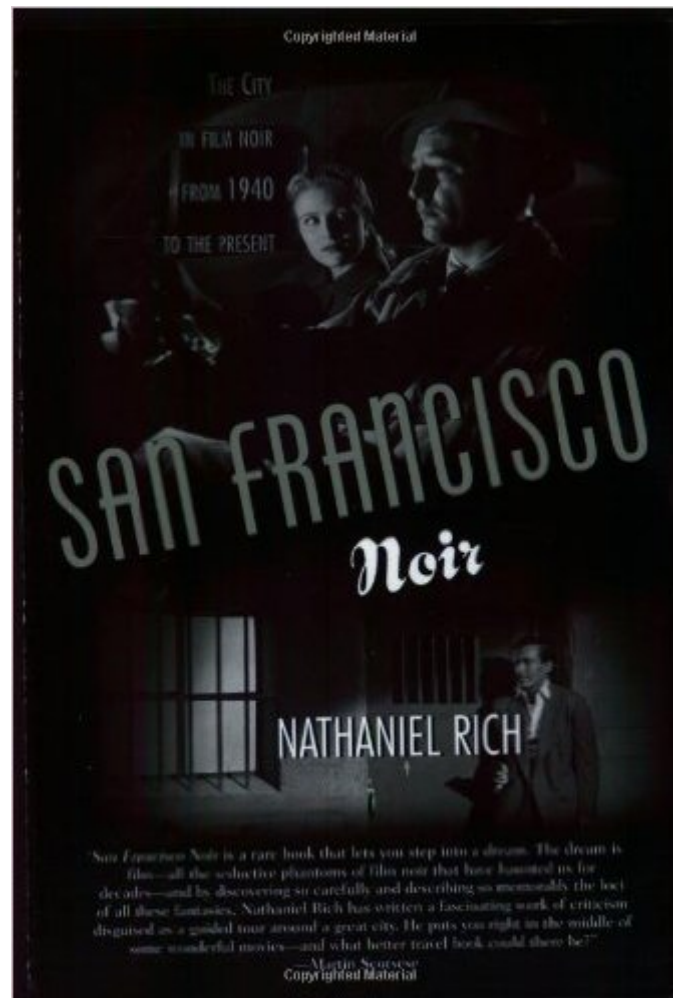


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# San Francisco Noir



## Synopsis

All cities have their secrets, but none are so dark as San Francisco's, the city that Ambrose Bierce famously described as "a point upon a map of fog." With its reputation as a shadowy land of easy vice and hard virtue, San Francisco provided the ideal setting for many of the greatest films noir, from classics like *The Maltese Falcon* and *Dark Passage* to obscure treasures like *Woman on the Run* and *D.O.A.*, and neo-noirs like *Point Blank* and *The Conversation*. Readers visit the Mission Dolores cemetery where James Stewart spied Kim Novak visiting Carlotta's grave in *Vertigo*; the Steinhart Aquarium, where a steamy love scene unfolded between Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth in *The Lady from Shanghai*; and the Kezar Stadium, where Clint Eastwood captures the serial killer, Scorpio, in a blaze of ghastly white light in *Dirty Harry*. In this guide to the great films noir and the locations where they were shot, the mythic noir city meets San Francisco's own dark past. With period film stills.

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## Customer Reviews

This is far more valuable than any travel guide I've read -- and most movie guides, for that matter. We all read novels or see movies set in particular cities and then find our hopes dashed when we go visit them. For instance: ever read *The Fortress of Solitude* and then book a hotel room in Times Square? Doesn't match up. Luckily, the author has collected all the bits and pieces of the film noir canon so that when you go to San Francisco you won't be running around confused. More than any other major American city, SF seems to have one dominant mood, one overarching spirit. These films embody that spirit, and by knowing them, you'll know the city. (Trust me, I grew up there.) On

top of this, the book is well-written and entertaining, even if you have no immediate travel plans. Highly recommended.

