



Day for night. One of timberbuild's most ambitious projects, the Hannover 2000 ExpoDeck ...

Another of these extraordinary timber decks is being built in Metz, northern France.

A Timberbuild essential

Steve Johnson reviews the English edition of the book *in-the-know-engineers and enlightened carpenters* have been seeking out for years

Timber Construction Manual
Herzog, Natterer, Schweitzer, Volz, Winter, Birkhauser
Edition Detail, 4th edition 2004

Following three editions of the *Holzbau Atlas*, Swiss publishers Birkhauser have published an English translation of this indispensable book modestly titling it *Timber Construction Manual*. Like the first three, this fourth edition was jointly written by the five apostles of Germanic timber design: architect-professors Thomas Herzog, Roland Schweitzer, Michael Volz, and engineer-professors Julius Natterer and Wolfgang Winter. Despite their impressive scholastic credentials, these men cannot be fairly labelled as academics. They jointly and independently build outstanding architecture that pushes the bounds of technology, aesthetics, and ecological thinking.

Well-detailed examples in the book also cover the work of other gifted designers, many of whom are not known for their use of timber. The mundane is bypassed. This book is all about inspiring by example, and underpinning those examples with bagfuls of clear and beautifully delineated supporting information. Judging from the number and types of people proudly admitting ownership of one of the three previous editions, I am aware that the appeal of this book goes well beyond architects; in-the-know engineers and enlightened carpenters grabbed this book long before an English translation was mooted.

If you are interested in timber construction, and especially in new design, this book is indispensable. Birkhauser may be known amongst some designers for their immaculate *Detail* magazines, published side-by-side in German and English. This book is all in English

and has not a wasted column inch of technical, graphical, and photographic information. While reading through this book, some differences between German and British practices of timber design become clear. German carpentry traditions are ancient, continuous, and constantly updated. British traditions, although also ancient, are not continuous, and are only now being updated and sporadically recorded. In the book

there is great emphasis on softwoods and heavily engineered timber. There is mention of hardwoods, but almost as a bygone material. Equally, while ecological issues are raised, there isn't a great deal written about the negative effects of over-harvesting. The assumption seems to be that any use of timber is good. Having said this, the authors go to great lengths to show empirically how, if used thoughtfully and sustainably, timber is the king of low-impact materials.

One final downside of this book is an almost complete omission of the word 'carpenter'. This I find astonishing as, with the book being otherwise so comprehensive and holistic, it neglects to sell to designers the advantages of being able to work alongside perhaps the last remaining master builders. Despite only a couple of shortcomings, if you want to know more about the properties, limits, advantages, and extreme potential of timber, this is probably the best single timber construction document available.

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