



A GUIDE TO SOHO

Soho is synonymous with trend-setting art, shopping, and the buildings that comprise the Soho-Cast Iron Historic District, the largest concentration of cast-iron facades in the world. Browsing is free in the many galleries (most are closed on Sunday and Monday). Be on the lookout for famous faces, fashion photo shoots, and movie filming. Wear black and don't think of going too early (most stores aren't open before 11) and you'll fit right in.

Where is Soho?

"Soho" is shorthand for "South of Houston", a New York City neighborhood that is indeed south of Houston (pronounced "how-stun" here) Street, north of Canal, and between Sullivan and Lafayette Streets.

It's easy to get there

By Subway

C or E to Spring

N or R to Prince

6 to Spring or Bleecker

By Bus

M1, M5, M6

History

In 1848 James Bogardus built the first cast-iron building façade in what is now Tribeca. The technique soon became widespread as a fast, "fireproof," economical way to build elegant European-style buildings that imitated more expensive stone precursors. In an age before electricity, cast-iron allowed for large windows that admitted more light. Some buildings also used cast-iron for interior columns in order to create large interior spaces, for glass sidewalk vaults and stairways, and occasionally for an iron framework that was a precursor of today's steel skyscrapers.

The buildings were constructed by mixing and matching columns and door and window frames selected from a catalog. The elements were manufactured at a nearby foundry by casting iron into molds, and transported to the construction site, where they were quickly bolted together into a finished structure. Sometimes the cast iron was combined with brick (see Dean and DeLuca) or stone (see

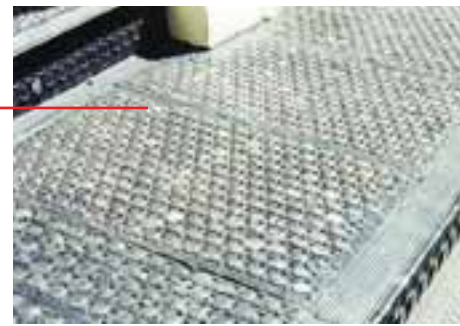


Canal Jean). The iron was painted in dusky colors (never white, which was too expensive). Details were highlighted in a contrasting color.

Originally built as light manufacturing spaces, warehouses, and department stores, many cast-iron buildings became artists' studios in the 1960s as artists moved into the light-filled lofts which easily accommodated the large canvases favored by the abstract expressionist movement. The artist-residents were followed by the trend-setting galleries, and soon by boutiques. These drew tourists and in the 80s real estate prices climbed. Many artists, galleries, and stores fled to Chelsea, Long Island City, parts of Brooklyn, and Hoboken, NJ.

Things to look for

- Buildings that use the same cast-iron foundry molds for their window and door frames.
- Iron grids filled with marble-like pieces of glass used for parts of sidewalks and steps. These glass



vaults allowed light into basement areas in pre-electricity NYC.

- Stamped tin used for ceilings, many of which have been restored and repainted. Tin was a cheap decorative way to finish ceilings and was often used in buildings in Soho, Greenwich Village, Chinatown and the Lower East Side.
- Street trees encased in modern cast-iron planters. Originally the cast-iron district didn't have many trees, and the by-the-books Landmarks people of today decreed that it wouldn't be historically accurate to plant any now, so this is the compromise.
- Belgian block streets, made from stone quarried in Vermont, a favorite for movie and advertising shoots.
- Fire escapes that give the area part of its special look.
- Sidewalk artists, craftspeople, and street vendors, especially on weekends.



Historic and other notable sites

1 West Broadway was the one-time main art gallery thoroughfare in Soho. It now marks the western edge of the main cast-iron area. On the northwest corner of Prince and West Broadway are two stores that epitomize the high and low ends of shopping in the neighborhood. In a small cheerfully decorated building at street level is Sally Hawkins Gallery, selling real jewelry by several different contemporary designers. Next door and downstairs on the Prince Street side is Girlprops, another decorated building crammed full of



bargain faux jewelry creations. Just north of the Hawkins Gallery are four small buildings running a gamut of post-modern design.

2 A mural (faded and peeling) by artist Richard Haas, on the corner of Prince and Greene, is painted to match the cast-iron front. Look for the real windows and the cat.

3 Prada, at Broadway and Prince, is a quintessential cast-iron building formerly restored to be the downtown branch of the Guggenheim, now a retail store with a remarkable interior by the hot Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas.

4 Further north on the same block is The New Museum of Contemporary Art (583 Broadway) with its cutting-edge exhibitions. The sidewalk includes a modern interpretation of the traditional glass vaults.

5 The Singer Building—561 Broadway. The fanciful green and red façade of this 12-story steel, glass and terra cotta loft building is a precursor of upper Park and Sixth Avenues' curtain walled buildings of 50 to 60 years later. Ernest Flagg was the architect of the 1902-1904 building with ironwork that suggests the decoration of early Singer sewing machines. On the first floor, Kate's Paperie sells paper of every description underneath a paper ceiling. The L-shaped building also has a façade on Prince, where its name is inscribed in iron.

6 The Scholastic Building—557 Broadway. Architect Aldo Rossi makes his very sturdy-looking building fit into the block by following the floor lines of the building to its south and picking up on the colors of the Singer Building to its north. The back entrance on Mercer has a different look but the same colors.

7 Greene Street from Canal to Houston is the most complete cast-iron street, with many restored buildings, Belgian block street paving and the fire escapes that together give the cast-iron district its distinctive character.





Between Spring and Prince is “Subway Map Floating on a New York Sidewalk,” a 1986 artwork by Françoise Schein embedded in the east sidewalk. This stylized subway map with north and south reversed uses elements from the glass vaults that allowed light into the basements and which can still be seen in their original context on the steps of number 103 across the street.

