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## His Long Walk Home

By PETER EDIDIN

**W**ALKING with Robert Jay Kaufman after lunch is not good for the digestion. He is tall and has long legs that speed up when something engages his interest. He constantly jaywalks. He never takes more than a few steps before stopping to consider some element in the cityscape. And inclement weather, like the mini-monsoon that drenched the city a couple of weeks ago, is a minor inconvenience.

On Franklin Street in TriBeCa, between Greenwich and Hudson, for example, in the midst of that downpour, he ordered a halt. "Look at the Renaissance details - the arches and the verticals," he said of several buildings on the north side of the street. "You can see the egos of people who put up the buildings, all of which were built probably within 20 years of each other. Each one tried to do something different, to get noticed."

Crossing the street, Mr. Kaufman pulled out a credit card, squinted along its edge to check the alignment of the window casements and decorative details of a tiny two-story brick house, recently restored, and pointed out where the builder had intentionally varied the scheme. It is that attention to symmetry and proportion, he suggested, that makes the little structure feel so right to a passer-by.

Manhattan has 1,544 blocks below 14th Street, or so Mr. Kaufman says. That number, like many things about the city's oldest precincts, is debatable; it depends, among other things, on how one defines "block." The City Planning Department, for example, estimates that Manhattan has 3,450 blocks, 1,100 of which are below 14th Street.

Still, Mr. Kaufman has earned the right to his opinion.

Mr. Kaufman's day job, so to speak, is heading the illustration and animation department at the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University. But in the spring, summer and fall of 2003, this 54-year-old urban adventurer spent 52 days wandering back and forth over every one of those blocks. His circuitous ramble covered roughly 300 miles, during which he ran through three pairs of walking shoes and developed, he said, "legs of steel and feet of clay."

The tale of this trek along what he describes as "my Appalachian Trail with restaurants" is told in words and pictures in "Blockology: An Offbeat Walking Guide to Lower Manhattan," a new book that Mr. Kaufman wrote, illustrated and published through the aptly named Turning Corners Press, of which he is both proprietor and sole employee.

The book's theme is experiencing the essential downtown New York through the close, leisurely observation of the architecture and ambience of its blocks. It is a mission he regards as both humble and noble. City dwellers tend to take the block for granted, despite the fact that it is the fundamental element of urban space. Or as Mr. Kaufman puts it: "The block integrates society. It's the true marketplace."