

BOOK REVIEWS

Designing and Installing Displays for a New Museum, U. Ethelred, Cleanand Press, Toronto, New York and Boston, 1985. 21 big pages.

In this book the many different ways of panicking are explored in detail. Time charts are provided so that museum staff may acquaint themselves with the various degrees of panic and their associated time frames. For example, at three years before opening date mild panic and some slight loss of sleep is in order; at two years a deeper panic is called for with attendant stomach ailments and more pronounced insomnia. All stages are charted until EOD (estimated opening date) minus one week, when pandemonium reigns, voices are never lowered below bellowing pitch and relationships are permanently soured. Figures are provided for percentage mortality and percentage chronic illness as factors of display readiness panic syndrome.

A key chapter deals with techniques for ensuring that each member of a display team has a completely different concept of the final design and how it may be achieved. Road block psychology tactics are explained.

Hints are also given in an appendix on how to put artifacts into displays.

Diesel Fitter.

Design for Scientific Conservation of Antiquities, Organ, R.M., IIC/Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1968. 497 pages.

This exquisitely finished book in gold tooled imitation morocco and printed in Vari-Typer has had wide circulation in the nearly twenty years since its publication. The paper cover bears signs of continual heavy use and is torn, dog-eared and almost illegible. The cover itself is worn from excessive handling and the gold tooling on the front and spine shows signs of flaking. The binding at the top of the spine is distorted by repeated removal from tightly packed book shelves.

The first six pages which constitute the introductory passages are in perfect condition, although the paper tends to be uniformly yellowed throughout. Surface pH is 5.0 measured by contact with Hydrion indicator paper.

In general, the sections on Human Personnel (assuming there are also other kinds of personnel, although this is never followed up in the text) are in very good condition, with minor finger marking at corners. The section on Healthy Environment shows marked deterioration from a variety of air-borne pollutants (p.23) and acid and alkali marks (p.24). A tear on p.27 is held together with Elastoplast. The section on Other Human Factors refers primarily to novels by Graham Greene. The section on Accident carries an excellent diagram (p.35) of the way in which circles can get crushed into ellipses by out-of-control rectangles.

In general, the pages containing information on laboratory construction and equipment installation are marred by a variety of foreign substances, including plaster, putty, silicone sealant, paint and floor covering adhesive. Pages 296 to 311 have been almost totally destroyed. Deep burn marks and spatters of melted copper would indicate that a high current electrical discharge had taken place within inches of the book. This is a clear indication that the person using the book had not read the excellent electrical safety guidelines on these pages before they were obliterated.

A tear on pages 383 and 384 (recto and verso) has been crudely taped together with a waterproof adhesive dressing (for minor cuts and abrasions). Dark stains on subsequent pages indicate frantic efforts to locate the section on First Aid while bleeding profusely.

Pages 404 and 405 are stuck together with what appears to be rosin flux, while pages 405 to 408 are disfigured with blobs of lead/tin solder and tallow. The Suppliers List at the rear has been detached and lost.

In general, the book bears every evidence of heavy and continued use over decades. This is hardly surprising as it is that kind of book. However, this reviewer feels that books used as frequently as this should be replaced periodically with new ones, even though this philosophy strikes at the very roots of museum practice.

Tin Smith

Computers in Conservation, A. Hacker, Random Access House, New York & London, 1989. 703 pages.

The prime intention of this book is to demonstrate that computers are of some use in the conservation of antiquities and works of art. However, the way in which this author goes about demonstrating it has not been chosen with the non-computer-literate reader in mind. Until the reader is able to master the very special vocabulary, syntax and grammar necessary to understand the book, it will be Greek to him (to quote the immortal Bard). As an example, the sentence "CP/M runners will be able to effect usage of dBase III on their MS-DOS with no hardened interface" may be comprehensible to the initiate, but to this reviewer it is not. Anyway, it's pointless for me to continue trying to review this book when I can't even bloody read it. I mean to say, why didn't they include a dictionary or a brief grammar in the back, so at least I could get some idea of what's going on? Is that really too much to ask? Oh, what's the use? I'm going to finish this and get back to work...

Arc Welder

Proceedings of the San Andreas Symposium on Disaster Preparedness, Various Authors, National Institute for Conservation Experiments, 1985, 293 pages.

