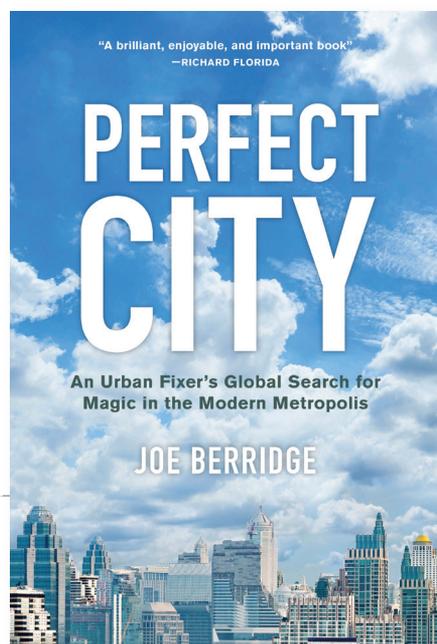


Perfect City: an Urban Fixer's Global Search for Magic in the Modern Metropolis

Reviewed by **Glenn Miller**



By Joe Berridge, 2019: 200 pages.

The firm now known as **Urban Strategies** was founded in Toronto in 1986 by Frank Lewinberg and Joe Berridge. Ken Greenberg joined two years later, and *Berridge Lewinberg Greenberg* went on to become one of the country's most successful planning consultancies (as evidenced by a host of national and international awards). In 1998, the firm was one of the first in the field to abandon the traditional practice of branding a company identified by named partners, switching to the more generic and strategically useful 'Urban Strategies.' One constant, however, was the company's stated goal to "work hard, have fun and create better urban environments."

This deceptively lighthearted ethic also permeates Joe Berridge's welcome debut as an author. At one level, "Perfect City" can be seen as a committed urbanist's version of Anthony Bourdain's globe-trotting explorations in search of exotic food sources. At another, Berridge takes us to and through some of the many international assignments awarded to Urban Strategies, from Sydney to Shanghai, with stops in Belfast, London, Manchester, New York and Singapore, with a consultant's eye for building lasting relationships and leveraging the firm's ability to tap into diverse business cultures along the way. It is also clear, however, that Berridge's delight and desire to search for the "magic of cities" is both deeply personal and fundamental to his world view.

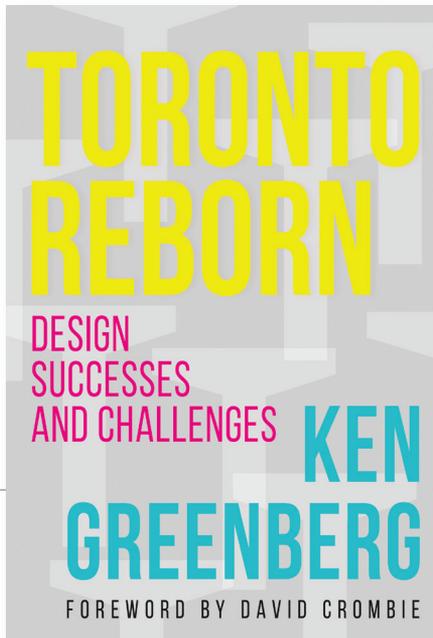
Relying heavily on references to Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses as a short-form for explaining how each place approaches the complex task of city-building (Jacobs = Good, bottom-up, engaging; Moses = Bad, top-down, imperious), Berridge offers up carefully-crafted sketches of the features, places and the personalities he meets on his work travels. As with Bourdain, there is often food and drink involved – the more local, the better to get a sense of the place.

Although Berridge's preferred modus is more Jane Jacobs than Moses, his frank admiration of mega-scale city building underway in places like Shanghai ("Shanghai is destined for global supremacy.") is in contrast to an underlying irritation with pro forma public engagement practices that fail to put local insights to good use. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the chapter devoted to Toronto, where Berridge's tone shifts to sharp criticism and frustration with that city's inability to get things done in a timely way. Despite his obvious frustration with Toronto's institutional shortcomings, his bristling take-down of patronizing visitors with the temerity to criticize his adopted home town is nothing short of hilarious, as is his tongue-in-cheek warning to never allow architects to plan anything larger than a building. "Architects always get it wrong when they are given a problem that is too large," he says.

Beginning planners and veterans alike can learn a lot from Berridge's ability to blend big picture analysis with an appreciation of small details that can affect outcomes. A key strength of this very readable book is that there are no photographs or sketches of the cities he is writing about. Confident that the descriptive power of his prose is more than enough to get his message across, Berridge leaves the reader wanting more. That's about as perfect as it gets.

Toronto Reborn: Design Successes and Challenges

Reviewed by **Glenn Miller**



By Ken Greenberg, 2019: 336 pages.

City planning junkies will also want to read Ken Greenberg's "*Toronto Reborn: Design Successes and Challenges*." Greenberg, who was an Urban Strategies partner (with Berridge) for 12 years before establishing his own firm, Greenberg Consultants Inc., concentrates his considerable analytical skills on historical failures and future challenges facing Toronto. Building on themes introduced in his 2011 book, "Walking Home: The Life and Lessons of a City Builder," Greenberg explores in-depth the role of the myriad institutions, people and private companies that collectively contrive to push the city forward.

"Toronto has become expert at muddling through," he laments, adding that Toronto's "unfortunate tendency to second-guess, start, stop and then start something else" is both a curse and a blessing. Like Berridge, Greenberg is frustrated by the reputation of Torontonians for "talking themselves into exhaustion" but he also acknowledges that "Toronto has succeeded as much by what it *didn't* do as by what it did – "demolitions, streetcar removals, and expressways are all bandwagons the city never wholeheartedly boarded" (emphasis added).

There isn't space here to note the many planning 'best practices' cited in "Toronto Reborn," but one of the most powerful has to be Greenberg's convincing commitment to design which respects "permeable edges, new links, and connections." Whether applied to university master plans or suburban neighbourhoods (which Greenberg argues need to be better understood), "collapsed boundaries" are a vital ingredient for success in bringing people together.

Although both authors voice strong opinions, Ken Greenberg's take is overtly political, providing explicit critiques of current provincial policy. The city is facing "serious headwinds," he comments, referring to the difficult relationship between Toronto and the provincial government. "It remains to be seen how far Toronto will be pushed off course in its attempts to become a successful, prosperous, sustainable and equitable city for all." Greenberg concludes that while "Toronto Reborn" may be aspirational, helping Toronto reach its potential is a worthy goal for anyone committed to city building.

Glenn Miller RPP, FCIP is a member of the Plan Canada editorial board; from 1986 to 2011 he was editor of the Ontario Planning Journal, the professional practice magazine of OPPI that ceased publication in 2018. ■