

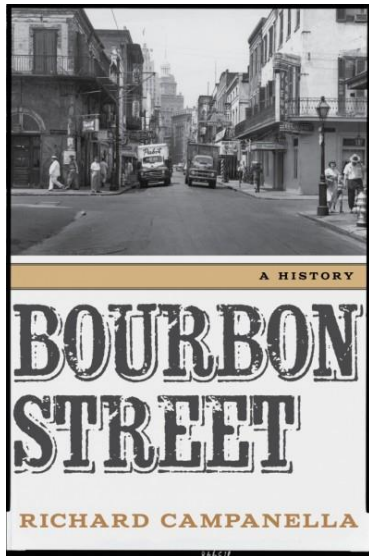
# Books for the design buff on your holiday list

By John King, SFGATE,

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The smartest book I've read this year about American cities is "Bourbon Street: A History," by Richard Campanella (Louisiana State University Press, 416 pages, \$35). New Orleans' epicenter of excess regarding which, writes the Tulane geography professor, "the right wags its finger, while the left looks down its nose."



What fascinates Campanella isn't the lurid goings-on – though there are meticulous descriptions of such practices as the tooter system — as much as the responses it provokes in an age where so-called authenticity is all the rage. That worldview recoils from Bourbon Street and so did Campanella. But then came the ravages of Hurricane Katrina, where the first place to shake off the deluge was, yes, that strip with its century-old cultural aim of keeping the customers satisfied, even if those customers were relief workers.

Even if you've never been to the French Quarter, "Bourbon Street" is a fascinating account of how urban cultures persist and evolve and are perceived. My only quibble: there's no mention of Bob Dylan's incoherent\_yet oddly beguiling tribute to the strip from the Basement Tapes.