



Contact: Lottchen Shivers/845-876-8791/lottchen@earthlink.net

**COMPLETELY UPDATED WITH
FULL-COLOR THROUGHOUT**

BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK

By Carol von Pressentin Wright

“Impressive and indispensable” – *New York Times**

Just ten years shy its 100th birthday, the Blue Guides series continues to be the gold standard for cultural guide books. Continuously published since 1918, they remain essential and unique guides to the art, art history, history and architecture of Europe, the Classical world, and major U.S. cities.

When the venerable Blue Guides series was acquired from British publisher Bloomsbury in 2004 by Somerset Books, a small privately-owned travel publisher which had only been in business for five years, there were concerns that the series would not survive. Or at least not survive as the unashamedly erudite and very detailed guide books they are.

Fortunately, Somerset Books has put those fears to rest, instead reversing the editorial drift towards mass-market guides and has held the series' position on what the *Sunday Times* (UK) calls “the cultural high ground.”

In fact, Somerset's editor-in-chief and publisher (and wife and husband), Annabel Barber and Thomas Howells, have been giving the guides a vital and vibrant update, while continuing the strong focus of the Blue Guides on being the best-researched and

best-presented cultural guide books in the English language. Retaining their depth, detail, and intellectual standards, the Guides reflect the changes in the way people travel today, the information that is now available on the ground and online, and the different background information that the typical traveler will already have when visiting a sight. The publisher has extended the depth in which many aspects are covered and re-edited the material to make the information more easily accessible. Some of the major changes they have made include:

- full-colour throughout, with illustrations to inform rather than to decorate
- maps, diagrams, floor plans, architectural details, photographs created especially for the Blue Guides
- re-editing to improve access to information and navigability with cross-referencing, excellent indexing, and intelligent layout
- selective listings of restaurants and accommodations informed by the belief that good practical recommendations will contribute to the enjoyment of good art

The new 4th edition of BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK by Carol von Pressentin Wright (\$24.95/paperback; 584 pages; full-color with maps, floor plans, photographs, and architectural drawings throughout; Winter 2008/09) showcases the changes that are being made to the Blue Guides as well as Wright's new information. It also includes a new essay on architecture by Francis Morrone and another on the geology of Manhattan by Simon Harding.

Wright has been writing the BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK since its first edition was published 25 years ago. The main focus is now on Manhattan and Brooklyn with additional chapters on Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island. Manhattan, the most extensive section, is organized by neighborhood, from South Street Seaport and Battery Park City at the southern tip to Inwood at the far north end. Background history and detailed, scholarly descriptions of the neighborhoods, parks, museums, and landmarks that define New York City continue to be the main information provided, with a special focus on major museums and an explanation of their collections.

There is information about new buildings and changed locations, and expanded information about particular sights. For instance, the Rockefeller Center section has a

new map showing the location of the more important artwork. There are also expanded sections, for example, additional information about Battery Park City as a result of Battery Park City's development since the most recent edition of BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK. There are more public sculptures and restaurants now, as well as the spot in the World Financial Center overlooking the World Trade Center site.

The new format of the Blue Guides with colored boxed text has allowed for more material to be pulled-out that was formerly "buried" in the text. For example, the box on Fiorello LaGuardia expands quite a bit on what was formerly written about him, and the same goes for Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, and lesser-known figures like the fascinating Jacob Wrey Mould and sculptor Emma Stebbins. The box on J.P Morgan as a collector reflects new scholarship that came out after the last edition of BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK. As Wright says, "these are things that, to me at least, make the book lively and idiosyncratic."

There are walks throughout the guide including Fifth Avenue, the far East Side which includes Turtle Bay and the United Nations, the Whitney Museum and its neighborhood, and a walk through Brooklyn Heights. The new walks generally follow the paths laid down in earlier editions but now include improved maps and creature comforts.

Practical information – travel into New York City and around the city, shopping, events, hotels, restaurants, bars, chronology, and glossary – fill out the end of the guide.

In addition to BLUE GUIDE NEW YORK, the 5th edition of *Blue Guide Tuscany* by Alta Macadam will be published in February 2009 and the first edition of the *Blue Guide Concise Italy* by Paul Blanchard is being published in May 2009. Macadam has been living in Florence and writing *Blue Guides* for over 30 years. This will be her 42nd *Blue Guides* title. As for the new *Blue Guides Concise* titles, they will maintain the style and focus of the *Blue Guides*, but will be completely re-written extracts of the longer *Blue Guides*, containing the information you need to know to understand what made a particular area famous and enjoyable to visit. Very little background knowledge is assumed, and there is still a strong focus on the culture, art history, and architecture.

Ultimately, as Annabel Barber says, "there is no series quite like the *Blue Guides* and we were adamant about retaining the original focus on "high" culture. However, the *Blue Guides* need to reflect the way people travel today, how much time they have, what

information they need to understand what they are looking at, and what deeper understanding they hope to take away with them. That's what we aim for the *Blue Guides* to provide."

CAROL VON PRESENTIN WRIGHT is the author of the four editions of *Blue Guide New York* and also of *Art Shop Eat New York* and *Blue Guide Museums and Galleries of New York*. She is also a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of New York City*. She has also written on women's health and cooking, including *The Hole in the Wall Gang Cookbook* with Paul Newman. Born in Staten Island, she grew up in New York City, has a degree from Columbia University, and now lives with her husband in New Haven.

Recently published:

Central Italy with Rome and Florence by Alta Macadam and Ellen Grady – 1st edition – April 2008

Forthcoming:

Tuscany by Alta Macadam – 5th edition – February 2009
Concise Italy by Paul Blanchard – 1st edition – May 2009
Crete by Paola Pugsley – 8th edition – Fall 2009
Concise Rome by Alta Macadam – 1st edition – Fall 2009

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*for the 3rd edition of *Blue Guide New York*