

From the Planners' Bookshelf...

How Paris Became Paris, The Invention of the Modern City.

Joan DeJean, Bloomsbury, New York, 2014.

Highlights.

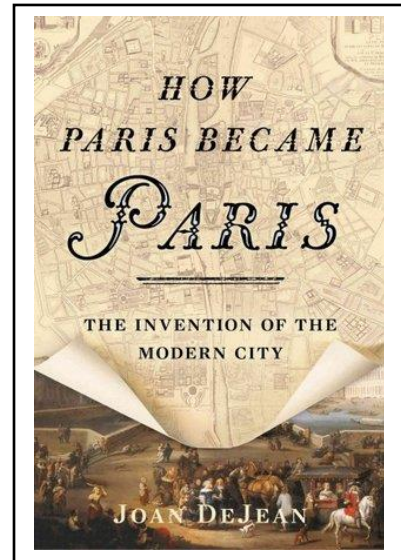
Ms. DeJean presents a fascinating story of transformation; a story so detailed and engaging that the workings of the invention process can be readily seen. The three French monarchs who activated the change are alive in their times with their ambitions out front and personal. A few catalyst events created an environment that synergistically embraced quality infrastructure and a unique residential architecture that became its own style with colors, materials and an aesthetic attitude about places and lifestyle. The story is about three generations of French Kings devoted to a single objective; building the most magnificent city in the world.

The catalytic projects were: The Pont Neuf of Henry IV; Place Royale started by Henry IV and finished by his son Louis III; Louis XIII's Ile Saint Louis; and Louis XIV's creation of a linear garden and walking promenade that circled the City replacing the outdated defensive wall. These four projects, supported by myriads of other works, sustained a momentum of civic improvements for over 125 years with three generations of rulers that built a great city; a city that became a modern city.

The author has many points to her story. Her integration of the social, economic, fashion, romance and aesthetic aspects of the City's planning and development paints a holistic and visceral picture of not only what happened, but why; and how it felt. She also is emphatic that the transformation took place long before the more renowned Baron Haussmann put his mark on the City; long before!

The main message is that the result was intentional. Given that three 16th and 17th century French kings had nearly total control of property, resources and the economy, along with an enormous budget, so did many other monarchs throughout the world. In France, this power was used to create an environment with social, economic and physical aspects that yearned for a higher state of being. Without ignoring the "have and have not" conditions that were probably severe, the general attitude of the regents tended to open systems...parks and promenades that anyone could enjoy.

[Highlights](#)
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Reign of the French Kings Who Transformed Paris 1589 – 1715

Henry IV	1589 – 1610
Louis XIII	1610 – 1643
Louis XIV	1643 - 1715

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How Paris Became Paris Checklist

A strong, single vision sustained over three generations of Kings [1589 to 1715] created Paris. The vision persisted from Henry IV's Pont Neuf to the 1660 decree announcing Louis XIV's signature style in urban planning: to open Paris up and make its streets wider. In his concept, the model street was straight, connected, lit, clean, wide and aligned with other streets. The Parisian business model for the improvements engaged the wealthiest businessmen by creating grandiose royal visions largely financed by private investments. In 1676, Louis XIV commissioned a new map from architects Bullet and Blondel; the map hung in City Hall and was still being followed in 1715. Paris became a cultural and pleasure city of the world on purpose. Goals were set and attained.

The factors were:

1. **Great architecture;** Distinctive architecture of private residences; residential architecture, uniform in design and gleaming in what was already seen as characteristic white stone, newly invented balconies, buildings laid out on generous parcels of land and facing wider and straighter streets...plus views of water, specifically the Seine.
2. **Bridges** with views of the water rather than the conventional design of the times that includes housing and shops on both sides of the bridge. 'Pont Neuf was the first major city bridge built without houses lining both sides. Henry IV, unlike any of his predecessors, laid out social objectives for the bridge.
3. **The place, or city square,** became an open, public space, surrounded by buildings. This modern city square "helped Paris become Paris". The social success of Place Royale was intentional. Place Royale had three basic goals: "1) to adorn Paris, 2) to provide a setting for public ceremonies, and 3) to give Parisians a recreational space".
4. **Display** was a specific objective of the streets and parks. "Paris was invented as a place of 'grandeur,' a new kind of a 'wonder of the world,' famous for its streetlights and its boulevard and its romance with the Seine – and its fast-paced pedestrian life." Fashion, money and romance became an essential part of the story of Paris. New words that arose were: "financier, nouveaux riche, millionaire, fashion, coquette and gold digger".
5. **Streets** were widening, first to promote improved traffic flow, but later justified as the new way to ornament his city of Paris to make Paris the most beautiful city in the world.
6. **Boulevards and avenues** were created for pleasure walking and public display. The street became prominent with lighting, cobblestones, cleanliness, day and night shopping.
7. **Sidewalks** were places for people to walk for pleasure and display the latest fashion, money and romance.
8. **Urban infrastructure** like mail delivery, public transportation, street lights and street cleaning became common.

Source: *How Paris Became Paris*, DeJean as summarized by *wck planning*.

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Pont Neuf was opened to all; it created popular views of the Seine River. Promenades were public spaces that accommodated everyone. The economic system was likewise opened, “rags to riches” stories happened. The society enabled people to rise above their born station. Openness in all aspects of life epitomized the Parisian social and economic systems that were unique in the 17th century.

Implications for the American City.

