



New book design

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Introduction and interviews by
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Introduction

As the literary editor of one leading British newspaper pointed out recently, the book 'has kept pace with virtually every technological change you care to think of, from the internal combustion engine to television'. Indeed, though increasingly sophisticated production techniques have been developed and its external face has been subjected to the whims of any and every graphic design style currently in favour, the inside of the book has essentially kept the same format since the first 'codex' books were created by the Romans thousands of years ago.

The combination of the desktop publishing revolution, advances in print quality and the emergence of a global economy has led to more titles being published than ever before. Book design is increasingly important in the publishing process thanks to stiff competition between publishers and the development of a visually literate audience. When presented with two books offering roughly the same content at the same price, the increasingly design-conscious book-buying public will always choose the volume that is more attractive to look at, easier to read and that presents information in the clearest, most easy-to-understand manner.

Book design is one of the earliest examples of what we now call 'graphic design'. The Church was its first patron. In the West, the original book designers were 9th-century-monks copying scriptures onto parchment, and the first attempts at printing were designed to emulate these beautifully hand-produced pieces. The designer Jan Tschichold spent many years examining these beautiful medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and books in an effort to discover their underlying design principles. After painstakingly measuring a wide variety of examples, he concluded that the majority used the proportions 2:3:4:6 for the size of their inner, top, outer and bottom margins respectively. He also found that the height of the text box equalled the width of the page where there was a page width/page height ratio of 2:3. This 'golden ratio', used by many (including Gutenberg), was first described in Tschichold's *The Form of the Book: Essays on the Morality of Good Design* (1955) and was instrumental in establishing the basic principles of modern book layout. Josef Müller-Brockmann's exploration of the grid system was another huge influence on post-war book design. Both he and Tschichold are still very important today. However, rules are made to be broken, and for every designer following the 'golden ratio' there are many more who are willing to throw the rulebook out of the window.

It is hard to generalize about current trends in book design. Editorial design (like any other type of design, such as packaging, annual reports, brochures, etc) is for ever subject to the constantly shifting directions and stylistic approaches that influence graphic design as a whole. While it is possible to note the popularity of a certain sans-serif typeface, or the growing use of a certain style of photography, the most significant trend in design at the moment is 'anything goes'. Designers will go to any lengths to create the design that is most appropriate to the book's content and its intended audience.

The single factor that has had the greatest impact across all genres of both fiction and non-fiction publishing is that of increased production values. The most lavishly produced books are generally those about visual culture; many use unconventional formats and unusual print techniques and materials, and are conceived to appeal to the design-literate consumer. For the most part, these are books made by designers for designers, and as such all the design elements (layout, typography, imagery) have to work even harder to satisfy this most discerning and critical section of the book-buying audience.

The standards set by these books have had a big influence on book design across other genres, a good example being the once-humble cookery book. These are now so concerned to combine seductive imagery and cool typography with clean layouts and high production values that the recipes have become almost secondary. Of course, the commercial success of these books is helped greatly by the celebrity status of the authors and TV tie-ins.

It was the 19th-century US clergyman Henry Ward Beecher who asked, 'Where is human nature so weak as in the bookstore?' Designers more than anyone seem happy to endorse his theory. Few of the books that we buy – with the exception of a dictionary or the Highway Code, perhaps – are, strictly speaking, essential purchases. Books are really just another way for us, to relieve ourselves of our disposable income, and for this reason they have always had to possess an element of seduction. Although all the various elements (such as layout, typography, use of images, print quality, paper stock and finishing) combine to give an overall feel, it is the cover of a book that has to work the hardest. Whoever coined the phrase about never judging a book by its cover was misguided – the classics notwithstanding, if a book

can't be bothered to attempt to gain your interest with its cover, then the chances are that what's inside will be equally dull. The design writer Alan Powers argues in his book *Front Cover: Great Book Jacket and Cover Design* that successful covers possess 'a form of hidden eroticism, connecting with some undefended part of the personality in order to say "take me, I am yours".'

