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Book review

FABRICATION: THE DESIGNER'S GUIDE
P. Silver, W. McLean, S. Veglio and S. Hardingham. Architectural Press, Elsevier, 2006. ISBN 0 7506 6558 0, £22.99, 192 pp.

I looked forward to reviewing this book, as there is a definite need for a publication that will assist designers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of different materials and the various methods of fabricating these. Sadly, this book is a missed opportunity, partly as a result of a surfeit of mainly black-and-white photographs of the various work processes, set in a rigid layout so that the text is artificially limited to only a quarter of every second page. It would appear that the attraction of publishing the book as a pictorial 'design statement' using photographs taken by the authors took precedence over the real needs of its intended readership.

To select one fabrication method over another, a designer has to understand the relative merits of each process and the order of cost inherent in that selection. This book contains absolutely no cost information and only limited facts on the range of different processes available from each of the selected fabrication methods.

The book is structured as an examination of the tools and techniques of 12 different individual fabricators. Five work with metal, three with fabrics, two with stone products and the others with glass and timber. The level of detail about each varies, with some chapters providing reasonably detailed information on the constraints of size and techniques, whereas other chapters give no information on the limits of the fabrication processes. Because of the focus on individual companies, it is not clear how typical or atypical each of them is, compared with others working in that field.

Similarly, although some of the numerous photographs illustrate important facets of the fabrication process, and could assist a designer in selecting which approach would best meet his or her requirements, many others would have been better left out and replaced by the important written information that has not been included. A fuzzy shot of a spinning machine may be an interesting image, but it conveys no information that will assist a designer to make a rational choice to use a particular fabrication process.

The two principal authors, Silver and McLean, teach technical studies at the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster. I assume that the desire to write a book of this type arose from the difficulty they found in sourcing this type of data on fabrication for their students. Although the limited information provided in this book might provide sufficient support for a module of an undergraduate course, the need remains for a more thorough treatment of this subject.

S. Mackay