

Cities of the World

By **Stephan Fussel, Rem Koolhaas**

Taschen, \$200, 600 pages

Originally produced as six volumes between 1572 and 1617, *Cities of the World* was a monumental task at the time. Not only did it contain maps and bird's eye drawings of every major European city; it also included towns and cities from Africa, Asia, and Central America. Beyond just a catalog of maps, it contained extensive commentary about the cities and their importance at the time. More than a hundred artists contributed to the project, including drawings of local culture, dress, or activities to help the viewer see life elsewhere at the time.

The book is physically imposing; one of Taschen's XL projects that opens to more than a foot-and-a-half-tall and two-feet-wide when opened, with 600 pages and more than 500 city plans and maps (two of which fold out to more than 4 feet across). The art was reproduced from an almost perfect surviving set, and the drawings and engravings leap off the pages. Not all of the original text was translated, but the parts that were give the modern reader a unique tour of the 16th Century world. As is common with many Taschen books, the text is printed in English, French, and German, allowing international sales without the need for separate printings.

One of the interesting things to do with *Cities of the World* is to compare the maps from 400 years ago with modern maps from the same cities. While many things have changed, you can still see that many cities still have the same flow to their streets. One might think that the market for books like this would be highly limited until you actually see it for yourself. As you pore over it, looking at the details in the maps and drawings, your mind begins to rearrange your bookshelves, figuring out the best way to display it. The assumption is not, "can I afford to get this," but, "what do I need to cut back on to afford this?"

