

**STORE
FRONT NYC**

STORE FRONT

**JAMES T. &
KARLA L. MURRAY**

FOREWORD
Chris Stein

NYC

Photographs of the City's
Independent Shops, Past and Present

PRESTEL
Munich • London • New York

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FOREWORD: SIGNS

Chris Stein

Growing up in Brooklyn, I got caught up in various musical genres at around age ten, in 1960. By the time I was twelve or thirteen I was a fan of jazz, folk, and film soundtracks. The funny thing is that my relationship with the pop music of the day was somewhat strained. I considered things like the massively popular Shangri-Las “too commercial” to consider worthy of my affections. “I Will Follow Him” by Peggy March was omnipresent and seemed to stay at number one for months. I even questioned the Beatles at first before being drawn in.

So it came as somewhat of a personal revelation when, in later years, dealing with my own band, Blondie, I suddenly found myself greatly enamored of songs and styles that I had derided as a kid. I had a particularly abrupt reversal regarding the Shangri-Las. Working on my own music somehow caused me to now think “Leader of the Pack” was genuinely and unironically brilliant.

Spending years—the 1950s to the ’80s and onward—on the streets of Manhattan and New York City’s other boroughs perhaps led me to a similar consideration (or lack thereof) of the urban commercial sprawl that I was embedded in. I would of course breathlessly appreciate some bit of baroque architecture like The Alwyn on 58th Street, but the day-to-day signage and more “mundane” little shops and store fronts didn’t quite register as integral and vital—until they started disappearing. It was eye-opening to then see them being presented in a new context by people like James and Karla Murray, whose photographs I discovered online.

The Papaya Kings, pizza places, cafés, and restaurant fronts that had been just background material for it all I now find charming and distinctly

original. “You don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone” philosophy is a component. The city is in constant flux, and at the same time corporations mine personal nostalgia in order to hypnotize consumers, they still miss the target when it comes to recreating the atmosphere of the past.

The trend leans away from individual shops and cafés and in toward chains and online supply. I live in the West Village, and the turnover of shops and small businesses on Bleecker Street, for example, is fast and furious. I’ve seen boutiques come and go in the space of literally a year or less, and each iteration of consumerism is more modern than the previous. I’m all for plowing ahead, but I find it fascinating that some old location that I might have ignored for its normalcy I now see as vital, and representative of a totally fresh antique context. The flat, undecorated lines of 1960s and ’70s architecture really has the same appeal for me now as an old iron-front loft building in SoHo.

Photography is time travel, and the past surrounds us even as it’s absorbed. Great that somebody is keeping track.

Chris Stein is the cofounder, songwriter, and guitarist of the iconic punk band Blondie. His photographic work has been featured in galleries and press around the world, and published in the books Negative: Me, Blondie, and the Advent of Punk (2014) and Point of View: Me, New York City, and the Punk Scene (2018).

INTRODUCTION

James T. & Karla L. Murray

Every city has its own tale to tell, and for us, the story of New York's time-worn, generational mom-and-pop stores is an important part of what makes it a unique and remarkable place. Yet unfortunately, the neighborhood shops where New Yorkers buy a cup of coffee, the morning newspaper, or a loaf of bread; where they get their shoes repaired or a haircut, or purchase anything they could ever want or need, are becoming increasingly threatened.

The idea to thoroughly document small stores came about when we were photographing the city's streets for a project involving the graffiti art scene in the late 1990s. Our work took us to all corners of New York City as we traveled not only through Manhattan but to distant neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. We would often return to the same streets, sometimes months or even weeks later, and despite the short time frame between visits, we noticed that some blocks looked drastically different. Many stores with charming hand-painted and neon signage had closed and the whole look and feel of the area had changed; much of its individuality and character had faded away. We made it our mission to meticulously catalog these independently owned businesses when we first began to notice the alarming rate at which they were disappearing. Today, over 80 percent of the stores we photographed for our first book on the subject, *Store Front: The Disappearing Face of New York*, published in 2008, have vanished. Even with our follow-up volume, *Store Front II: A History Preserved*, which was published in 2015, nearly half of the stores we photographed have already closed.

This book is arranged into five main chapters corresponding to the five boroughs of New York City: Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. We have also loosely organized our photos by neighborhood within each borough, and every neighborhood included is briefly described

at the start of each chapter. The location of each store front—cross streets and neighborhood—is captioned below the image, along with the year the photograph was taken. The boundaries of New York's neighborhoods are in flux, and sometimes disputed; we've relied upon Kenneth T. Jackson's *The Encyclopedia of New York City* to delineate the city's neighborhoods and map our work.

When selecting the photos for this publication, we knew we had to include store fronts that we photographed in the 2000s, some of which are no longer in business but are so fondly remembered, while also bringing in updated photos of older store fronts still in business, reflecting what their facades look like today. We also chose to include many previously unpublished photos of store fronts that continue to play vital roles in their neighborhoods.

