

ON SEEING NEW YORK →



ERIC UHLFELDER

AUTHOR

Eric Uhlfelder has written books and articles on urban design, architectural history and photography for various publications, including Editions Flammarion, Architected'Auhourd'hui, Editions Hazen, The New York Times, World Architecture, and Metropolis Magazine. In 2014, he won an award from National Press Club in Washington, D.C. for a story he wrote for National Geographic. His images are part of the permanent collection of the Musee Carnavalet in Paris and the Bibliotheque de la Ville de Paris. His work has been exhibited in Venice, Paris, and New York, where he has lived for 30 years.

DETAILS

FORMAT

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PAGES

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE

By Eric Uhlfelder

Elegant and crass; classical and modern; extraordinary wealth and privation; poetic and atonal.

I wasn't aware of such cognitive dissonance when I first discovered New York in the 1970s. It was a visual explosion of shapes, textures, spaces, and various times past colliding together for me to shoot. I was happiest when wandering her streets, searching for composition. This is where I began to hone my eye and craft, preparing me for what I would do abroad.

I went to Paris... many times. The name itself became ambrosia, replacing New York in my imagination as the epitome of place. It was less dynamic, more homogeneous than the City. But it was so much kinder to the spirit.

Paris embraced its past – though I was to learn that too was relative – allowing me to traverse time, which so appealed. But in the 1990s and 2000s, the City of Light also started to succumb to relentless improvement, so much so that now one quarter of my book is no longer visible.

Meanwhile, I discovered Venice where time has almost stopped centuries ago, where I keep returning, where in temperament and taste I feel I most belong – at least in winter.

But home is still New York and chance has turned my focus back to where I started this photographic journey. Looking back at my early pictures, my work feels unexpectedly contemporary and at the same time historic. The distinguished massing of towers of Central Park South has since been broken with duller, linear shapes; an East 96th Street soda shop is memory; and the Downtown skyline that defined New York for decades has been lost. Once anchored by the gleaming silver lines of soaring twin towers demurely complemented by early 20th Century stone skyscrapers, one could think this nowhere but Manhattan. Not now.

In comparison to what I've shot in Paris and Venice, New York, even in details, feels cold and monumental – the evolving American urban aesthetic. And development pressures continue to compress.

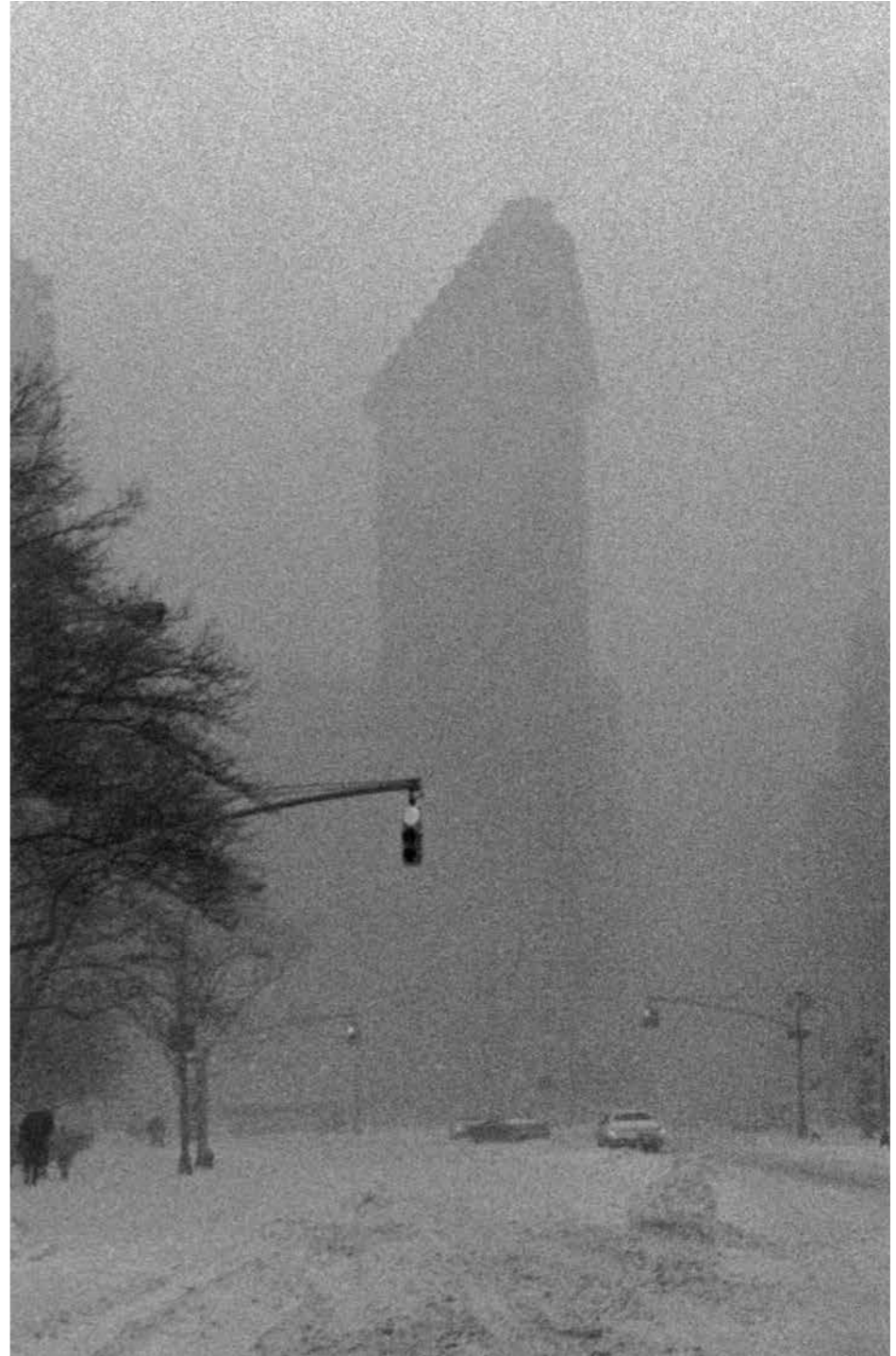
New York today doesn't feel like the city of my youth; much cleaner for sure, but also more sterile. But as what happens to all things dynamic, the difference between then and now may simply be that the pace and scale of change has sped up.

