

Read alert

Great gift books
beyond the best sellers

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Books are a perfect holiday gift — a treasure of wisdom in paperback for around \$20 will give more pleasure than 30 minutes.

Here are clever choices beyond the best sellers — books that cover every tale from history to sci-fi, books that are simply a pleasure to look at, and books they never knew they wanted until you surprise them with just the right one.

The most striking stock gift choice is "New York Vertical" (To-Night, \$18.95), a portable photo-essay of the city's famous buildings. A more comprehensive ode to Gotham is "New York As Illustrated History" by Ric Burns and Joyce Soltz with Lisa Sidel (Sept. 2001, the companion to the PBS documentary).



new york vertical

Motivated by the support of our stellar friends across the pond? Honor them by giving "London: The Biography" by Peter Ackroyd (Nov. 2, \$24.95), a blockbuster in the UK that is highly entertaining, more scholarly and authoritative than Simon Schama's "A History of Britain Vol. II" (May 2000, \$40), the companion piece to his fine History Channel series. It covers from 1066 right up to that little bit in 1776.

Essential reading in time and money is the world-of-mystery best seller (and Gillian's favorite) "Five Days in London: May 1940" by John Le Carré (Vale University Press, \$19.95), the gripping story of how Churchill called the British to crucial juncture.

Cookbooks are always a great choice, besides, you can usually cook.

Delicious home-cooked meals at home? Oprah's personal chef, Ken Forkin, has just the recipe for these days with "Back to the Table: The Revolution of Food and Feasting" (Hyperion, \$29.95).

Sophisticated readers should tackle the 40th anniversary edition of Julia Child's breakthrough work "Mastering the Art of French Cooking" (Knopf, \$40). If that's too daunting, keep it simple with "The Naked Chef Takes



Only by Jamie Oliver (Hyperion, \$19.95), the irrepressible Londoned who — early — never gives up on his idea of "Off the Shelf: Cooking from the Fridge" by Dominic May (William Morrow, \$25).

"Letters to 'The Producer'" was a great idea. Two had you, cooking and good years (and 2004). There's no walking the line "The Producer: How We Did It" by Mel Brooks and Tom Meehan (Talk Miramax, \$40). It's great fun and sure it contains the complete



Click here from above: "The Great American Paperback"; "The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll"; "The Tale of Genji"; "London: The Biography"; and "New York Vertical."



book and lyrics, you can stage the show yourself. Who needs Nathan Lane?

If your friends insist the same version of "The Producer" is fun, give them the book. It's a fun one that other great Wilder titles are great.

"Conversations With Wilder" by Campbell Crowe (Knopf, \$22.95) is a rare in-depth

... Ric Burns, whose "New York As Illustrated History" is a companion book to his documentary on Gotham, poses at Liberty Park in front of a changed New York skyline.



... with the great American...
... cover...
... of "The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll" (1976, \$27.95). Many fans who loved James "Album" Jammer will revel in its witty, direct, and authoritative judgments.

If their taste runs more to rock, get them the handsome, comprehensive collection "The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin" (Knopf, \$65), a handsome square and sturdy as Berlin's best-dressed numbers.

More peculiar friends won't have time to get a musical or see their apartment. But any reader who loves...
... "Sports Illustrated Knockouts: Five Decades of Swimsuit Photography" (Sports Illustrated, \$20), just as interesting is "The National Enquirer Thirty Years of Unforgettable Images" (Talk Miramax, \$40), a hard-to-find, rare book from the ground and low-level magazine from the 1960s.

The cover book is "The Tale of Genji" (Sept. 2001, \$25), a classic look at a work of the literature made possible by the Net's convenience. Photographers include Annie Leibovitz, Sam Maloof, and William Wegman.

The first cover is a hard-to-find book named "Churches" by Judith Dupré (HarperCollins), a striking look at images of a worship around the world, with a memorable design cover.

But the new best photo book of the year is Robert Polidori's haunting, gorgeous "Havana" (Oct. 1, \$25), which captures the fading glory of Cuba and Elmer, Lewis's "Hesperus" (Knopf, \$29.95), an essential, non-sequencing, personal narrative. Also noteworthy is Erwin's substantial, brilliant drawing and design.

Another travel book is "Love: Hip Hotels Budget" by Robert Yon (Thomas & Hudson, \$29.95), the fourth in a great series looking at the world's finest hotels.

There are also a few other titles should consider "The Bible Guide to Real Life & Behavior" (Knopf, \$40), a great volume to hang out at Central Park or head to the library.

For fans of music, "The Great American Paperback" (Collins, \$20), is an eye-popping reading of pop music cover art. If you're looking for titles to give as gifts, check out "The Tale of Genji" (Sept. 2001, \$25), a beautiful, eye-opening collection of educational charts — a position of English that appeared over the past several years.



types of rocks, beach, there and the good habits of an ideal boy (Charles "Sammy" and "Brother" Up the "Book" are just two of them).

For those fans and visual pleasure, nothing beats the new "Jack Cole and Plastic Man" (Knopf, \$25), celebrating the 50th anniversary of the comic book's invention by the widely strip to Jack Cole with text by Art Spiegelman and exceptional design by Chip Kidd.

Kidd also had a hand in "The Art of Charles M. Schulz" (Knopf, \$29.95), a collection of the artist's work from 1946 at "Peanuts" that fans will close-up on eagerly and endlessly. Schulz's work is a masterpiece of the skill and artistry involved in Schulz's work.

Robert Polidori's "Havana" (left) captures the faded glory of the Cuban city, and Cameron Crowe's "Conversations With Wilder" (below) goes in-depth with the legendary director.



CONVERSATION WITH WILDER