The concept of the cover design being a book's main selling point is relatively recent, however. Traditionally, when books were the prerogative of the very wealthy, the inside of a book would be typeset and printed by the printer, and a bookbinder would then create a binding in the style of the customer's personal library (invariably leather-bound and gold leaf-embossed). Cheap reprints of novels were available to the masses, but it was not until 1935, when the first ten Penguin Classics were launched, that 'quality' fiction and non-fiction were published for a wide audience of ordinary readers. The brainchild of Allen Lane, managing director of the Bodley Head, the venture was seen as a huge risk at the time. Design played a very important part in the series' success. Featuring a 'dignified yet flippant' logo (later redrawn by Jan Tschichold), simple typography and blocks of solid colour, these covers made the Penguin titles instantly recognizable. They used an easy colour-coding system: orange for fiction, dark blue for biography, green for crime, red for plays, cerise for travel and yellow for miscellanea. In a shameless piece of marketing, the price (a modest sixpence) was displayed prominently *twice* on the front cover.

As Penguin increased the number of its imprints, its covers became more adventurous. In the late Nineties, Penguin tried to inject new life into its Modern Classics series by commissioning some of the UK's most fashionable designers to come up with designs that would appeal to the under-25s. Despite being somewhat sniffily received by the purists, the new covers were a huge financial success and provided a perfect example of the importance of distinctive cover design.

Traditionally, it is the hardback edition of a book that has enjoyed higher design and production values. However, many publishers now offer 'paperback originals', which have some of the higher production values associated with their declining hardback editions and so neatly bypass the need for the hardback edition as a marketing tool. Things are slightly different in the United States. Unlike Europe, where margins are becoming increasingly tight, North America has an ongoing tradition of

producing well-crafted hardback books. The bigger market for fiction there lends itself to higher print runs and therefore lower unit costs than in Europe. Publishers such as Knopf, for whom the celebrated designer Chip Kidd has produced over 800 covers, are renowned for their well-designed titles.

Whether for art and design or fiction titles, covers are exploited to create some kind of hype. Various novel techniques have been explored. Bruce Mau created ten different covers featuring different fabrics and colours for his 2000 book *Life Style*, designed and edited by himself. More recently still, *Freitag*, published by Lars Müller in 2002, was produced with multiple covers. The Freitag brothers make bags and accessories from recycled truck tarpaulins – every one is different, and to reflect this each copy of the book was bound with its own individual piece of tarpaulin.

*You Can Find Inspiration in Everything**, created for Paul Smith by Aboud.Sodano and published by Violette Editions, was bound in a piece of cloth cut from an assortment of fabrics from Smith's textile collection, giving each copy a totally original cover. Despite the fairly conventional format of the book itself, it is notable thanks to its oversized polystyrene case, moulded in the shape of a book. Designed by Jonathan Ive, it presented the design-conscious reader with a dilemma – while the cover is bulky and pretty much impossible to fit on a normal bookshelf, throwing it away is not really an option. As well as using a number of different paper stocks and print techniques, the book also features a paper pattern, a pull-out poster and its own magnifying glass.

It has become *de rigueur* for publishers of books on art, design and architecture to exploit different production techniques – whether it's the format, the binding, the cover material or the packaging – to appeal to their novelty-hungry target audience. A particularly lavish and significant example of this is Damien Hirst's book *I Want to Spend the Rest of my Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now*, published by Booth-Clibborn in 1997, which started a trend for monographs that did more than just showcase the artist or designer concerned. With its numerous pop-ups and cut-outs courtesy of designer Jonathan Barnbrook, the book was a radical departure from everything that had come before it, perfectly expressing Hirst's larger-than-life, media-savvy personality.

Taking things even further, numerous attempts have been made at creating books that, rather than just showcasing art, are themselves pieces of art. Most outrageous was surely Helmut Newton's *Sumo*, published by Taschen in 1999, which weighed in at 30kg. The book was printed in a limited edition and came with its own aluminium table, designed by Philippe Starck. Canongate and Damien Hirst's 1999 limited edition of Robert Sebag's *Snowblind* (priced at £ 1,000 a copy) came with a mirror cover, silver Amex credit card, introduction by Howard Marks and hidden \$ 100 bill (the number on which corresponded to the edition number of the book). More conventional in format, but also more exclusive, was Irma Boom's 2,136-page book for SHV Holdings. Painstakingly put together over a five-year period with historian Johan Pijnappel, it was commissioned as a gift for the board and shareholders of the company. Until recently there were no copies in the public domain.