There are still plenty of breath-taking views not to be seen anywhere else—from the Brooklyn Promenade to the High Line. And if I had started my shoot-

ing today, I would likely feel fully satisfied with what would be on my plate, unaware of what was once there. I try to wander, again, as if I had just arrived for the first time. But there's no escaping memory nor the cognitive dissonance that is New York.

*Eric Uhlfelder
September 2014*

FACING PAGE: FLATIRON BUILDING

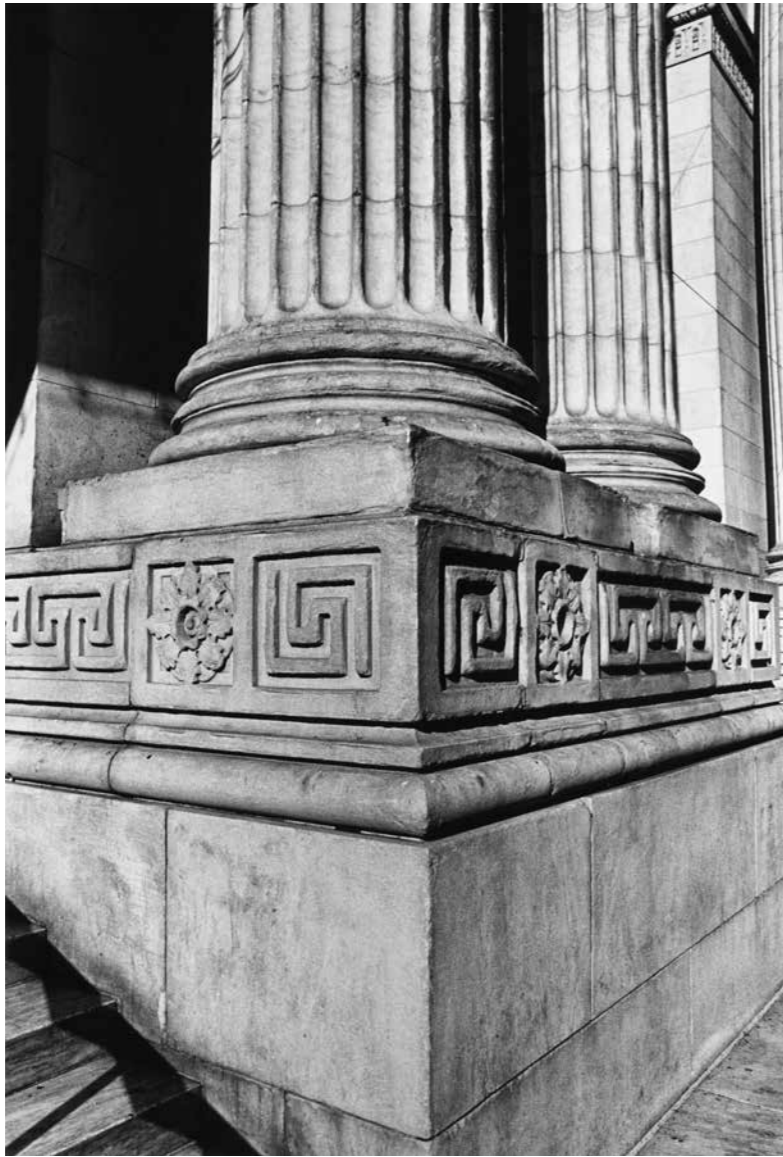




CENTRAL PARK SOUTH



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AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS

*“I would give the greatest sunset in the world for one sight of New York’s skyline.