Throughout all five boroughs there are numerous distinct regions. But the small stores that make up each area, contributing to the spirit and cultural diversity of the streets, have been threatened by economic pressures, the takeover by chain stores with their uniform branding, and rapidly changing demographics. The local store has always been a foothold for new immigrants, a comfortable place where familiar languages are spoken and traditional food is served. These shops are lifelines for their communities, vital to the residents who depend on them for a multitude of needs. When these shops fail, the neighborhood itself is affected.

We hope that our project acts as an artistic intervention to help draw attention to and preserve the small shops whose existence is essential to the distinctive, colorful atmosphere of the city's streets.

MANHATTAN

When most people envision New York, they think of Manhattan, the smallest in area of the city's five boroughs. Manhattan is a long finger-shaped island, surrounded by the Harlem River to the north and north-east, the East River to the east, the Upper New York Bay to the south, and the Hudson River to the west. It is the oldest and densest of all the boroughs and contains the city's most famous attractions, buildings, and cultural institutions.

Most of Manhattan is easy to navigate because of the well-executed grid plan of 1811 that imposed a kind of waffle-iron system of order on the streets north of Houston Street. Twelve major avenues, each 100 feet

wide, run north and south through uptown and downtown, and most are numbered. Fifth Avenue divides the east side from the west side, with 1st Avenue all the way to the east and 12th Avenue all the way to the west. Broadway is an exception to the rule, as it is the only major avenue that doesn't run strictly vertical, but cuts a diagonal path across the island. Streets intersecting the avenues at right angles run east and west between the East River and the Hudson River and are numbered consecutively as they proceed uptown from Houston Street. The grid plan, however, does not apply to many neighborhoods south of 14th Street, including SoHo, TriBeCa, and Greenwich Village, which were constructed before engineers instituted the plan.



BELOW 14TH STREET

GREENWICH VILLAGE — EAST VILLAGE — SOHO — LOWER EAST SIDE (including NOLITA, LITTLE ITALY, CHINATOWN) — TRIBECA

The area of Manhattan bounded to the north by 14th Street, to the east by the East River, to the south by New York Harbor, and to the west by the Hudson River, is commonly known as “downtown.” At one point in time, this southern tip of Manhattan was New York, as everything north of 14th Street was farmland and wilderness. Downtown encompasses many diverse neighborhoods.

Greenwich Village is bounded to the north by 14th Street, to the east by 4th Avenue and the Bowery, to the south by West Houston Street, and to the west by the Hudson River. By the late 1930s it was known as a bohemian enclave, and during the 1950s it became a center for the Beat Generation. Despite widespread gentrification and escalating real estate values, Greenwich Village—which is historically known for embracing the artistic and unconventional—still retains some of its countercultural vibe.

The **East Village** is bounded to the north by 14th Street, to the east by Avenue D, to the south by East Houston Street, and to the west by the Bowery and 3rd Avenue. Starting in the 1830s, large numbers of German immigrants moved into the area. But, when the wealthiest families left in the early 1900s and moved uptown to Yorkville, Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the overcrowded tenements of the Lower East Side moved in. In the 1960s, the area changed radically when intellectuals and artists who were being priced out of Greenwich Village began moving east. In the 1970s, drugs brought about a general decline, and a massive abandonment of housing resulted. The area’s Spanish-speaking population increased throughout the 1980s, and by the ’90s, it had become home to the largest community of Ukrainians outside Ukraine. Today, the East Village is a thriving, diverse neighborhood.

SoHo, an area whose name is an abbreviation for “South of Houston,” is bounded to the north by Houston Street, to the east by Crosby Street, to

the south by Canal Street, and to the west by 6th Avenue. In the mid-1800s it became known for its factories, warehouses, and large retail businesses, a number of whose buildings were constructed from cast iron with elaborate ornamentation. However, the neighborhood suffered economically in the early 1900s, after many businesses moved uptown to 5th Avenue. Between 1960 and 1970, artists seeking low rents and large spaces for their studios and living quarters transformed SoHo by converting the empty warehouses and manufacturing spaces. During the 1980s, the area became one of the city’s trendiest neighborhoods, and many of the artists who had reclaimed it were no longer able to afford the increasing rents brought about by gentrification.

The **Lower East Side** is a large region of lower Manhattan bounded to the north by East Houston Street, to the east by the East River, to the south by Fulton and Franklin Streets, and to the west by Pearl Street and Broadway. Within its boundaries are the neighborhoods of **NoLiTa** (known as such due to its geographical location “North of Little Italy”), **Little Italy**, and **Chinatown**. The Lower East Side has a multi-ethnic history as the first home for many immigrants seeking a better life for their families in the United States: initially it was the Irish and the Germans, followed by the Italians and Eastern European Jews, and finally various Latino and Asian immigrants.

TriBeCa, which stands for “Triangle Below Canal Street,” occupies a trapezoidal region bounded to the north by Canal Street, to the east by Broadway, to the south by Murray Street, and to the west by the Hudson River. The area, which once contained a fruit and produce market as well as warehouses for the dry goods, textile, and mercantile industries, has since transformed into one of the city’s most fashionable residential neighborhoods, lined with shops, restaurants, and bars. It is largely made up of former industrial buildings that have been transformed into high-end lofts and apartments.















