
Book Review

Collier's Rules for Desktop Design and Typography

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135 pp., \$14.95 ISBN 0-201-54416-4 Addison Wesley, 1990

Where are the 'rules' and if there are any, how would I find them? This is one of the many questions that sprang to mind while reading Collier's Rules. As a book it is quite enjoyable, but I am unsure who the authors are aiming it at. I typeset technical books and would not disagree with the occasional jewels of advice that can be found amongst the jazzily laid out pages and platitudes. Naturally, there are quite a few points upon which I would take issue. However, for those new to the world of DTP and wanting answers the book could be quite difficult to use and understand. A pervading problem is the dominance of advice which is specific to Apple Macintosh-based DTP tools, some of it at an inappropriately detailed level.

The book is divided into eleven sections, each dealing with an aspect of document design and production, starting with characters and moving through to page layout and binding. Each section opens with an introduction of exactly two pages which summarizes the material. The rest comprises typically five double-page spreads, designed as a poster, giving further detail about aspects of the subject. Most of the book is printed in two colours, black and green. The colour section is appropriately in full colour.

The poster presentation style is one of the major flaws of the book. I would quite like to have some of the spreads as posters on my wall as they are quite visually interesting and informative. However, the explanations and associated illustrations are dotted around the page and the eye is not properly led through the visual confusion. In many cases the busy backgrounds make reading the text difficult or impossible. Unfortunately, the printer has marred the effect by poor registration of the two colours, and the binding is not accurate. Fortunately, the book can be opened hard against the binding, since the book is made of stitched sections — a binding method strangely omitted from the section on bindings. The page layout section introduction states, 'Signposts, symbols and other pieces of page furniture to help the reader find his or her way around the document are easily added using DTP, but make sure that they remain consistent throughout the document and that they aren't too overwhelming'. Later is said, 'a solution that works for a poster won't necessarily work for a record sleeve, which has to make sense in different sizes. And a book will need another approach again'. This is all true.

A reference book dealing with a subject where there are complex interactions, such as typography, demands good cross-referencing. The primary way of finding information is by flicking through the pages and looking for an illustration that looks relevant. But, for example, links do need to be made between paragraph layout and filling lines, and the index fails to make them. Also there are no references given whatsoever, not even to some of the software mentioned, so going deeper than the superficial coverage is made more difficult. Perhaps this is a way of heralding the promised hypermedia version of Collier's Rules. However, this is a weak excuse for making the book version less effective. The final section of the book is indeed about Hypermedia — all in seven double-

One of the sources of difficulty is the correct treatment of pictures. This is made clear by looking through several news-stand magazines. Most beginning users of DTP believe that all you need is a scanner and, unfortunately, even basic detail about making the best use of such equipment is missing. For scanned line art, the problems of resolution are not dealt with and the principle of dithering is not clearly explained. The explanation of the difference between bitmap and object-based picture formats is just about adequate. The implication that working with colour is straightforward is amazing; the comparison of a conventionally separated colour print with a DIY separation is simultaneously misleading and informative. The colour balance needs attention in the former; the misregistration of the latter may have been intentional.

McLean's *Manual of Typography* is now technically outdated, but on price and as a book to look at and use it stands up well to Collier's Rules. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but the fashion magazine approach to the latter's design grates. In conclusion, I did wonder if I had been the victim of an intellectual confidence trick. The book pays homage to the wonders of DIY production using computer-based tools and shows just what the technology is capable of. It gives some advice about harnessing the power of the tools, but is richly packed with counter-examples. These were not lost on me, but I fear they would be missed by the intended readership. I get the feeling that the book is the culminating effort of a team that have felt they have 'made it' through the DTP maze and believe they have now graduated. I think not; buy the book and use it as the basis of your own critical exercise.

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