Particularly when one can’t see the details. Just the shapes. The shapes and the
thought that made them. The sky over New York and the will of man made visible.*

Ayn Rand



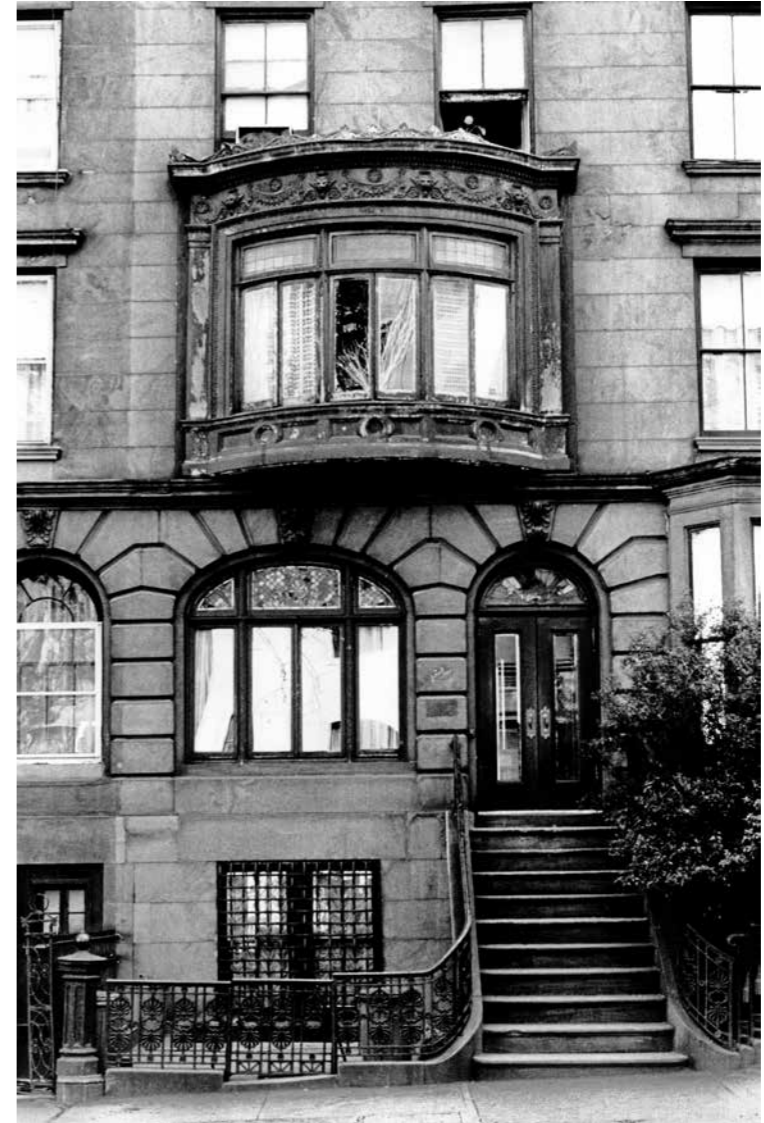
FROM STATEN ISLAND

FACING PAGE: WALL STREET





MANHATTAN BRIDGE



EAST 36TH STREET



DECEMBER 2001

“It was a cruel city, but it was a lovely one; a savage city, yet it had such tenderness; a bitter, harsh, and violent catacomb of stone and steel and tunneled rock, slashed savagely with light, and roaring, fighting a constant ceaseless warfare of men and of machinery; and yet it was so sweetly and so delicately pulsed, as full of warmth, of passion, and of love, as it was full of hate.”

