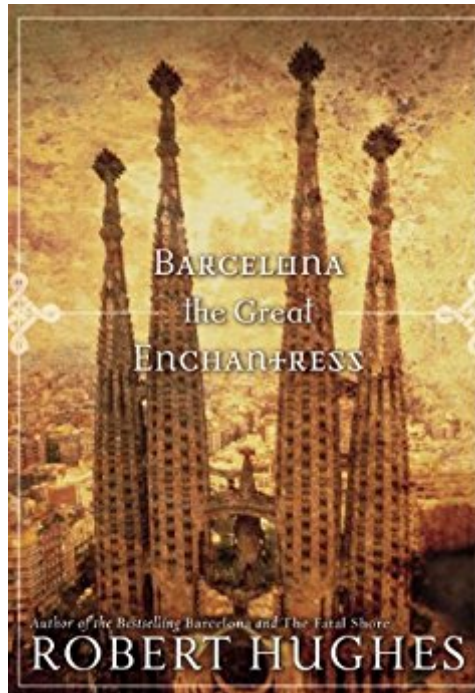




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Barcelona The Great Enchantress (Directions)



Synopsis

Beginning with a vivid description of his wedding in the splendid medieval ceremonial chamber in Barcelona's city hall, Hughes launches into a lively account of the history, art, and architecture of the storied city. He tells of architectural treasures abounding in 14th-century Barcelona, establishing it as one of Europe's great Gothic cities, while Madrid was hardly more than a cluster of huts. The city spawned such great artists as Antoni Gaudi, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Salvador Dali, and Pablo Casals. Hughes's deep knowledge of the city is evident—but it's his personal reflections of what Barcelona, its people, and its storied history and culture have meant to him over the decades that sets Barcelona the Great Enchantress apart from all others' books.

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Customer Reviews

As I travel to Spain more, I read less books about food, tours, and Spanish verbs, and more about Spanish history. While many of the books I've come across cover the history of Spain in a fairly broad manner, this book focuses almost exclusively on Barcelona. When many people think of Barcelona history, they might be inclined to think Gaudi and post-Franco. This book reminds us that

there is much more to the story than this. Barcelona has somewhat of a troubled history, with ample turbulence and strife. Somehow, it has managed to grow (morph?) into the city so many of us love. History does repeat itself, however, which makes one think how Barcelona will fare given a) the economic crisis in Europe (and in Spain, in particular), and b) that Barcelona and broader Catalan will have quite a fight on its hand if it aggressively pursues its independence, as some have proposed. Anyhow, this book is written from the perspective of a man who grew to love Barcelona, and he therefore did his research on the place. He mostly keeps his opinions out of it, but his direct experiences--which I wish he would have referenced more of--help paint a picture of the city, past and (mostly) present. Those who travel to Barcelona--or might in the future--will appreciate this book, as it rounds out the story in ways that guidebooks can't. In turn, it makes for a richer experience for the traveler. Thank you for making this available on Kindle. Good read.

This is one of the most engaging books about a city that I've ever read. It is not a travel guide, but if you read it before or whilst you are visiting Barcelona, your visit will be enriched a hundred-fold. Lovers of architecture will be delighted by Hughes's beautifully detailed descriptions of Barcelona's utterly fantastic buildings, from the city's earliest edifices through the incomparable works of Gaudi and Domenech. If you have been there, his descriptions will transport you back. Barcelonaphiles will delight in this book and if Barcelona's charms have so far eluded you, there is no better place to start loving it than here.

Hughes' short work conveys an admirably passionate relationship to a city that is disappearing and being replaced by another that is perhaps just as deserving of passion- and if not that, affection. The old Barcelona is one that he conveys something of, without burdening the book, and the reader with nostalgia. Barcelona is a city of many pasts, and some of them have been better than others as he presents it. Much of the book is focused on architecture, which makes perfect sense. But less satisfying is the failure to focus on the political importance of Barcelona, as an outpost of nascent democracy which, at the same time parochially clung to traditions of equality that are still vaguely medieval. This is touched on, but not much, and when there's a building to talk about Hughes prefers that. What's frustrating are the undrawn connections between politics and art. Perhaps this is because architecture - the supreme expression of the Catalunyan spirit in Hughes' book - is something that the wealthy build, and in times of trouble, the poor pull down. Architecture is not a populist form of expression. And Hughes does cause jaws to drop with his accounts of occasional eruptions of popular rage that result in not a few eradication of past monuments. He takes this in

admirable stride, remarking that the mass appropriation of church property in the city left open the door to the creation of many a more meaningful, if less ostentatious achievement: the Boqueria, of instance, which is one of several times where Hughes brings in a third theme, food. His love of the culture of eating and cooking in Barcelona acts to ground things that sometimes threaten to get lost in the desire to balance history, architecture and aesthetics , and politics. I'm heading to Barcelona for the first time in two weeks, and I read this book in a few hours. I think it has done a great deal of good in preparing me to appreciate the city. Having read some Spanish history, I knew more of the historical details of the colonial period than Hughes provides: this makes me think I may read his longer work on Barcelona next. The brevity if the book demands compromise: if not ideal, Hughes has done good enough job in his task, and I can recommend this to those seeking the appreciative introduction it provides.

A must read for anyone completing visiting Barcelona and/or is interested in its history. This is a condensed version of his longer book on Barcelona which i have not read. This book is extremely readable and reads like a story.

This book will give you a sense of the Catalan spirit and personality. The author's professional interest in art focuses the book more heavily in that direction, but it is not overladen with details. It will give you a sense of the atmospherics of Barcelona and some insight into who the Catalans are. Robert Hughes doesn't just travel to Barcelona; for at least 30 years it has been his second home and he has important friendships there. He has effectively adopted the city, and this book tells us why. I enjoyed the book; I learned more about Catalunya and the spirit of its people without being overburdened by too much historical detail. The author has a dry sense of humor that some might interpret as veering into arrogance; at this point he is a semi-cantankerous old man. But his joy in revealing his love for his adopted city is apparent.

Hughes makes architecture in Barcelona accessible. Great book to read if you're going to visit Barcelona, or if you're an architecture buff.

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