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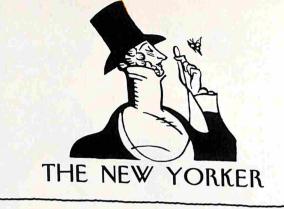


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City Tales : DESTINATIONS

Arrivals & Departures

by DANA GIOIA photograph by Elizabeth Zeschin

Today most travel feels like commuting. Distant airline journeys begin and end by waiting in line. Cars find the traffic in exotic cities drearily familiar. The same bored faces look up from bus station benches from Antwerp to Alabama. There is no poetry in reaching a public garage, a bus stop or luggage carrousel. Just the flat, minimal prose of baggage claims and parking meters. # But there is one commute that actually feels like travel -coming into Grand Central Terminal. Entering its vast main lobby either by descending from the noisy street or by rising from the ain platforms underground, one walks into Manhattan's greatest indoor public space, an area all the more exciting because unlike its closest contenders- Carnegie Hall, the Stock Exchange, the Palm

Court at the Plaza - Grand Central is neither elitist nor exclusionary. In its democratic precincts investment

bankers in snug italian suits line up for coffee behind Hawaiianshirted street vendors and elderly nuns on a shopping spree share waiting room benches with honeymooners from Osaka. Stepping onto Grand Central's smooth marble floor is always like walking on-



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stage but whether into a stark social drama or screwball screen comedy one can never quite tell in advance. Hundreds of lives hurry by, each one starring in its own compelling story. Charged by their sheer energy, one feels that particular rush of excitement that only great cities give. This almost delirious feeling that anything is possible represents the unacknowledged triumph of Grand Central's architecture. Utterly functional, this station is also truly grand. Its one vast central chamber stands impressively surrounded by teeming platforms, passageways, tunnels, balustrades, and antechambers, the air above crisscrossed by huge shafts of filtered sunlight rising to the high arched ceiling decorated astonishingly -as if to say that this one room is indeed its own universe- by the stars and constellations of the zodiac. Yet even to a gaping first-time visitor, a lone pedestrian clutching

a battered suitcase on the swirling concourse below, all this grandeur seems not only unintimidating but inviting. This is a place which recognizes the importance of each arrival. Nervous, giddy, even inspired, one steps into the crowd ready to begin.

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