
Book Review

Line, Shade and Shadow: The Fabrication and Preservation of Architectural Drawings

“The book began quite innocently with a search for information that was not there,” begins Lois Olcott Price in the introduction to her recently published book, *Line, Shade and Shadow: The Fabrication and Preservation of Architectural Drawings*. A labor of love for Price for over two decades, this work amply rewards those who have long awaited its publication. A small preliminary quibble: it might have been good to have included in the title “...Before 1940” which would clue the buyer that the book does not include discussion of computer assisted design (CAD) and computer printer output material, focusing instead on pre-World War II and pre-Modernism materials and methods. The information that Price does include is thoroughly researched, as is expected of Price’s work.

The book is divided into four distinct chapters neatly arranged. One: Architectural drawing fabrication before 1860. Two: Architectural drawing fabrication between 1860-1940. Three: Photoreproductive processes used by architects. Four: Preservation and conservation issues with architectural drawings. Each section has endnotes with bibliographic references. A nice glossary exists at the back of the book. The size, heavy coated glossy paper, large font, and design layout scream “coffee table book,” yet the information is encyclopedic. As noted by James F. O’Gorman, in the forward, “This is a reference book, not one to be read cover to cover.” The book is a gem to skip through, easily read in specific sections as needed. The abundant, large photographs by Jim Schenck compliment Price’s descriptive text.

Price begins by outlining how the development of technology within the culture impacted the tools necessary for creating new modes of building, thereby putting the drawings in period context. Chapters one and two are a short master’s class in circa nineteenth and early twentieth-century architectural drawing and design. Where else will one find a definition of “mouth glue” (p. 24), a discussion on the importance of French curves (p. 63), suspended pantographs (p. 65), or poché (p. 100), and read about lawn manufacture, as in lawn fabric (pp. 90-91)? Of further delight for architects, artists, historians, and conservators are sections discussing paper characteristics (pp. 16-17) including papers used for tracings (pp. 76, 81-88), watercolor manufacture and use (pp. 36-43), inks (pp. 103-118), dry media (pp. 119-126), and erasers (pp. 126-128).

The organization of chapter three on photographic reproductive processes is straightforward beginning with an overview of basic nineteenth-century printing-out photographic development in the context of the era. It is followed by the name, history, process description, identification methods, bibliography, and example images for each iron, silver, carbon, and dye process listed. A few of the illustrations (e.g. Pellet and Vandyke) are unfortunately placed within the description of the previous process. Careful reading of the figure descriptions will avoid confusion. Throughout this chapter, Price presents a balanced amount of pertinent technical, historical, and practical information. Similarities between historic photographic processes are directly addressed in the “confused with” sections.

The details of period working methods and materials covered in the first three chapters will help caretakers establish appropriate care schemes and conservators to choose appropriate treatment protocols. If unclear, chapter four clarifies the impact of historical construction and use directly on the condition of the materials today. High praise goes to Price for clearly presenting a myriad of helpful solutions for a large array of materials and collections. In this final chapter, each historic format and process are covered, as are issues of management, arrangement, surveys, environment, storage, access, exhibit, duplication, and emergency/disaster recovery. Readers may wish to tab page 240 for the quick reference chart of “Photoreproduction Sensitivities” and page 300 for the “Recovery Summary” chart.

The information of most direct interest to conservators begins on page 308 and extends through page 346. A comprehensive guide to relevant information without becoming an instructional manual, this section repeats plenty of “cautions” throughout to satisfy the most nervous conservator, while conveying enough helpful information to those learning from the text. For example, on page 338, within a discussion of pressure-sensitive tape removal, Price notes that organic solvents can soften the adhesion and how various papers might be altered by this procedure. Details regarding specific solvents and application procedures are avoided.

Price predominantly comments on New England and mid-Atlantic US architectural histories because of the geographic spread of technology during this time period, and her access to collections, yet anyone working with similar architectural drawings will benefit from the knowledge presented. Available from Oak Knoll Books in the USA, and Hes and DeGraaf in Europe, this book is a good addition to a reference library and well worth the US\$95 price tag. It is nice to have information that was once missing, now all in one place.

Stephanie Watkins

Having read the review several times, I finally had to find out what this was. Ed.

mouth glue – "...animal glue mixed with sugar or molasses and sold in lozenges designed to melt in the mouth or warm water so the adhesive could be applied from the softened stick or with the tongue."

Lois Olcott Price