A trip to any bookshop specializing in art and design will provide an abundance of titles with 'interesting' covers – Phaidon's inflatable *Fresh Cream*, Laurence King's *Graphic Britain* with its peel-off GB stickers, and IDN's *Iconographies* with its embossed cover are well-known examples. Not many of these books actually push the design boundaries in terms of what's inside – most of the experimentation is limited to the cover, the format or the binding. A reason for this could be that foreign-language imprints are as important now as ever to a title's commercial success, so the treatment of the type inside has to remain comparatively conventional.

Spoon, published by Phaidon in 2002, took things a step further. A showcase for the work of 100 product designers, it has an extraordinary, OTT cover. Designed by Mark Diaper and produced in conjunction with Corus, it consists of curved pieces of lightweight polymer-coated steel in the shape of a spoon. On this occasion, the revolution does not end with the cover, as the pages inside the book follow the shape of the cover. Though it is visually stunning, it is also annoying to read and potentially damaging to the other books on your shelves. An honest attempt to add value and playfulness to a book, combined with an innovative use of material? Or a cynical marketing ploy?

Books that are aimed at the design market can usually be placed in one of three rough categories. Many are

books aimed at helping the designer with his or her craft – in addition to the obvious software manuals, there are books on every aspect of how to design, how to use type, how to use colour, working with grids, problem-solving, etc. Then, by way of contrast, there are books whose main purpose is to inspire, showcasing everything from the coolest new graphic design to boring postcards and bar interiors. Perhaps the reason why this genre of book is so popular is because, as the pace of work increases, it becomes more and more difficult for designers to leave their office in search of inspiration. Lastly, there are the monographs – the definitive (or not) collection of an artist's or designer's works. Unfortunately, the ego-boosting idea of being both designer and editor, combined with the relative cheapness of publishing, has led some design consultancies to blur the boundaries between 'book' and 'self-promotional brochure'. Many are happy to publish a self-congratulatory volume full of 'personal work', often with little or no critical analysis. Perhaps what they find attractive about publishing a book is the idea of creating something that has a relatively long lifespan, unlike much of their other print-based work.

Increasingly designers are becoming editors themselves. *S, M, L, XL*, a collaboration between architect Rem Koolhaas and designer Bruce Mau published in 1995 by Uitgeverij 010, is one of the most significant examples of a book where the designer is given as much credit as the author. It is easy to forget the impact that this huge book had at the time of its first appearance. Publisher Lars Müller, who has been responsible for creating some of the most coveted art, design and photography titles of the last 20 years, designs and either edits or co-edits all of his books. Many design books fitting into the 'how-to' category (such as Michael Johnson's *Problem Solving*, Lucienne Roberts and Julia Thrift's *The Designer and the Grid* and Quentin Newark's *What Is Graphic Design?*) are written and designed by the same people.

The number of books aimed at designers seems to be growing at an astonishing rate, and it is hard to imagine that such an output can be sustained without some drop in quality, or boredom setting in as far as the public is concerned. While there are always a number of new, well-researched books every year, it is doubtful whether the majority of the titles

that currently reach the bookshelves will have any kind of longevity – a view held by many retailers as well as those within the design industry.

But while high-profile books like *Spoon* end up grabbing the headlines, there are plenty of other more low-key, but beautifully produced and thoughtful books that do not rely on novelty covers or flashy design and that sell steadily over a number of years. Designers such as Peter Willberg and publishers such as Lars Müller and the Hyphen Press have a loyal and dedicated following, and their books are as much content- as design-driven. It is surely the smaller independent publishers who are prepared to take more risks with content, rather than just design, who will flourish in the future, since they are more likely to produce titles with lasting appeal. Likewise much has been achieved by Alan Hatcher at Phaidon, Angus Hyland at Canongate and Vince Frost at Laurence King to improve the overall standard of design throughout the range of titles at these more mainstream publishers.