The proceedings of symposia on various conservation-related topics usually feature the text of given papers in essentially complete condition. This bound volume of the symposium proceedings differs from this format in one essential feature: aside from a few scattered pages of almost incomprehensible fragments and a lengthy and rambling editorial, the pages are essentially blank. To quote (at length) from the Editorial:

"It could be argued that the lack of substance in this volume reflected that of the symposium. This is far from true. We feel sure that, had the symposium proceeded as planned, we would have been able to fill most of the pages with printed material. However, after the earthquake during the opening address it was rather difficult to continue the programme amid the ruins of the auditorium. For this reason, the first day's presentations were re-scheduled to day two, and planned to be presented in the hotel where most of the delegates were staying. Had the hotel not burned down that evening, we feel sure the symposium would have continued as planned. Once the delegates and their belongings had been rescued from the rubble, they

were transported to a rented auditorium in time for the day three presentations. When the river overflowed its banks the organizers were taken a little by surprise as this upset their plans. The last day of the symposium, day four, dawned bright and sunny and there was great optimism that the programme would conclude on a good note. This was not to be. A gas explosion in the only remaining auditorium in the city rendered it unusable minutes before the delegates arrived. This was unfortunate... Blank pages have been left in the volume as a memorial to all the delegates who perished in the air crash during their return journey."

The editor further apologises for the quality of his own editorial and the fragment or two of papers in the volume. They were apparently reconstructed from partially obliterated, freeze-dried notes recovered from the wreckage of a bus in which the editor was travelling when it plunged into a reservoir.

If you think it's worth paying \$25.00 for an almost empty book, then go ahead. But I should warn you, I know of eleven people who have purchased a copy of this book and then met with very nasty accidents.

Pile Driver

Museum, Doris Arbuthnot-Prole, Stinkhorn Publications, Ottawa, 1984. 110 pages.

This is an insane foray into the never-never land of farcical fiction. It has the same thematic treatment which made Arthur Hailey famous, particularly in such novels as *Hotel*, *Airport* and *Hospital*. There the similarities end. *Museum* follows more in the Tom Sharpe tradition, where episodes of astonishing vulgarity exist side-by-side with scenes of pure farce.

The plot concerns a museum director in search of a new museum; the sort of holy grail to which museum staff labouring in sub-standard accommodations quickly aspire. Meanwhile, a wicked chief curator is plotting the downfall of the hapless and unwary director, including traps of blackmail and extortion. The plot thickens as the museum burns to the ground after the artifacts in the displays are mysteriously stolen. Good human values triumph in the end as the plot turns to a satisfactory and very clever conclusion. This is an excellent book if you like good old slapstick with a happy ending. Also good to read if you work in a museum and have an inside track on the incompetence and stupidity which goes on there. Buy it; you won't regret it - much.

Surface Grinder

Cracks in Wooden Objects: A Pictorial Checklist, W.Holz & W.DuBois, Canadian Crack Inducers, 1986. 1273 pages.

This is a perfect companion piece to all those well-known books on the characterization of leather, parchment, paper, wood, metals, bone, antler, horn and several other things which don't spring to mind. These authors provide 972 pencil rubbings of cracks they have personally encountered in 69 collective years of examining wooden museum objects. Every kind of check, crack, split and cleavage in 78 commercial and exotic woods is described and characterized before systematic classification. Cracks range from little ones of 10-11mm long to great, humungous splits of well over 3 meters in length (on fold-out supplementary sheets). Depth of cracks is provided in a 176 page appendix. The authors estimate that approximately half a kilometer of 4B pencils was used in the production of this checklist, together with 48 rolls of single-ply, institutional toilet tissue. It is a staggering accomplishment and is a testament to the single-minded devotion of a very few devoted professionals.

Two further volumes are projected, entitled *Knots We Have Known* and *The Warp Atlas*. If they are as methodical and complete as the first volume they will be well worth receiving free of charge as review copies.

Dove Tailer

Hang-ups: Alternative Framing Techniques, Brad Pusher & C.O.R. O'Plast, Wallsend Press, Staples Inn, London, 1987. 16 pages.

In this flimsy pamphlet, sewn together with an old shoelace, the authors discuss their frustrations in mounting large exhibitions on meagre budgets and advocate the liberal use of household items, such as bed frames, as alternative methods of picture framing. Perhaps the most ludicrous are the use of gutted television cabinets to house those pictures with very deep mats, or the glass doors from front-loading automatic washing machines for circular pictures. If this is not enough, they also suggest the conversion of laundromats into all-night art galleries whereby paintings can be framed using clapped-out washing machines.

One can only imagine the impact this book could have on unimaginative exhibition designers or myopic, penny-pinching museum administrators to see that circulation should be restricted to only those who have the perspicacity to realise what drivel this is. Anyone thinking they possess such a faculty should probably have got in first and written a better book.

Disc Sander