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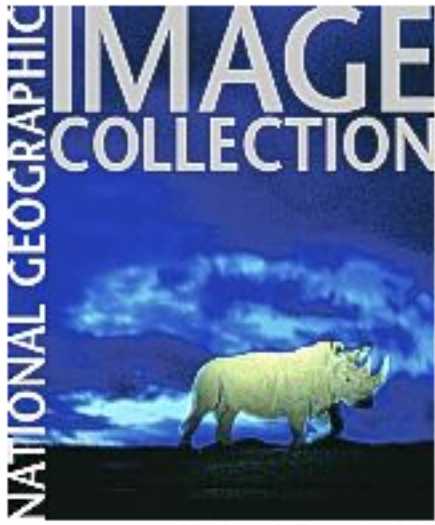
Mackenzie Carpenter is a
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Coffee-table books let you explore from
Pittsburgh to Paris

Wednesday, December 09, 2009
By Mackenzie Carpenter, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

It's a mighty depressing world out there this holiday season, but for those looking for diversion -- or just a great decorating accessory -- consider the coffee-table book. Infinitely stackable, they're big, they're glossy and sometimes, they're even a great read. This year, as every year, there are hundreds to escape into, whether to a national park, a cozy Paris hotel or a Frank Lloyd Wright house.



"The Jazz Loft Project: Photographs and Tapes of W. Eugene Smith from 821 Sixth Avenue, 1957-1965," by Sam Stephenson. (Alfred A. Knopf, 256 pages; \$40). This is one of the must-have coffee-table books of the year, on top-10 lists everywhere, and there's a Pittsburgh connection. Mr. Stephenson was the co-curator of the stunning 2001 "Dream Street" exhibit of Mr. Smith's Pittsburgh photographs at the Carnegie Museum of Art. In this book, Mr. Stephenson described how the Life Magazine photographer, "devastated and depleted" by his unfinished Pittsburgh project, holes up in a Sixth Avenue building in 1957, that had become the hangout of jazz icons and junkies, recording it all, on camera and on tape.

"The National Parks: America's Best Idea, An Illustrated History," by Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns (Alfred A. Knopf; 404 pages; \$50). A beautifully designed companion to the gorgeous PBS series -- minus the soulful soundtrack, alas.

"Parisian Hideaways: Exquisite Rooms in Enchanting Hotels," by Casey O'Brien Blondes (Rizzoli; \$45). The ultimate escape book, for those planning a Paris trip who would rather stay at an elegant, off-the-beaten-path place than a big anonymous chain hotel. And if you can't afford that trip to Paris, you can always just read this book.

"The National Geographic Image Collection," by Leah Bendavid-Val, Michelle Anne Delaney and Maura Mulvihill (National Geographic Books, \$29.95). A stunning collection of photographs from the storied magazine's archives dating back to the 19th century. This book is already speeding up the best-seller lists.

"Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward," by Richard Cleary (Rizzoli; \$75). A companion book to this summer's exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, with newly commissioned contemporary photography, archival photography and detailed drawings of more than 200 projects. This is a book for the Frank Lloyd Wright connoisseur.

"The Football Book: Expanded Edition From the Editors of Sports Illustrated," (Sports Illustrated Books; \$29.95). You need another football book, right? You want to be reminded of last year's Super Bowl, not this year's playoff prospects, right? Read this book, which incorporates great photographs from SI's archives and some of the best sports writing ever produced -- from Frank DeFord, Roy Blount Jr., George Plimpton and Peter King -- during the past 55 years, and includes updates through the 2009 Super Bowl.

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