



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	The Designer: Half a Century of Change in Image, Training and Techniques
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Rosemary Sassoon
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Review:

Rosemary Sassoon has a long and rich history working across the realms of design. Originally trained in lettering she has worked as a designer in calligraphy, packaging, exhibition and textile design amongst other areas. She has written extensively about design and has a broad and distinguished career as a design educator and researcher. In *The Designer* she investigates and documents the changes over the last fifty years to both the design profession and to design education. She shares her own plentiful history in both of these realms, and supplements it with the views of prominent designers, theorists and design educators.

The book is organised into three sections.

In the first section – *Discussion* – Sassoon examines the changing role of both design and the designer in society, she also discusses the relegation of drawing as an essential tool of the designer and in the largest chapter investigates changes in design education. Throughout this section she balances her own views and memories with interviews and support from important designers and design educators. The design education chapter is the richest component, exploring such areas as: regret at the loss of the apprenticeship system; uncertainty about the increasing role of computers in the studio; and concerns at the seemingly continual growth in class sizes. Although rich, what I found missing from these discussions was both a perspective on the future(s) of design education and balancing voices that see the changes in education as either a possible opportunity or a reflection of changes in the profession.

In the second section, entitled *Wider Perspectives*, Sassoon allows extended space for other designers and educators to write about their own experiences in design over the last fifty years. There is a range of work here that covers broad territory, from

pedagogic case studies to reflective overviews of careers in design education. Additionally the essays document the changing role of design around the world, exploring design in the UK, Canada, America, Hong Kong and Australia. Jorge Frascara's and Paul Green-Armytage's valuable contributions discuss their own changing conceptualizations of design and the relationship between this and their roles as design educators. Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl reflects on her involvement in the world of design across the last forty years, documenting changing contexts for design in two locations – the USA and Hong Kong. Neil Barnett and Darren Raven discuss the role that group-based projects can have in preparing design students for employment. In many ways this section is the strongest in the book, the added space allowed to these writers and the nature of the publication enables personal reflection that is lost in many other writings on design, here the authors articulate personal views and thoughts that we do not get to read that often.

In the third section, *By Accident or Design*, Sassoon returns to her own story, filling in the details of her individual journey in and through the world of design. We are treated to a fascinating story that documents how design has changed in the last half century seen through a personal lens. Sassoon discusses her growing prominence as a designer in a plethora of fields, from lettering to textile design to exhibition design. She then moves on to discussing her experiences in design education, beginning with her own design training, then moving on to her considerable experience as a design educator, and finally segueing to her work as design researcher investigating handwriting and letterform creation. Her work in this area eventually led to her earning a doctorate from the University of Reading focusing on models and methods for children to learn handwriting.

This book shines when the author and guest writers weave together their own personal histories and considerations, contextualising these observations against the changing role for design in the world. We benefit from the individual thoughts and reflections of some of the most prominent designers, theorists and design educators. Those interested in design education or understanding how the role of the designer has changed over the last fifty years will find much of value in this publication.

Where the book is lacking is from a deficit of speaking about and to the future of design. While the main tenet of the book is historical there is a lack of reflection on the possibilities presented and the challenges coming up for design and design education. Additionally it would have been useful to have more contrasting voices discussing the changes and challenges to design education, alternative viewpoints that argued for the possibilities presented by technologies would have helped to frame a more robust and informing collection.

Overall though, *The Designer: Half a Century of Change in Image, Training, and Techniques*, is an engaging and thoughtful collection, assembling personal memories and considered reflections from a variety of designers, design educators and theorists, enabling us to better understand the last half century of design.