Can the book survive another 2,000 years? Not so very long ago the demise of the book was forecast – it is safe to say now that news of its impending death was greatly exaggerated. Much has been written about e-books and their potentially devastating effect on the world of publishing, and already many novels are available to download from the web. But as with most attempts at predicting how we will live our lives in the not-too-distant future, too much emphasis is being placed on the emerging technology and what it is capable of doing, and not enough on how it fits into the way we actually live. Perversely, it seems that the more screen-based society becomes, the greater the number of printed books that are being produced. Clearly our love affair with books is far from over.

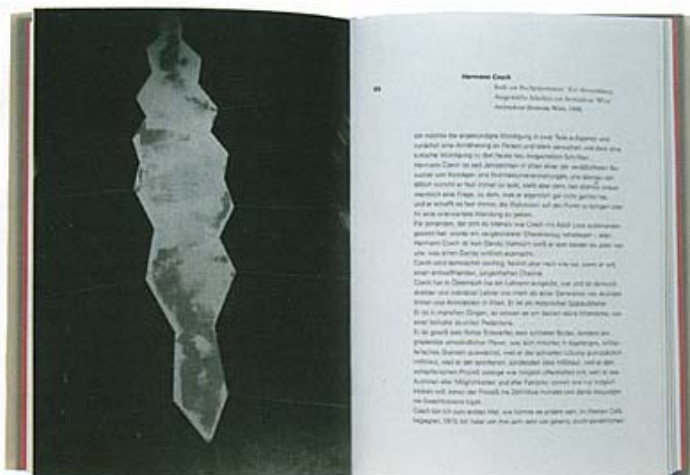
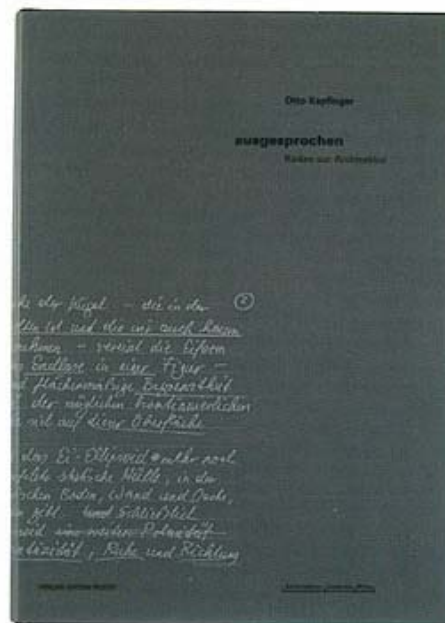
Gutenberg's printing press, perhaps the most significant technological development in the history of the book, helped to expand the literary world, giving more people the opportunity to read, and talk and write about books. In the same way, the internet, rather than signalling the end of books as we know them, has made them more accessible than ever. Wherever you are in the world, websites such as Amazon have ensured that you can get a copy of almost any book you want delivered to your doorstep within a matter of hours. It is now easy to search for

that impossible-to-find book on the net, or bid for a rare volume on one of the many auction sites.

Perhaps the real reason why e-books have never really taken off is the same reason why books have survived in their current format. We now spend most of our lives looking at screens – computer screens when we are at work, television and cinema screens when we are relaxing, and mobile and palm-top screens when we're going from one to the other. In such a context, printed books come as something of a relief.

Most people's relationship with books begins when they are very young, with the comforting childhood ritual of a book at bedtime. As well as being a bonding experience between parent and child, books represent a gateway into a land of fantasy, fuelling the child's imagination and introducing new ways of thinking and new ideas. The imagery on the pages of a children's book is one of our earliest and most lasting visual influences. Many graphic designers such as Bruno Munari and Paul Rand have been inspired to create their own children's books. Despite the fact that computer games and DVDs seem to be the pastimes of choice for today's culturally challenged children, whatever you think of it, the Harry Potter 'phenomenon' has proved that children still have a huge appetite for reading and are as capable of falling in love with books as ever.

