PEEKSKILL is out. Beacon is in. At least, that is the report from the fourth edition of John Villani's "100 Best Art Towns in America: A Guide to Galleries, Museums, Festivals, Lodging and Dining," which was published by Countryman Press last month.

In the third edition, from 1998, the list, which is not ranked, included Peekskill and Woodstock, as well as Red Bank and Lambertville in New Jersey, and Easton, Pa. But this time, although Woodstock is still listed, the others are not. Instead, among the top 100 are Beacon; New London, Conn.; Corning, N.Y.; and the Hamptons on Long Island. North Adams in Massachusetts also made the grade.

Mr. Villani's book, which costs $19.95, is divided by region, with individual entries on each town. These include a brief description of the town and its history, a few points of local tourist interest, an overview of the arts scene, a list of major visual and performing arts events, and lodging and dining recommendations. For example, the entry on Beacon singles out the central visual-arts places, like Dia:Beacon, Beacon Project Space and the Howland Cultural Center.

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The book is part guide for the art-minded traveler and part how-to manual for those looking to quit city life and move somewhere quiet, clean and laid-back, but with more to offer culturally than, say, a tavern with a jukebox. The towns profiled range in population from under 1,000 to nearly 100,000; each edition has included some towns in the New York region.

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In deciding what places to include, Mr. Villani visited hundreds of small-and medium-size towns across the United States. He assessed their museums, galleries, theater performances, festivals, music recitals, poetry slams and art fairs. He also looked at the availability and affordability of the types of spaces needed by artists, actors, musicians and others in the arts, as well as access to a market and audience.

Towns where the arts were accepted and embraced by the local political and business structure were more likely to make the cut, Mr. Villani said in a telephone interview from his home in Santa Fe, N.M. (His hometown, by the way, leads another listing in the book, the top 10 largest art towns.)
So why did Mr. Villani drop Peekskill, a thriving town on the Hudson River with much support from local political and business groups?

"Peekskill's position in the Hudson River Valley has really been eclipsed by developments in nearby Beacon, which has evolved very quickly into a national model for how a successful arts-led revitalization can take place in a regional community," Mr. Villani said.

Sarah Pasti, director of the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, a major art center that opened in Peekskill in June 2004, said "I'm completely amazed and surprised at this." She pointed to the many new galleries that have opened in Peekskill, as well as "the renovation of the Paramount Theater and all the artists who continue to move here."

A positive surprise in the greater New York region, Mr. Villani said, is the growing significance and strength of the creative community in New London.

"In my view, New London has all the pieces in place to become a very important arts community over the next couple of years," he said. "It is a real blue-collar community, but it has a wonderful theater, a fine museum and an astonishingly vibrant art center that is the kind of collaborative artist-incubator that helps to foster the artistic spirit and integrity of an evolving creative community."

James Stidfole, founder of the Hygienic Artist Cooperative and Galleries in New London, says in the book, "New London's filled with young artists, and each month, it seems, new plans are announced to turn some downtown building into lofts or studios.

"Our artist population has quadrupled, with lots of them moving in from New York City and Boston as well as other parts of Connecticut."

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[Photograph]
Kate Rogovin in her gallery on Main Street in Beacon. The Community is listed in the latest edition of "100 Best Art Towns in America." (Photo by Susan Stava for The New York Times)