



Call of the Mall: The Geography of Shopping by the Author of Why We Buy

By Paco Underhill



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The author of the international bestseller *Why We Buy*—praised by *The New York Times* as “a book that gives this underrated skill the respect it deserves”—now takes us to the mall, a place every American has experienced and has an opinion about.

Paco Underhill, the Margaret Mead of shopping and author of the huge international bestseller *Why We Buy*, now takes us to the mall, a place every American has experienced and has an opinion about. The result is a bright, ironic, funny, and shrewd portrait of the mall—America’s gift to personal consumption, its most powerful icon of global commercial muscle, the once new and now aging national town square, the place where we convene in our leisure time.

It’s about the shopping mall as an exemplar of our commercial and social culture, the place where our young people have their first taste of social freedom and where the rest of us compare notes. *Call of the Mall* examines how we use the mall, what it means, why it works when it does, and why it sometimes doesn’t.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Paco Underhill has a genius for retail. As a follow-up to the bestseller *Why We Buy*, he has written an arch entertaining ethnography of the shopping mall. Energized by two dripping cinnabons, Underhill guides readers on a walking tour to encounter senior mall walkers, teen jean and hoodie shoppers, shoe fetishists, six second sales greeters, kiosk vendors and food court diners.

He nails our ambivalence about indoor shopping saying, "the mall, like television, is an easy American target for self-loathing. We look at the mall and wonder: is this the best we could do?" He gets the devil in the details with wonderful riffs about global malls, parking spaces, the "free" gift with cosmetics, retail tribalism (Nordstrom versus Ann Taylor, Pac Sun versus Abercrombie) and why CD and bookstores have returned to city streets. But Underhill doesn't whine. When he critiques multiplex theatres, raunchy bathrooms or the absence of coatrooms, he also offers witty suggestions. For example, how to turn a well-appointed restroom into a profit center.

Underhill is convinced that online shopping and fatigued boomer shoppers are leading to the "post-mall era." This kind of prediction makes *The Call of the Mall* a great read. It is a smart, observant meditation--one that suggests the past and the future of our shopping culture. --*Barbara Mackoff*

From Publishers Weekly

Bestselling "retail anthropologist" Underhill (*Why We Buy*) talks readers through every aspect of malls, from the first glance at their ugly exteriors along the side of the road to the struggle to remember where the car's parked. Although he offers glimpses of shopping centers around the world, the bulk of this excursion takes place in a mall a few miles outside Manhattan, as Underhill and a rotating cast of companions wander through stores looking for various items, commenting about what does (and doesn't) work about the shopping (and social) experience. The colloquial narration works well, even under potentially strained circumstances ("I need to use the bathroom, and you're coming with me"), although the casual recognition of gender differences in shopping patterns sometimes leads to observations that that readers may find off-putting, like comments on the physical assets of "fat and curvy" women. Underhill clearly revels in mall culture, though he looks upon it with a sharply critical eye; among the biggest complaints: lousy maps and the lack of shopping carts. No detail is too small to escape his attention; if one ever wondered why clothing racks always seem stuffed to capacity, for example, he explains it's because rising real estate prices have largely eliminated storerooms. Some might ask how much detail shoppers really want about how stores entice them to buy, but any nagging doubts will be swept away by the engaging manner in which Underhill passes along the keen insights he's gained through years of retail consulting.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School--Underhill takes readers on an insightful tour of a typical Saturday at a large, regional mall. He examines the routes there, the shopping center itself, the stores, food, entertainment, ambience, and the customers. He shows why the mall is the way it is and how it could be improved. He provides insight into how the stores are arranged, how they display merchandise, and the different ways that men and women respond to this environment. Written in the first person, the book is light and breezy in style and includes conversations with salespeople, shoppers, and experts in retail sales. According to Underhill, "Teenagers are the ones whose love for the mall is pure and constant and unshadowed by doubt or ambivalence"; by reading

this book, they will be able to look more critically at the forces that are at work as they shop.—*Jane S. Drabkin, Chinn Park Regional Library, Woodbridge, VA*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christina McMullen:

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