

You Are What You Read

compiled by Sal Alfano



Aside from an occasional letter or phone call, I never find out whether our readers find any use for the books reviewed in this column. Even more rarely do I get suggestions from builders about the books they like and think we ought to review. So this month I asked a group of readers and past authors as well as our regular library columnist, Paul Hanke, to compile a list of their favorite, most-used construction books. Their choices exhibit great variety and include a couple of surprises as well. Thanks to everyone who participated. I hope you'll keep telling me about what you're reading.

Design

One book that showed up on a couple of lists is *The Motion Minded Kitchen* by Sam Clark (Houghton Mifflin, \$11.95). Our Kitchen & Bath columnist, Paul Turpin, calls it "a good, maverick look at kitchen remodeling issues, with the emphasis on functionality." While Paul doesn't agree with all of Sam's recommendations, he finds industry publications on the subject "bloodless and anemic by comparison." Designer Marc Rosenbaum of Energysmiths in New Hampshire dubs it "the best I've seen at getting people to think about the functions of space."

A surprise here was *Handmade Houses* by Barry Shapiro and Art Boericke (Scrimshaw Press, out of print). Oakland builder Seth Melchert, who has worked on some of the unusual houses pictured in the book, says "it celebrates the unleashed and wild creativity of builders with a little time and imagination." He returns to it from time to time for a "trumpet blast" of inspiration. "Don't be complacent," he says, "You can do anything."

The most popular book, especially among designers, was *Architectural Graphic Standards* edited by Charles Ramsey and Harold Sleeper (Wiley, \$160), now in its eighth edition. According to remodeling contractor John Sylvestre of Minneapolis, it "has everything," and Paul Turpin calls it "the encyclopedic resource book." Two new, abridged editions of the *Standards* are a little easier on your pocketbook: the *Residential and Light Construction* edition by James Ambrose (Wiley, \$85) and the softcover *Student Edition* by Stephen Klimont (Wiley, \$54.95). Both were reviewed in *Builder's Library* (1/91).

Building Construction Illustrated (second edition) by Francis Ching, with Cassandra Adams (Van

Nostrand Reinhold, \$24.95) is, according to Paul Hanke, "hard to do without as a design reference."

Another of Hanke's favorites is *Graphic Guide to Frame Construction* by Rob Thallon (Taunton Press, \$29.95; 800/888-8286). He calls it "the best of the collection-of-details genre."

Simplified Design of Structural Wood by James Ambrose and Harry Parker (Wiley, \$37.50) is "a great book on wood structure," according to John Sylvestre. "It has lots of tables. I use this as much as the building code book to figure beams, etc."

Marc Rosenbaum touted *Energy Source Directory* (Iris Communications, \$175; 503/484-9353) as "a 500-page compendium of energy-efficient products no designer or builder should be without. Updated occasionally in a three-ring binder, it's expensive but worth it."

Finally, Boston builder Paul Eldrenkamp calls *A Pattern Language; Towns, Buildings, Construction* by Christopher Alexander (Oxford, \$49.95) "a fundamental design book that teaches even the non-professional how to think about design."

Fundamentals

Lots of old standards appeared in this category. Builder-turned-editor Charlie Wardell of Lexington, Mass., said *Modern Carpentry* by Willis Wagner (Goodheart-Willcox, \$25.20) "lived in my truck and actually got used on a regular basis." This "old but reliable" reference is a favorite of John Sylvestre's, too: "I love the workers in their bib overalls. Solid on framing and layout information." Sorry to be the one to tell you, John, but the bib overalls are gone from the latest edition.

Hanke calls *Fundamentals of Carpentry: Practical Construction* by Walter Durbahn and Elmer Sundberg (American Technical Publishers, \$22.48; 800/323-3471) and *Carpentry* by Leonard Koel (American Technical Publishers, \$31.95) "two well-worn old standards, covering virtually everything about the carpentry trade."

Paul Turpin finds *Practical Electrical Wiring* by H. P. Richter and W. Creighton Schwan (McGraw-Hill, \$19.95) "especially good for house-wiring and as an instructional aid and general reference for electrical work."

Advanced Framing (Journal of

Light Construction, \$24.95; 802/434-5241) was at the top of Los Angeles builder Steve Farrell's list. He finds it "concise, accurate, written in 'street' language, with information you can apply to the project you are working on."

