawl there is very little else until you reach the next city. Findlay cites Phoenix as an example of a city that was developed to cater to the automobile by permitting low density developments. In fact he suggests that local leaders believe that the low density neighborhood lifestyle has attracted a lot of people to Phoenix and allowed it to grow. Phoenix allowed multiple urban centers to flourish rather than forcing development into a central business district. Migrants (domestic) were and are attracted to the comfortable suburban low density life. This is in stark contrast to the "smart growth" and new urbanism advocates who want a return to high density cities based on mass transit and "walkability" rather than automobile based communities. Findlay spends most of the book discussing several examples of such centers which he labels magic kingdoms which not surprisingly refers to Disneyland which is one of the centers studied. The others are Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the Seattle Center. Findlay explains that: "[These centers] were among the earliest and boldest exemplars of the new urban form in their respective metropolitan areas. They changed the look of cities, both by contributing landmarks to the urban scene and by providing models for other developments. They represented achievements in the realm of culture as well as contributions to a sense of community." In other words it is the cultural contributions of these centers that is the most significant asset. For examples with respect to Seattle Center, it is a fairgrounds with a monorail going to it from nearby Downtown Seattle and it is home of the Space Needle, which as well as know is Seattle's most famous landmark. That tower has become the symbol for Seattle. Seattle Center was built for the 1962 World's Fair but unlike many other such facilities a lot of remains today. Findlay uses as an example that Seattle Center does not generate a profit to the city, but it has come to define it and is a cultural asset to Seattle much like the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe is to Paris. Findlay cites criticisms of San Jose being described as an urban mess by scholars who hold onto a Nineteenth Century Eastern based idea of what a city should be. He gives a number of examples of how cultural and political leaders in the West including architect Richard Neutra have stated that the East cannot be used as a model for this part of the country. Urban planners and the politicians who listen to them have a distinctly Eastern bias. Findlay argues that these Western cities were built more by choice and design than the Eastern historical cities. The migrants many of whom left Eastern cities dreaming of a Western lifestyle came wanting these low density cities. He cites the example of the contrast between San Francisco, which is an Eastern style city and Los Angeles a Western style one. Actually, just compare San Francisco with nearby (and ironically larger) San Jose and you will see the same contrast. The author not only argues that the Western lifestyle has attracted migrants, he says that the migrants are much more motivated by this than by money. Also mentioned is how a love for nature attracted many migrants to the West. The ability to ski and go to the beach on the same day is a draw to Southern California. This "outdoorsy" mentality can be credited for the rise of the environmental movement in California making that state a leader in that area. Another example is that white flight is not so much a problem in the West as in the East. Findlay cites a migrant who left the city in Detroit only to move to a suburban area in Phoenix rather than in Michigan. Concepts such as white flight are Eastern in nature and do not adequately account for most of the West. The best thing about this book is that it raises the self esteem of the entire West. We no longer have to define ourselves in terms of the East. The Eastern lenses can be tossed out and our West is the new normal. These Magic Lands are urban centers created by design rather than by historical accident like in the East. The cities of the West represent a new level of human achievement in that our urban conglomerations are designed based on our needs and desires rather than by the patterns of settlement 100 or 200 years ago.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An excellent urban history  
By William M. Knoblauch  
In Magic Lands John M. Findlay argues that in twentieth century planned communities arose across America to offer alternatives to urbanization. Findlay examines four case studies: California's Disneyland; Silicon Valley; Arizona's Sun City; and the Seattle World's Fair. These "magic lands" were sources of recreation, inspiration and optimism for the rest of the country. Magic Lands begins with a look at the West's rapid growth at mid-century. Findlay credits the military spending of World War II and a post-war boom driven by the G.I. Bill for increasing populations and changing landscapes. New industries--such as Hewlett-Packard in Silicon Valley and Boeing in Seattle--aided this growth by driving the west to new economic heights. With new jobs came an increase in demand for housing and shopping plazas. The result was the "horizontal" urban community, one which sprawled outside of the urban center creating sprawl. Reacting to this eastern-style growth, westerners escaped to planned communities for amusement and alternatives to urban lifestyles. The alternative communal visions presented in Magic Lands varied drastically. Walt Disney envisioned Disneyland both as family entertainment and as his example as "the city of tomorrow". Stanford built an industrial center that relied on the surrounding natural geography and climate to draw its workforce. Sun City transformed the natural landscape to provide an "ideal" active retirement community. Seattle rehabilitated a run down neighborhood to house it's 1962 world's fair. In each case, changes in these areas transformed their adjacent communities geographically, economically, and culturally. The reasons for transforming these landscapes was constant, but the methods by which these Magic Lands were constructed varied drastically. Disneyland was built under the close supervision of Walt Disney, who envisioned his planned community as an example for the entire country, but Stanford's Industrial Park (i.e. Silicon Valley) never had a master plan--simply a goal: to build a leading high tech

industrial center. In the case of Sun City, a drive for profit (and little else) led to the construction of this rich and green retirement community in the Arizona desert. Seattle's World Fair aimed to revitalize its downtown district--it ultimately failed. In each case, the results of these communities influenced national ideas on architecture and urban landscapes. While *Magic Lands* offers a compelling look at these four planned communities, their similarities are tenuous at best. Comparisons of Disneyland to the Seattle World's Fair are sometimes a stretch, while Sun City shares little in common with Seattle. These are vastly different and unique communities. More compelling is Findlay's final chapter that shows the impacts of these communities today in places like Irving and Los Angeles. These planned communities had vast cultural and environmental impacts, and these topics could be covered more in depth. These are minor criticisms. *Magic Lands* is an insightful read that will both appeal to scholars and lay-readers interested in urban development and the growth of the American West. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very clean copy. Slight ding in corner is no hindrance in reading and made it super cheap. Excellent value. By Peter B. Ives For me the first and last chapters are the most useful since they cover the region as a whole. The intervening chapters treat Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, Arizona, and the Seattle World's Fair of 1962 as examples. My one pet peeve is that the book's sub-title is geographically misleading in referring to Western Cityscapes (etc.) rather than the Far West as the first chapter more honestly states. I was aware of this discrepancy since I read the Contents page online, but some purchasers might miss it. Has an excellent Bibliographical Essay.

The American West conjures up images of pastoral tranquility and wide open spaces, but by 1970 the Far West was the most urbanized section of the country. Exploring four intriguing cityscapes--Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the 1962 Seattle World's Fair--John Findlay shows how each created a sense of cohesion and sustained people's belief in their superior urban environment. This first book-length study of the urban West after 1940 argues that Westerners deliberately tried to build cities that differed radically from their eastern counterparts. In 1954, Walt Disney began building the world's first theme park, using Hollywood's movie-making techniques. The creators of Stanford Industrial Park were more hesitant in their approach to a conceptually organized environment, but by the mid-1960s the Park was the nation's prototypical "research park" and the intellectual downtown for the high-technology region that became Silicon Valley. In 1960, on the outskirts of Phoenix, Del E. Webb built Sun City, the largest, most influential retirement community in the United States. Another innovative cityscape arose from the 1962 Seattle World's Fair and provided a futuristic, somewhat fanciful vision of modern life. These four became "magic lands" that provided an antidote to the apparent chaos of their respective urban milieus. Exemplars of a new lifestyle, they are landmarks on the changing cultural landscape of postwar America.