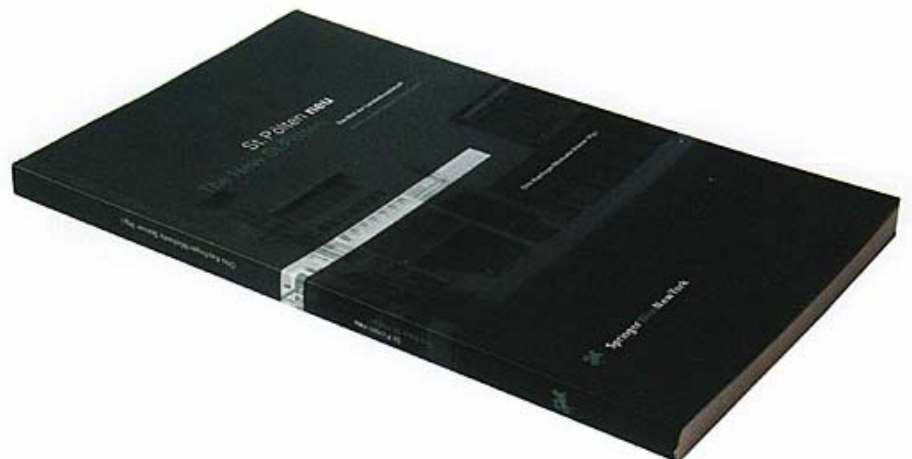
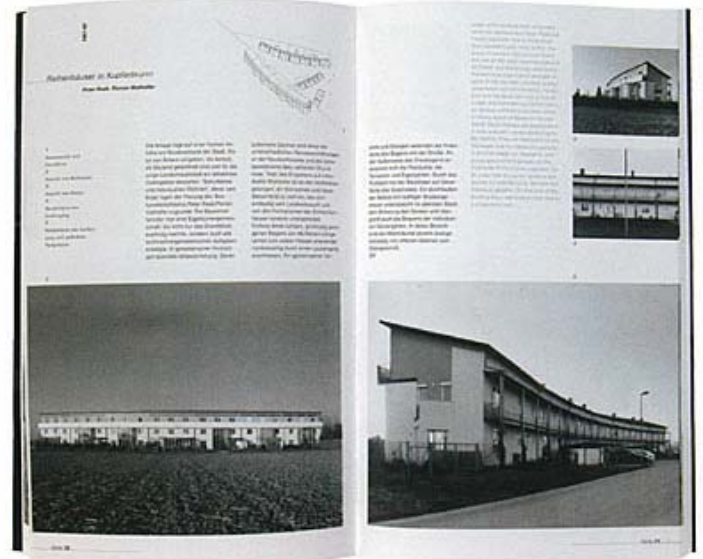
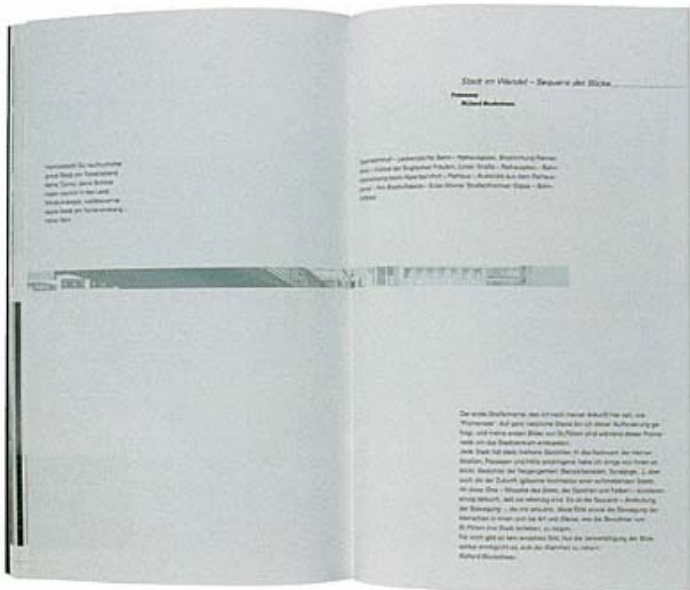
Immersing yourself in a book, whether it's turning over the beautifully proportioned pages of a book on medieval manuscripts or racing through the high-octane pages of an airport-lounge James Ellroy paperback-*noir*, is one of life's greatest and most basic pleasures, and one that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Books play an important part in our lives – we turn to them for instruction, enlightenment and inspiration throughout our existence. In an increasingly disposable world, books represent permanence and continuity. The tactile quality of books is a joy that should not be underestimated. It is what will ensure their longevity. A future without books is unthinkable, and highly unlikely.