Thomas Wolfe



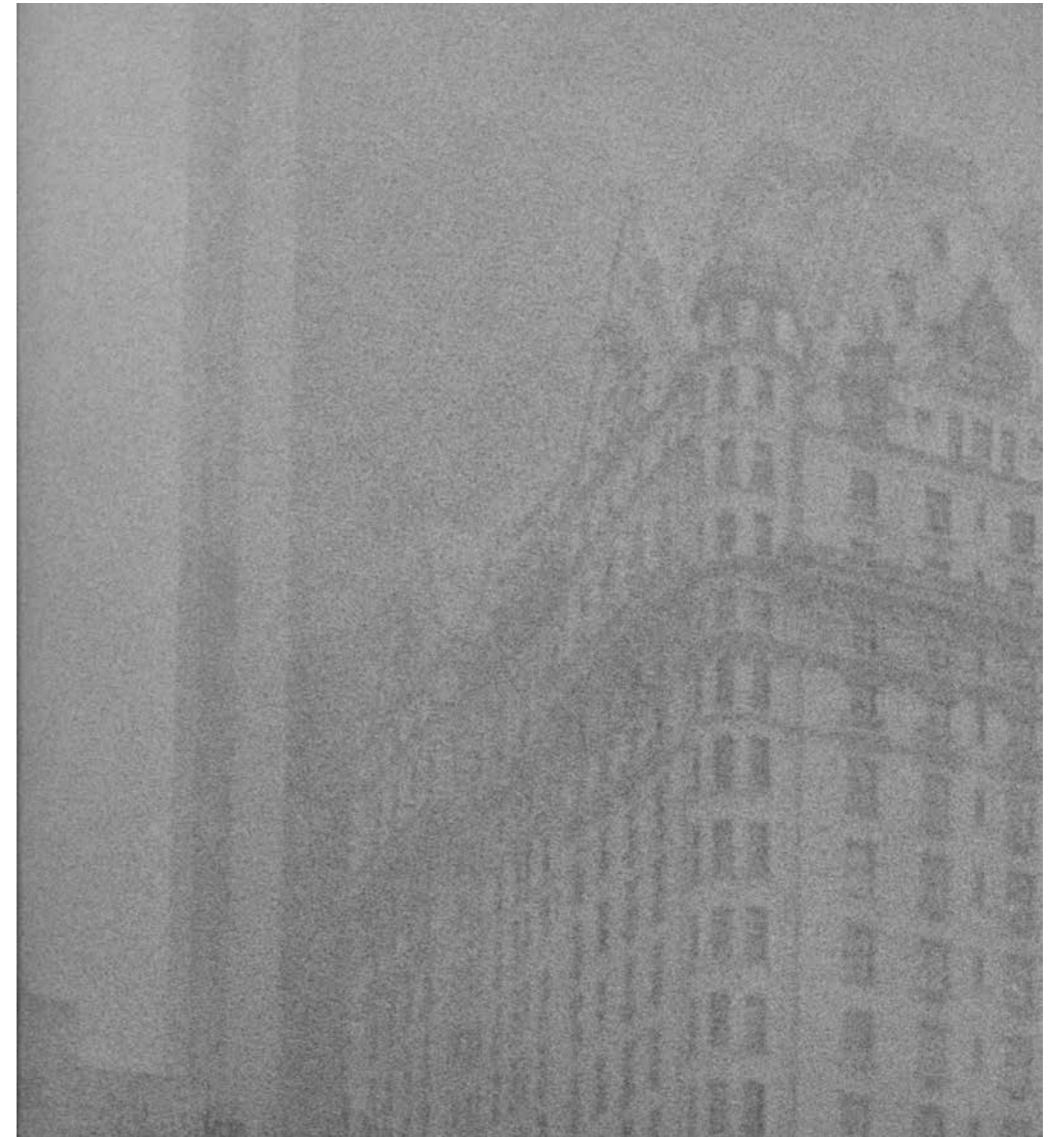
EAST 96TH STREET



MADISON SQUARE PARK

And just as it had been tradition of mine to climb to the Plaza roof to take leave of the beautiful city extending as far as the eyes could see, so now I went to the roof of that last and most magnificent of towers. Then I understood. Everything was explained. I had discovered the crowning error of the city. It's Pandora's box.

F. Scott Fitzgerald



PLAZA HOTEL



MIDTOWN AT EVENING IN WINTER



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