

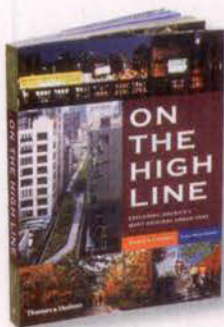
Stories of the High Line

Exploring America's most original urban park—
and taking a break BY ANNIK LA FARGE

Two weeks after BEA ended last year and all the booksellers left town, something magical happened in New York: 10 more blocks of the High Line, our beloved “park in the sky,” finally opened to the public, doubling it in size.

The first section, from Gansevoort to 20th Street, opened in June 2009 and was an instant success, not only because the park is so beautiful but because it's so different, so original. People who have lived in New York all their lives, myself included, were stunned when they first climbed the steps to the High Line and found themselves 30 feet in the air, looking through and into and across Manhattan from a perch they had never had before. Overnight, new vistas of familiar sights miraculously opened up. At around 19th Street, for example, you can see the Empire State Building perfectly framed through the bell tower of the General Theological Seminary. Two monuments of New York, one a place of business, the other of spirit, suddenly merge against an open sky. At the other extreme are dozens of small architectural details that one barely notices from the street; today they are at eye level, like pictures hanging on a wall: ovals, circles, squares, and diamonds carved in stone on tenements and former factories that line the old railroad. For nearly a half-century, from 1934 to 1980, this was the train's eye view: what engineers and brakemen of the New York Central Railroad glimpsed as they piloted their giant locomotives down the High Line. Today, it belongs to us all.

When you're on the High Line, all your senses tell you that you're any place but Manhattan. For one thing, it is impossibly quiet. You almost feel that

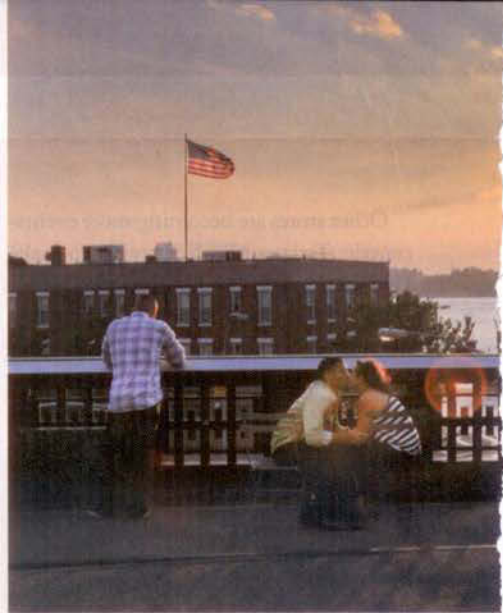


you've left the city, but there you are, hovering above it. It's not only the street sounds that are muffled: people are quiet, too. They don't scream into their cell-phones, or bloviate in full voice about the stock they just shorted. There's something about the High Line that forces a change of pace, like a car downshifting, until it is ambling. People promenade in the High Line, and for the most part they do so quietly. It's New York's slow park.

And here you are, back again at Book Expo.

LOOKING BACK, AND FORWARD

The last time I worked the show was in 2007, when I was publishing director at Bloomsbury USA. As always, I found myself needing to escape the noise and bustle of the convention hall, so I walked west from the Javits Center, over to 12th Avenue and across the West Side Highway to Hudson River Park. There I sat by the river and, between noxious and noisy takeoffs from a nearby helipad, spooled through the years of ABA and BEA: Washington, Anaheim, New Orleans, Chicago,



Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York. It seems we've all spent a lifetime with each other, traveling the country with our bags of books and stories, jawboning, pitching, drinking, breakfasting, carousing, wearing down the soles of our sensible shoes on those awful concrete floors.

