

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Home on the High Line, Where Tourists Roam

By PIA CATTON

Taking in the sights along the High Line is easy enough, but a new book, "On the High Line" (Thames & Hudson) by Annik La Farge, seeks to deepen the experience. With hundreds of photos spanning the years before, during and after the site's construction, the book lends context to the reclaimed urban space that has become one of the city's most popular attractions. While the book is light enough to carry along on a walk, an accompanying iPad app (\$4.99) offers an interactive feature that can compare images of past and present at select locations.

Ms. La Farge, who lives in Chelsea, became an expert on the park by following its development on her blog *LiveinTheHighLine.com*. She spoke with the Journal recently about the project's deep links to the art of photography and the creative process behind capturing the spirit of an ever-changing landmark.

Photography is an essential part of your book, but the art form was also crucial in making the High Line happen from the beginning.

In 2000, when Joshua David and Robert Hammond were looking to preserve the High Line, they knew photography was going to be an essential part of their fundraising. They asked photographer Joel Sternfeld to shoot the wild High Line. When he got there, he said, "Give me a year." He waited for cloudy days when the sky was overcast. Most of us would wait for a dramatic sky, but he didn't want anything to compete with the beauty of the structure.

There are three principal photographers listed in the book, as well as yourself. What did you focus on shooting?

What really interests me is looking at layers of an urban landscape and seeing the many



elements of the past—industrial history, railroad and maritime history, arts, culture, architecture. I've become particularly interested in aerial photography of the High Line. And I like to capture tiny details that a visitor might miss, like a pair of old signal lights, rusty meat hooks, and the name of a railroad company—Erie Lackawanna—stamped onto a piece of track. I have a glorious photo of a peregrine falcon taking off from the DEA building, and I love to photograph illegal dogs on the High Line.

Food plays an important role on the High Line.

The southern portion was originally farmland owned by the Astor family and later the

Gansevoort Market was one of the first farmer's markets in the city. On the northern end, you had the R.C. Williams company in the wonderful Cass Gilbert building on 25th Street; they were a wholesale grocer that was the original "supermarket to the world."

The book's design packs a lot of concepts—history, design, horticulture, urban planning—into one item without being overwhelming. How did you manage that?

One of the key things the High Line's founders, landscape architects and horticulturists understood at the very beginning was that every aspect of the project had to be awesomely beautifully and well-designed. So we had to at

least try to live up to that.

The book is a guide, but not a programmed walk. Why?

It's a linear park, and it lends itself to a linear narrative treatment, so I organized it roughly south to north, but we didn't want it to be too didactic. We wanted it to complement the feeling you get in the park, which invites you to wander and linger. One day Lorraine [Ferguson, the art director], Tom Dyja, my editor, and I did a walk. And Lorraine commented that the experience of reading this book is like having a wise guide perched on your shoulder, giving you history and context. "See that pier over there?" the voice says. "That's Pier 54,

Left, looking up at the Gansevoort Woodland at the southern end of the High Line. Below, Annik La Farge, author of the new book 'On the High Line.'



(r) Scott Mlyn; Rick Darke

signs posted by an anonymous resident who was aggravated by tourists?

That was regrettable. We're all tourists at some time. I'm sure we all annoy Parisians and Londoners. The problem on the High Line is that they have a ton of people and not a lot of space. This is something they have to think about. I've lived across from Central Park (on the east side and the west). There are packs of tourists there around the museums, but you don't read about people tearing their hair out. Here it's all so new, which makes it all the more galling to people who live in a neighborhood that was once very quiet. The High Line is, in a way, more like a museum than a park in the way that out-of-town visitors regard it. And people tend to be quiet. There's something about the place that just slows you down. So yes, there are tons of tourists but it's not nearly as rowdy as it could be.

where the Carpathia brought the survivors of the Titanic, which was headed for Pier 59."

How much did you know about gardens and horticulture before writing this book?

Next to nothing. We reached out to Rick Darke, who's a highly regarded landscape ethicist, horticulturist and writer who had spent many years photographing the abandoned High Line. He wrote a preface and short pieces on wildness in an urban setting and a few other things, but beyond that he contributed a deep wisdom and understanding about place.

You've lived in Chelsea since 2008. How did you react to the