This book is very handy, but the author shows his disdain for movies he does not like, which causes him to miss the boat on a few. I feel obliged to say (beforehand) that his writing on the two movies I list has enlightened me on things I did not know, though I have studied these movies for years. I am not from SF, so I can only remark on what I have seen, and what I know. The movie "Hammett" may have been shot (mostly) on sound stage, but it does make use of a few real buildings that are still in existence today. He criticizes the stars acting abilities, though the actor was chosen to play Hammett in two different films - a rarity. In "Impact" there are a lot more bits of San Francisco that he fails to mention. There was Anna May Wong's running down the alley in Chinatown, views of the Ferry Building that were taken before the Embarcadero hid the view. Street corners and views of bridges abound. All of that said, I look at the book a lot. I consider it more valuable to my collection than "Footsteps in the Fog." which is about Hitchcock's SF and N. Cal.

Rich works any number of variations on a theme, and at first what seemed like a liability (the designer's rigid graphic scheme followed by what feels like an exact word count for every entry, no matter if the film is a great one or a lousy one) and makes it into a virtue. He is a skillful and persuasive prose writer, and his knowledge of these films is profound. Ok, there may be incidental errors here and there, as the other reviewers have indicated, but when you're reading his book you don't feel it. What's amazing is the strength of his central argument, that San Francisco is such a haunted place that right away it became one of the chief noir sites--early on, in 1940, during the so-called "gateway period," and even more astonishing, that despite the general death of noir when color took over general release in the late 1950s, noir has never really died in San Francisco, and the movies keep getting made on a regular basis. Noir experts may scoff at the idea of Schlesinger's PACIFIC HEIGHTS as a noir, but Rich shows us how it fits into the old "real estate noir" category of THE HOUSE ON TELEGRAPH HILL. Or David Fincher's THE GAME, or that crazy Richard Gere-Kim Basinger thriller FINAL ANALYSIS. Who knew? Yet somehow Nathaniel Rich, with his quiet, insistent exegesis, makes you believe. I haven't seen all of the films listed here, nor even seen all the locations, though I plan to take this book on my fist and make a tour soon of the ones I've missed. There are buildings we go by here in San Francisco, like that huge Art Deco pink marble slab up by Buena Vista Terrace, and we tell each other they were in this or that movie, VERTIGO or DARK PASSAGE, and yet is this a way of reassuring each other, or unsettling each

other? Can't find that building in this book by the way. Maybe it was just an "urban" legend. If ever I meet Nathaniel Rich, I'll tug at his sleeve till he's by my side on top of that hill and I'll point to it.

An excellent little guide not only to some great film noirs, but a very interesting guide to one of my favourite cities. San Francisco is one of the cleanest cities I have ever visited, but this book shows a grimy, gritty side that I'm sure exists somewhere out of sight of the tourist. If she does have a nasty side, I like to think it's hidden in the world of film noir. And yes, I've stood at the corner of Bush and Stockton and wondered why Sam Spade didn't go down to take a look at Miles Archer's body. And I've got the pictures to prove it! A very interesting little book that should interest both the film buff and the tourist. Give it a try.

Concise description of locations used in films noir shot in and around San Francisco, about three dozen films all together, with a decent bibliography and a brief guide to festivals and tours devoted to the subject. It's not as thorough as it might be. Take "Dirty Harry," shot in various places in the city as well as on the studio back lot in Hollywood. And what does Rich describe? Kezar Stadium, the place where Clint Eastwood stomps on Andy Robinson's wounded leg. Nothing about the final shoot out at the gravel mine or whatever it is, just across the bridge in Marin County. (It's now gone.) "The Black Bird" isn't included in the list of films being discussed. To make up for any inadequacies along that line, Rich does a very neat and perceptive analysis of each of the films themselves. He's perfectly candid, unkind where unkindness seems justified. At 167 pages it's a short book with lots of white space but it makes interesting reading, leaving some readers, myself included, wanting more.

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