In all my BEAs there has never been such a place as the High Line to escape it all and recharge your batteries. And it's just four blocks south (enter at 30th Street)—a five-minute walk. In addition to an almost pastoral beauty in the midst of the clanging city, you will find what you came here for: a great story. The High Line extends for a full mile, and on either side, from north to south, are remnants and artifacts of New York's rich history. Heavy industry was here—sawmills, iron works, a tinfoil factory. So was light manufacturing—book binding, printing, cigarette packing, furniture making. All the majestic luxury liners of the 20th century paid a call: *Mauvetania*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Queen Mary*, *Normandie*, *Lusitania*, and *Carpathia*, which docked at Pier 54 with survivors of the *Titanic*. There were photography studios, ornamental metal-



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Annik La Farge, a publishing (and BEA) veteran, has trained her eye and prose on the High Line, which offers a singular experience of a section of Manhattan's West Side, with up-close perspectives on the area's history, and stunning vistas of the rest of Manhattan and beyond.

workers, lithographers, publishers, and palaces to the arts: huge theaters and grand opera houses. There were technology innovators: scientists from Bell Labs tested radio transmitters on West Street, and industrial engineers developed refrigeration in the Meatpacking District. Bonded warehouses took root here, enabling the shipping and freight industries, first by boat, then by railroad, finally by truck. And, hey, this is New York, so of course there was food: some of

Food & Drink Along the High Line

BREAKFAST, LUNCH, OR DINNER

Trestle on Tenth. a comfortable, light-filled restaurant with excellent and reasonably priced food and drink. 242 Tenth Ave. at 24th St. www.trestleontenth.com/ Phone: 212-645-5659

Pastis. This big, rambling French bar and restaurant serves traditional Provençal dishes and bistro fare, plus several varieties of pastis, an anise-flavored aperitif from the south of France. 9 Ninth Ave. at Little West 12th St. 212-9294844 www.pastisny.com

TAKEOUT

The Lobster Place. One of the best fish markets in New York City, this huge store also serves fresh sushi, salads, and amazingly great soups and chowders. Located about mid-block in the Chelsea Market, which has dozens of eateries, cafes, and shops. 75 Ninth Ave. at 15th St.

COFFEE

Blue Bottle Coffee. You'll be hard-pressed to find a better cup of coffee in town. Espresso, iced, brewed, and drip style, along with pastries, brioche and granola. 450 West 15th St. www.bluebottlecoffee.net/locations/chelsea/

BARS

Bathtub Gin. A riff on a 1920s speakeasy: it has no windows, dim light, and there's a large copper bathtub in the middle. 132 Ninth Ave. between 18th & 19th St. www.bathtubginny.com/

Tia Pol. Divine tapas from the regions of Spain: Galicia, Andalucía, the Basque country and Catalonia. Boisterous and crowded at night, quieter at lunchtime. Very small and truly outstanding. 205 Tenth Ave. between 22nd and 23rd St. tiapol.com/ 212-675-8805

The Biergarten at the Standard. Enjoy a variety of flavorful beers and a classic German menu of sausages and pretzels. Sit outdoors in nice weather or inside at a communal picnic bench in a cavernous, light-filled, room whose handsome steel girders remind you that the High Line is just 30 feet above your beer stein. 848 Washington St. at 13th St. 212-645-4100 www.standardhotels.com/new-york-city/bars/biergarten/



the city's first farmer's markets flourished on Gansevoort Street, and a handful of the famous meat packers are still there today.

So if you grow weary of the convention hall, take a break on the High Line. One of the first structures you'll see is a place that sits on what I consider hallowed ground: the Morgan General Mail Facility. It's one of the largest mail-processing facilities in the country, and in the northwest corner you can see the outlines of the bricked-up freight entrance where as many as 8,000 mail trains a year passed into the building after traveling down the High Line and across 10th Avenue on a special "spur." But this wasn't always a postal center; in the 19th century one of Manhattan's first railway stations stood here, operated by the Hudson River Rail-

road. The first passenger to use the station was Abraham Lincoln, on his way to Washington, D.C., for his inauguration as president. Four years later, on April 25, 1865, Lincoln's funeral train passed through on its westward journey to Springfield, Ill.

That is just one of the many stories you'll find on the High Line. ■

*Annik La Farge spent 25 years in the book business as publicist, editor, and associate publisher. Today she runs her own company, Title TK Projects, and works with authors and businesses as a project manager on Web sites, enhanced e-books, and digital strategy. She has been writing about the High Line since 2009 on the blog LivinTheHighLine.com and is the author of *On the High Line: Exploring America's Most Original Urban Park* (Thames & Hudson).*