BOOK DESIGN
NEWS

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CELEBRATING TWENTY-SIX YEARS IN BOOK DESIGN

WHO & WHAT'S NEW

• *Book Covers & Jackets.* Quite a few of you ask if I do book covers. Since I rarely do, I usually decline.

Therefore, let me introduce you to **Mike Stromberg**, **Great American Art Co.**

Mike is an accomplished artist/designer and a skilled book cover designer. He has a solid design background with a rather interesting experience thrown in the mix. Take a look:

• 1967—Graduated Temple University, Tyler School of Art (BFA in Graphic Design)

• 1967—Drafted by The New York Jets in the 14th round. Played 3 years with The Jets, including **1969 Superbowl**.

• 1967–1969—Worked as staff designer at New American Library during the (football) off seasons.

• 1970–1972—Dell Books, after Football career was over.

• 1973–75—Staff Designer, LHO Graphics.

• 1976–1977—Allan Wolsky Agency.

• 1978—Founded **Great American Art Co.,** servicing publishers, creating book covers/jackets, ads, catalogs, etc.

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WHAT IS A BOOK DESIGNER?

I receive lots of e-mail from graphics students and graphics professionals asking specific questions about designing books and the book design industry in general. I recently received an e-mail asking me the broad question, "what exactly *is* a book designer?" Here was my reply:

[I visited your website and] based on what you have written I think that what you do is quite interesting.

I'm sure you will find interesting any profession where people truly enjoy what they do. You can't help but feel their enthusiasm for their work.

What *I* find interesting is that very few people know "what" I do, and even fewer know "why" I do what I do. Most people think books just happen. It is fun for me to share the curious world of bookbuilding.

However, I am in need of some clarification. Who exactly is a 'book designer'? What exactly does s/he do? Does s/he have a specific role or function?

Consider a book designer an "architect" for books. The author writes the book, the editor makes the book readable, and the designer decides how the elements of the book will be displayed enabling the reader to efficiently navigate the book with the highest level of comprehension. This threesome is the team that creates the book. The publisher oversees the project and a printer produces the physical result.

A (book) designer must consider many things when designing a book. Some basic things must be determined at the start: trim size; page count; number of colors; the use of photos and graphics; the typical reader of the particular book (or market); and whether this book should be related to a series or a publisher's "style" or any other relationship.

Based on the results of these factors, the designer can then begin choosing appropriate typefaces for text, display, sidebars, captions, etc. The designer

will have to choose the number of characters per page (characters per line multiplied by the lines per page) and make certain the typeface will accommodate that goal. These elements should create a style that meshes with the subject and enable the reader to easily know where they are as well as each element's purpose. Choosing the wrong typeface, the wrong line length, not enough white space or margins, etc. can cause all kinds of problems for the reader.

A good design may not make a book a bestseller, but a bad design can certainly keep it from becoming one.

Some say the design should be so good that the reader doesn't notice it. To a certain extent that is true, but I believe the design should have enough flair that it invokes an emotion that is consistent with the material, but not so much to be distracting. Kind of like background music that isn't noticed but has an effect on one's mood.

Beyond the design, many of us "old school" book designers are also providing typesetting and a finished product that goes directly to the printer. It is important for a good book designer to have knowledge and firsthand experience with the business of publishing, authors, editors, (cover and interior book) designers, photographers, illustrators, typesetters, printers, and the business of bookselling in general.

What we do is part of the whole. And we need to know how our part affects others as well as what others do that affects us.

Technology plays such a big role today so the designer also has to be aware of all of the processing requirements of the compositors and printers.

When I started designing books (26 years ago) and up until about twelve years ago, I designed with pencil and paper, writing exhaustive specifications for typesetting houses. Some books required several pencil layouts and a dozen pages of specs.

Many publishers use in-house people (or hire all-purpose graphic designers) to tackle the design through standard templates and predetermined "house styles." There may be lots of people designing books today, many with little or no real "book design" knowledge or background, but there are few "pure" book designers. Believe me, there is a difference.

DID YOU HONESTLY THINK . . . ?

Here's something that I saw a magician do recently and thought you might be amazed by it as well.

I want you to think of any number. That's right, any number. Got one? Good.

Now take that number and multiply it by 2. Okay?

To that number add 8.

Now divide that number by 2, or by half. Are you with me so far? I hope so.

Now take that number and subtract your original number from it.

Okay, now I want you to take that number and assign a letter to it. We'll assign the letter A to the number 1, B to number 2, C to 3, D to 4, and so forth.

When you have assigned your letter to that number, I want you to think of a country that starts with that letter.

Are you having fun yet? Good, because there's still more. Take your letter that you just thought of a country with and move one letter along in the alphabet. Take that letter and think of an animal.

Move two more letters and think of a color.

Have you got a country, and animal, and a color?

Well, take an upside-down look at the bottom of this page to see that…

REACHING 50 . . .

I recently became a fifty-year veteran of this planet. You would think that fifty years is more than enough time to figure out this thing called "life."

After all of these years, you'd think there couldn't possibly be anything more to be said or written. Yet every week new diet and fitness books are published. More cookbooks continue to find their way into the bookstores. The financial guides are just a steady flow these days. Is there something we missed on successful parenting or ways to plant seeds? New books are published daily and (thankfully) there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

As each of us age, we process the words we read differently because our individual experiences help form the images and reactions to those words.

Successful book design is the ability to design for the reader, taking into account such things as the potential reader's age, experiences, and background.

George Sheehan, the famous running doctor and author of several books on the philosophical side of running, once said that we are each an "experiment of one." We are all alike in so many ways, yet we are each so different. And so it is with books.

There are no green elephants in Denmark!