8 Haughwout building—488 Broadway at Broome, 1857.

This was the first cast-iron building to be officially declared a landmark, and is one of the finest, with 92 window frames on two facades. Modeled on Venetian palazzos and painted the original cream color, it was built for Eder V. Haughwout, a china and glassware importer. The elevator in the northern end of the Broadway side has a paneled cab and elaborate shaft, and is one of oldest operating elevators in the city. Mary Todd Lincoln bought china for the White House here.

9 10 Sullivan and Thompson Streets are more like parts of Greenwich Village than like the Soho cast iron district to their east. These charming streets are lined with small shops and restaurants, some on the ground floors of traditional tenement buildings. On Sullivan Street, named for Revolutionary War General John Sullivan, are two Federal-era houses. At 83–85 Sullivan is an 1819 building with original doorways, windows, and a wrought-iron stoop, and at 116, a Federal-style townhouse built in 1832 is notable for its elaborate entrance with unusual carved sidelights.



11 The New York City Fire Museum—278 Spring. Housed in a restored 1904 firehouse that was built to resemble an Italian Renaissance Palazzo, the Fire Museum collection includes artifacts from the late 18th century to the present, including an engine from the 1790s, tools, and clothing.

Shopping

12 Canal Jean Company—504 Broadway between Broome and Spring. A cast-iron first-floor façade with stone above. All 3 floors of youth-oriented inexpensive clothing have cast-iron Corinthian columns, tin ceilings, brick walls with various long-short patterns, and heavy sliding doors between areas. On the second and third floors you can see the thick arched brick walls that divided the building.

13 Leekan Designs—93 Mercer. Asian oddments including lanterns and lamps and a wondrous assortment of beads.



14 The Enchanted Forest—85 Mercer. A tiny toy store with a cast iron façade but a rustic look inside.

15 Broadway Panhandler—477 Broome between Wooster and Greene. A wide selection of kitchenware in a cast-iron building with a glass vault and steps outside and Corinthian columns and tin ceiling inside.

Culinary attractions

16 Space Untitled Espresso Bar—135 Greene. Light fare in a casual setting. Notice the old-fashioned heating units designed to surround the cast-iron columns, and the brick load-bearing side wall with arches.

17 Kelley and Ping—127 Greene. Asian cuisine in a casual loft setting with an open kitchen and a traditional tin ceiling.



18 Housing Works Used Book Café—126 Crosby between Prince and Houston. A quiet and inviting place for coffee with sandwiches and delicious desserts.

19 Savoy—70 Prince at Crosby. This is a stand-out among Soho’s many good middle-priced to expensive restaurants. The inventive menu of its chef-owner is always inspired by

the fresh seasonal and sometimes exotic offerings of the Union Square Greenmarket, the largest of New York City's farmer's markets. In a neighborhood of large buildings, the federal-style building is a remnant of a pre-cast-iron age.

20 Dean & DeLuca—560 Broadway at Prince. World-class ingredients and upscale take-out in one of the best cast-iron restorations. On New Year's Eve the line at the caviar counter extends into the cookware department.

21 Gourmet Garage—435 Broome. The working-class New Yorker's Dean & DeLuca that has earned its own following among restauranteurs and do-it-yourself cooks. All manner of prepared temptations to take-out. Outside features a glass vault sidewalk on 2 sides; inside are cast-iron Corinthian columns and a tin ceiling.

22 Sullivan Street

Bakery—73 Sullivan. With fabulous breads and pizza to go, this trendsetting establishment sets the standard for potato pizza as well as a rotating variety of other options.



Entertainment

Ohio Theatre—66 Wooster

Soho Playhouse—15 Vandam

Manhattan Ensemble Theatre—55 Mercer, 3rd Floor

Links

<http://www.nyctourist.com/soho1.htm>

<http://www.artseensoho.com/>

<http://www.nycfiremuseum.org>

<http://www.artseensoho.com/>

<http://www.newmuseum.org/>

<http://www.africanart.org/index.htm>

<http://www.canaljean.com/>

<http://www.leekandesigns.com/>

<http://www.housingworks.org/usedbookcafe/index.html>

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1/03
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About Big Apple Greeter

Established in 1992, Big Apple Greeter is a “welcome visitor” program whose aim is to introduce foreign and domestic visitors to a “New Yorker’s New York.” A large network of volunteer Greeters help visitors to feel welcome and comfortable and to make the most out of their stay in the world’s most exciting and diverse city. Our goal is to encourage visitors to return to New York again and again. As a non-profit voluntary organization, Big Apple Greeter receives financial support from New York City’s business and philanthropic communities, and offers its services to visitors free of charge. Greeters do not accept tips.

Who is a Big Apple Greeter?

Nearly 400 adults of all ages, from all of the five boroughs of New York City have volunteered to become Greeters. Each is eager to portray his or her enthusiastic view of New York City. More than 20 foreign languages are spoken among the volunteer Greeters.

What does a Greeter actually do?

Share with a visitor what life in New York is really like by walking in their own neighborhood, or a neighborhood familiar to the Greeter—not just to see the well known sights of New York, but to highlight the little things that distinguish one New York neighborhood from another. Share with visitors the wonders of New York’s mass transit system using FUN PASSES generously donated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

How do visitors learn about Big Apple Greeter?

Information about Big Apple Greeter is available on our multi-lingual Web site, www.bigapplegreeter.org, as well as extensive national and international newspaper, magazine and radio coverage. “Word-of-mouth,” travel agents, guidebooks and other pertinent information sources also disseminate information about Big Apple Greeter.

Big Apple Greeter has a nondiscriminatory policy on race, religion, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and disability.



SOHO

