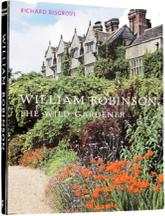


Words and Pictures

Noteworthy new publications, chosen by Anna Rose Hughes



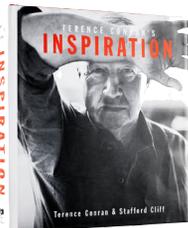
William Robinson: The Wild Gardener

Richard Bisgrove
Frances Lincoln
(£30)

William Robinson hated carpet bedding – the Victorian fashion of creating huge blocks of colour by planting annuals in bold and garish patterns. He also hated formal gardens and, even more, he hated architects who dared to meddle with gardening. He was combative, argumentative and outspoken, but he was also one of the most influential gardeners and garden writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robinson was enormously prolific; he published dozens of books, launched several gardening magazines and wrote hundreds of articles. One of his most successful and enduring books was *The Wild Garden*, in which he advocated the naturalisation of hardy exotic plants so that ‘they will thrive without further care’. Instead of carpet bedding with annuals (‘the evil serpent’) which had to be dug up twice a year, leaving the flower beds looking like ‘graves’ for many weeks, Robinson recommended a more natural-looking approach, using perennials and bold foliage plants which were left in the borders – a method still evident in many flower beds today. In this long overdue book, Richard Bisgrove brings to life Robinson’s work as well as his legacy. And, though beautifully illustrated with photographs and contemporary drawings, *William Robinson: The Wild Gardener* is much more than just a pretty coffee-table book – it’s well researched, illuminating and certainly not a hagiography. Robinson’s influence is still visible in today’s garden, but he was also a man whom Lutyens once described as being a ‘bore’ so annoying that ‘one feels inclined to explode’. **Andrea Wulf**
H&G readers can buy a copy for the special price of £24 (inc p&p) by calling 01235-827702 and quoting ‘46WRHG’

RIGHT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Liaigre*; *Terence Conran’s Inspiration*; *The Interior World of Tom Dixon*; *William Robinson: The Wild Gardener*

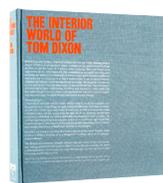
Three thoroughbred runners, with a veteran English stallion leading the field, followed by another horse from the same stable, a little more coltish and frisky. The French horse running in third place definitely has class, but a different style. These three books can be taken at the run, too, since none could be called text-heavy. Each offers an insight into the current state of design, in various categories, but it is not easy to say exactly what that state is. The tendency for designers to dissociate themselves from any particular movement, and, while their feet are firmly in the stirrups of modernism, avoiding frills and kitsch, their hands are signalling all sorts of mild subversions, in the form of idiosyncratic objects from past and primitive worlds



Terence Conran’s Inspiration:

Terence Conran and Stafford Cliff (Conran Octopus, £30)

There is nothing new about this balancing act. The blurb of Conran’s book states that ‘unlike many contemporary designers and architects, Conran’s tastes were never completely modern or completely traditional, but a unique combination of the two.’ It is best not to rely on book blurbs for accuracy, but it is seriously misleading to suggest either that Conran was the first designer of this kind, or that he remains remarkable for this reason. The game began with modernism, and produced expert players in Le Corbusier, Gio Ponti, the Eameses, and almost English decorators apart from the strict historical stylists. Almost every page of *House & Garden* in the period when Conran was learning about design conveyed the message that modern design is all the better for having a few bits of Victoriana or folk art sprinkled over the surface. Conran migrated from furniture design into retailing, and popularised this eclecticism through Habitat, and later The Conran Shop, with ever-reliable flair, bending a little to catch the winds of change, but keeping the hoof beat constant. In the interiors and garden of his own house in Berkshire, which form the substance of this book, we can eavesdrop on some of his life story, and see the delightful objects he likes and is inspired by.



The Interior World of Tom Dixon

Tom Dixon (Conran Octopus, £60)

Tom Dixon, who was design director of the post-Conran Habitat when the company was trying to recapture its youth, is now involved with the more focused business Artek, based on Alvar Aalto’s furniture. Included in the vast range of illustrations in his book are some examples of Artek’s ‘Second Life’ project, which celebrates vintage Aalto furniture rather in the manner of pre-faded jeans, such as three-legged stools with paint layers like a weather-beaten fishing boat. Dixon has written more text than Terence Conran, in which he evades the task of defining design and decides to let the pictures do the talking. He likes to be hands-on, and we follow his progress from welding to creating extruded plastic resembling tagliatelle, which can be turned into furniture.



Liaigre

Christian Liaigre, Thomas Luntz and Jean-Philippe Piter (Flammarion, £60)

Christian Liaigre works for private clients, transforming existing buildings (or in one case a yacht) with his own pleasing and rather dark-toned minimalism. There are luscious locations, exquisite bathrooms where the baths are made of wood, and every door handle is a work of art. You can’t go to the shops and buy this look, so buying the book is the next-best thing. **Alan Powers**
H&G readers can buy each book at special prices (all inc p&p): Conran for £35 (quote ‘CONR46’) and Dixon for £55 (quote ‘CONR47’) by calling 01903-828503, and Liaigre for £00 by calling 0000000000 and quoting xxxxxxxx □



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