Packaging
042

Design: Büro für Visuelle Gestaltung / Gabriele Lenz
 Project: Ausgesprochen
 Author: Otto Kapfinger
 Publisher: Verlag Anton Pustet
 Size: 225 x 160mm
 Pages: 128
 Year: 1999
 Country: Austria

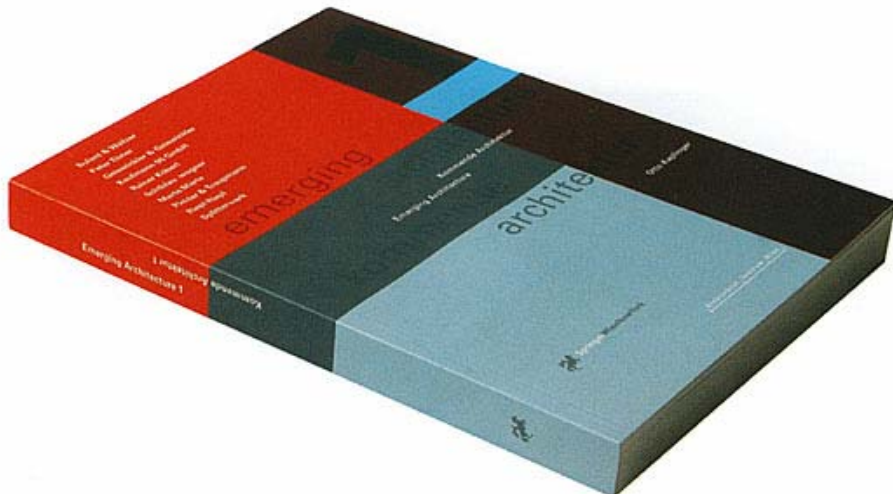
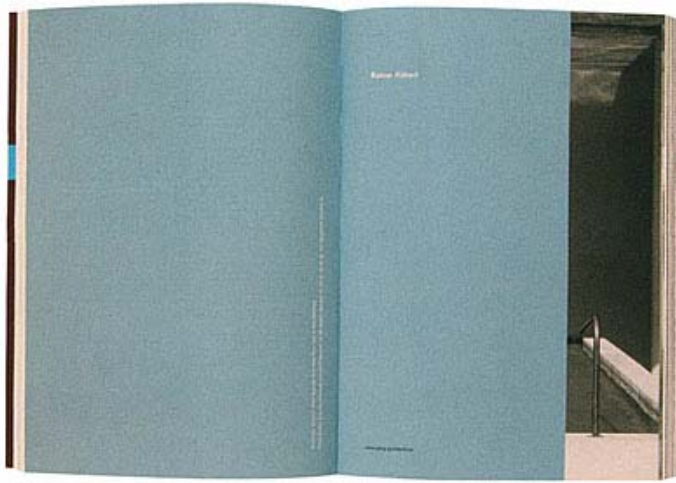
This academic book about architecture by Otto Kapfinger has a beautifully austere quality. The dust jacket shows the author's scribbled notes printed in white on glassine paper. The text inside is set in two muted colours which are alternated.



Structure
119

Design: Büro für Visuelle Gestaltung / Gabriele Lenz
 Project: The New St. Pölten
 Publisher: Springer
 Size: 287 x 174mm
 Pages: 120
 Year: 1997
 Country: Austria

The text of this architectural profile of the Austrian federal state capital is set in black (German) and muted grey-green (English). The two languages run side by side in two and three columns. The thread-sewn sections of the book use a grey-green thread to match the colour of the print.



Structure
120

Design: Büro für Visuelle Gestaltung / Gabriele Lenz
 Project: Emerging Architecture vols 1 & 2
 Author: Otto Kapfinger
 Publisher: Springer
 Size: 220 x 156mm
 Pages: 256 (each)
 Year: 2000 & 2001
 Country: Austria

This annual publication presents new architecture from Austria and neighbouring countries. It combines versions of the text in both German (serif) and English (sans serif), printed in two colours: black and light blue in volume 1, black and olive-green in volume 2. The two blocks of text, German and English, are cleverly offset, the English placed at the top of the page with the German below it. Caption text runs vertically up the page, with key words related to the projects printed in a tint of the second colour. The books have been bound with coloured thread that picks up on the secondary text colour.