Intentional actions are the critical factors in city planning to create a pleasant and prosperous place for people to live. “By 1672, street widening, first promoted as a way to improve traffic flow, was being justified in a new way.” “His majesty wishes to ornament his city of Paris to make Paris the most beautiful city in the world.” [p101] The three kings all wanted to create a unique place where the city itself was a monument. [p2] Ms. DeJean’s observations important for contemporary city planners:

- Paris became a cultural and pleasure city of the world on purpose. Goals were set and attained.
- “There was, to begin with, something found only in great urban centers, great architecture.” [p13]
- Features of the physical setting, invented during these times are:
 - Distinctive architecture of private residences.
 - Bridges with views of the water rather than the conventional design of the times that includes housing and shops on both sides of the bridge. ‘Pont Neuf was the first major city bridge built without houses lining both sides.’ [p22] Henry IV, unlike any of his predecessors, laid out social objectives for the bridge.
 - Sidewalks, boulevards, mail delivery, public transportation and street lighting were among the revolutionary urban technologies [p122] along with the prominence of the street, the advent of the balcony and the city square. [p223]
 - The *place* became an open, public space, surrounded by buildings. [p45] This modern city square “helped Paris become Paris”. [p46] The social success of Place Royale was intentional.
 - Streets designed for pleasure, walking and shopping, including nighttime shopping enabled by the sidewalks, the street lights and shop lights. Cobblestones became uniquely Parisian. Street cleaning was an innovation to promote the pleasure of walking to the “well heeled.”
 - “Paris was invented as a place of ‘grandeur,’ as Colbert [the City’s chief planner] had wanted, but also a new kind of a ‘wonder of the world,’ famous for its streetlights and its boulevard and its romance with the Seine – and its fast-paced pedestrian life.” [p19]
- Place Royale had three basic goals: “1) to adorn Paris, 2) to provide a setting for public ceremonies, and 3) to give Parisians a recreational space”. [p48]
- “Residential architecture, uniform in design and gleaming in what was already seen as characteristic white stone, buildings laid out on generous parcels of land and facing wider and straighter streets...” plus views of water, specifically the Seine. [p76]
- Even though the absolute monarch with near absolute power had a generous treasury, the business model for the improvements engaged the wealthiest businessmen. “This is the earliest example of a phenomenon characteristic of Paris’ reinvention: grandiose royal visions largely financed by private investments.” [p46]

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- “That 1660 decree announced Louis XIV’s signature style in urban planning: open Paris up, make its streets wider.” [p98] His concept of a model street had streets that were straight, connected, lit, clean, wide and aligned with other streets. [p100]
- In 1676, Louis XIV commissioned a new map from architects Bullet and Blondel. The map hung in City Hall and was still being followed in 1715.” [104]
- Fashion, money and romance became an essential part of the story of Paris. [p142] New words that arose were: “financier, nouveaux riche, millionaire, fashion, coquette and gold digger.” [p223]

In the author’s conclusion, Paris was much more than a collection of buildings or a center of commerce, “Paris was instead a revolutionary kind of capital, one whose fabric encouraged residents to step out of their homes and spend time in its streets, there they mixed and mingled; Parisians all and part of the same crowd.” [p223].

A great story of how a city was invented with a specific goal in mind...
to be the most magnificent city in the world.

Audio Interview with the Author.



NPR Summary

“Joan DeJean documents the century-long transformation of Paris from a medieval center to the modern city that is recognized today, revealing how the Parisian urban model was actually invented in the 17th century, when leaders tore down fortifications, created public parks and constructed streets and bridges.” Listen in at: <http://www.npr.org/books/titles/283526040/how-paris-became-paris-the-invention-of-the-modern-city>

A Published Review.

The Washington Post

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

REVIEW: ‘How Paris Became Paris’ By Joan DeJean and ‘Paris at the End of the World’ by John Baxter, reviewed by **Stephane Kirkland** May 9

“Each facet of Paris’ long and varied history is captivating in a different way. Two new, richly researched books explore aspects of the city’s path in pursuit of the elusive question of just what gives Paris its inimitable character.

“Well before we had anything resembling a city on our shores, Paris was defining core aspects of what we still regard as modern urban culture. In “How Paris Became Paris,” Joan DeJean presents the city’s role as a precursor of urban modernity by taking us to the 17th century, a decisive period of change for the city.

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“One of the milestones in the emergence of an urban culture came in the summer of 1606, when Parisians witnessed the opening of the freshly built Pont Neuf, or New Bridge. For the first time, people were able to walk, ride and drive over what was not just a new bridge, but a new type of bridge. It was an engineering feat, a broad structure suited to heavy traffic and therefore able to serve as the first real artery between the two banks, with a stop on the Île de la Cité in between. It was the first Parisian bridge built without houses, affording views of the water from the deck. It featured a broad space for pedestrians to circulate, elevated and protected from vehicle traffic by high stone curbs. Most important, it was not just utilitarian: It was treated as a place for urban civility and exchange, and it had a small square with a statue of the king, Henri IV, on horseback.

“This audacious bridge was only one of the projects that marked the emergence of a new kind of city during the reigns of Henri IV and Louis XIII. Two major urban developments of the time, the Place Royale (today's Place des Vosges) and the Île Saint-Louis, each with an ordered layout and new amenities, contributed to the formation of the urban ideal that Paris was beginning to embody.” Read more at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/review-how-paris-became-paris-by-joan-dejean-and-paris-at-end-of-the-world-john-baxter/2014/05/09/ba2db352-c972-11e3-95f7-7ecdde72d2ea_story.html

PLANETIZEN

Book Review: 'How Paris Became Paris'

Tuesday, August 12, 2014 - 5:00am PDT by

[JOSH STEPHENS](#)

[Urban Development](#), [Europe](#)

"How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City," by Joan DeJean, is full of creative insights on the symptoms of urban modernity as well as bold statements about how Paris came to be one of the world's great cities. Read more at:

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/70764>