Quick Reference

Also sliding around on the dash of Charlie Wardell's truck is the *Builder's Vest Pocket Reference Book* by William Hornung (Prentice Hall, \$7.95). Charlie says it has "lots of useful tables and charts for framing, finish work, sitework, and even painting. And it really does fit in your pocket." I agree, but who wears a vest anymore?

Some of you might be surprised by the *Reader's Digest New Complete Do-It-Yourself Manual* (Reader's Digest Assoc., \$27.99), which was reviewed in *Builder's Library* (2/92). It's on Paul Turpin's list, mainly because of its "simple and straightforward how-to approach" and the illustrations, many of which have been redrawn for the new edition, with good use of color.

Renovation

An old favorite turned up here, and again it was behind the seat of Charlie Wardell's truck: *The Remodeler's Handbook* edited by Benjamin Williams (Craftsman Book Co., \$23; 800/829-8123). Like other comprehensive manuals, it covers everything from design and drafting to estimating and contracts. The focus is on remodeling, with plenty of illustrations, details, and step-by-step instructions.

The other three books chosen in this category are among Paul Hanke's favorites. *Home Renovation* by Francis Ching and Dale Miller (Van Nostrand Reinhold, \$23.95) is "strong on design," while *Renovating Old Houses* by George Nash (Taunton Press, \$37.95) and *Remodeling Old Houses Without Destroying Their Character* by George Stephen (Knopf, \$6.95) are "strong on sensitivity and how-to." Hanke suggests you "read all three if you're serious about renovation."

Business and Management

I was happy to see so many business titles, since I worry that too many small builders sharpen their craftsmanship at the expense of marketing and management skills. Several people mentioned David Gerstel's recent book, *A Builder's Guide to Running a Successful Construction Company* (Taunton Press, \$27.95), reviewed in *Builder's Library* (1/92). Seth Melchert described it as "thorough, hard-hitting, yet humorous and easy to read. It's like having a conversation with a dozen other builders who are sharing their hard-won experience."

One of Gerstel's own choices is *Construction Contractor's Survival*

Guide by Thomas Schleifer (Wiley, \$36.95). "In 100 succinct pages," he says, "the book lays out the ten major strategic hazards to contractors. Examples include growing too fast, changing to computers without sufficient care, and doing projects too far away or too far out of your niche." Gerstel rereads it at the beginning of each year "to remind myself of the roads that should not be traveled."

Another book Seth Melchert likes is *House* by Tracy Kidder (Avon, \$9.95). "It's well written and engaging," he says. "Kidder paints the whole picture of building a house, in particular the emotional ups and downs that don't often get mentioned in trade manuals. I laughed, cried, and exalted with the builders in the book. Kidder shows that a building has as much to do with relationships as with nuts and bolts."

Mike Davis, president of Framing Square Construction Company in Albuquerque, strongly endorsed two of his favorites, *The One Minute Manager* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson (Morrow, \$15.45) and *Putting the One Minute Manager to Work* by Blanchard and Robert Lorber (Berkley Books, \$7.95). The sequel expands on and refines the original book, and Davis uses them both to train his ten crew leaders. He writes, "The *One Minute Manager* has proven to be one of the most valuable books I have ever read. It is a blueprint for dealing with employees and the foundation of a sound people management policy. In the course of my career, I have read many books — technical manuals, management books, etc. — but these two are the only ones I feel are important enough to recommend."

John Sylvestre cited *Professional Remodeling Management* by Walt Stoeppelwerth (Homotech, \$37.50; 800/638-8292) as "the mainstay and backbone of any remodeling business."

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey (Simon and Schuster, \$10.95) was enthusiastically endorsed by all 12 remodelers at a meeting I recently attended. One of them, Cam Fraser, of San Rafael, Calif., said, "It changed my life."

Gerstel also listed *Marketing Without Advertising* by Michael Phillips and Salli Rasberry (Nolo Press, \$14). He writes, "The authors persuasively urge you to put all your resources into taking care of your existing clients, for they then become your sales force."

After reading *Win-Win Negotiating: Turning Conflict into Agreement* by Fred Jandt and Paul Gillette (Wiley, \$22.95), Hanke was convinced that "conflict may be unavoidable, but it can actually end up with everyone feeling good instead of filing lawsuits." ■