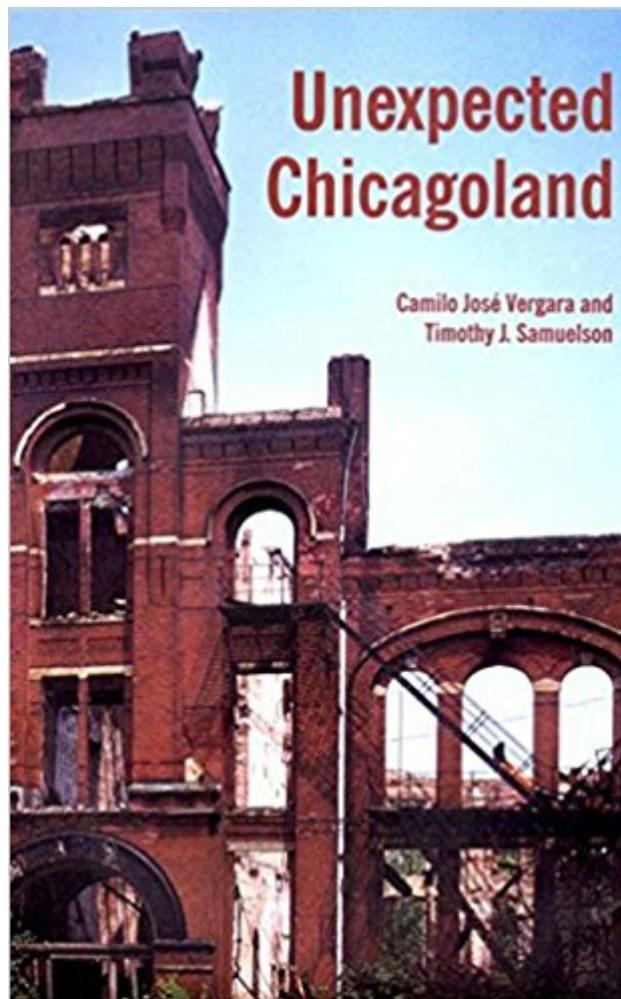


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# Unexpected Chicagoland



## Synopsis

In a series of celebrated books, the eminent photographer and sociologist Camilo JosÃ© Vergara has observed and recorded the evolution of America's inner cities for over twenty years, documenting the effects of time, commercialism, culture, and neglect on the built environment, with an aesthetic vision that has been hailed by the New York Times as "persuasive and moving." Here, in a unique collaboration with Timothy Samuelson, Chicago's leading architectural historian, Vergara probes the power and resonance of one of America's greatest cities. *Unexpected Chicagoland* includes over two hundred stunning color photographs, accompanied by a fascinating original narrative of the hidden history of Chicago's renowned architectural past. Vergara's photographs are a treasure trove of historically and visually interesting buildings and environments, most of them on the abandoned urban fringes. Included are examples of rarely seen work by some of the greatest architects of the twentieth century, such as Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and William Burley Griffin, as well as dazzling examples of Art Deco design. *Unexpected Chicagoland* presents an authentic and gritty view of the metropolis at a time when the public's understanding of all American cities has become increasingly sanitized and homogenized. The book itself, in a large format and exquisitely designed, is packaged to be a lasting visual treasure.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Camilo JosÃ© Vergara is the author of numerous books, including *American Ruins*, *The New*

American Ghetto, and El Nuevo Mundo. His work was also the subject of a 1993 BBC documentary. Timothy Samuelson is curator of architecture at the Chicago Historical Society and author of Above Chicago. He lives in Massachusetts.

There indeed is much "unexpected" in this book, some good, some bad. The good news is, there are several glimpses into nooks and crannies you'd probably never find on your own. There's also an homage to some truly great and unique Chicago landmarks, like the huge old railroad bridges, and a fascinating study of disappearing turrets on buildings. The bad news is, the author wanders rather far afield geographically, into Indiana and even Michigan. That would be OK for "Unexpected Midwest", but when you plunk down your money for a book on Chicago, it's an inexcusable heresy. Also unexpected is, a lot of space is devoted to things you may not really care about. You'll spend time inside the Bohemian National Cemetery Columbarium, exploring niches full of urns, photos, mementos, et al. Several pages are devoted to "extinguished neon signs", and six pages show seven different modern billboards. Four pages go to a single whale sign on a West Chicago building. If you're mainly interested in old buildings and architecture in general, look elsewhere. Otherwise, I'd strongly recommend you check this book out of your local library and see if it's to your taste, before buying a copy.

Unexpected Chicagoland is a fascinating, if dysfunctional book. The book does a nice job portraying the decay of urban infrastructure through pictures-when it sticks to "Chicagoland". Apparently, this geographic area extends all the way into Michigan (why?). For the money, the author could have stuck to Chicago proper alone and produced a much better book. It's not like you have to go out of the city to find these types of areas. The section on the Pullman district was especially good. The photos have a haunting quality to them. You can almost hear the trains roaring by and the bustle of the little enclave. Worth taking a look at if you can find an open copy at a bookstore.

Unexpected Chicagoland is a gift to those devoted to the study of cities and surrounding areas and to those who worry about how fast the landscape and cityscape is changing. Though neither Camilo Vergara nor Tim Samuelson are rabid preservationists, they know what symbols we are losing and do their best to memorialize them in text and pictures. Theirs is a unique partnership of artists with talent, concern, and reflection. I've bought 6 copies for friends.

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