

BOOK REVIEWS

INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER

Designer's Trade

By Gordon Russell. Pp. 328+23 plates. (George Allen and Unwin: London, 1968.) 60s.

Designer's Trade is the modest title that Sir Gordon Russell has chosen for his autobiography. His choice of so old-fashioned a term suggests that the picture he has of himself was formed during his early contacts with the Arts and Crafts Movement and confirmed when, in the twenties, he became an influential designer of furniture and radio cabinets. It also suggests that neither he, nor the public, has realized the full significance of his later achievements at the Board of Trade, and at the Council of Industrial Design, where he pioneered a new kind of industrial diplomacy, that of a government department that tries to reform industry from the outside. His gentlemanly yet firm influence over the Utility Furniture Committee during the Second World War and his tactful enthusiasm at the Council of Industrial Design from 1947 to 1957 showed, perhaps for the first time, that it is possible for an advisory agency to overcome the hostility and indifference of industry and to raise appreciably the quality of industrial output.

Now that the need to reform industry is seen to be more urgent than it was in Gordon Russell's period, we would do well to look closely at the way in which this gentle and determined man tackled some of the most novel and unpromising jobs in government service. His patient and realistic approach to these is exemplified in his comment on the public reaction to utility furniture, "The intelligentia criticized it as being too conservative, the trade as being too advanced, but I was encouraged to find shots coming from both directions: it looked as if we were about right. I am never for forcing the pace, a limited advance and then consolidation is a sound principle both in war and peace". The robustness and good sense of this quotation, born of direct experience of such diverse activities as hotel keeping, antique dealing, stone-carving, furniture manufacture and of the fighting at Passchendaele and the Somme, is typical. It owes nothing to intellectual or political theories (he dismisses these as "sillyologies") and hints at the inner strength and detachment that underlies the life that he describes so well.

If one can criticize his work as director of the Council of Industrial Design, it would not be for the amount of progress made but for the decision to concentrate on the visual rather than the functional aspects of designing. As a result the CoID has become known largely as a temple of good taste while the improvement of product performance has been left to unofficial organizations such as Consumers' Association and the Ergonomics Research Society. It is a pity that Sir Gordon Russell's experience did not include a scientific training that might have led him to notice the wartime success of operations research and to redirect it towards the needs of the users of industrial products. Had he done so, the CoID might have had a substantial influence on the safety of cars, the comfort of hospital patients and similar questions. Gordon Russell's account of his ability to learn by very diverse experiences suggests that he could have adapted as creatively to applied science as he did to everything else that came his way. He is perhaps a prototype of the "multi-professional man" who is so badly needed now that the divisions of our industrial society are becoming more apparent.

I have said nothing of the book itself, believing that its readability, straightforwardness and charm are bound to elicit good reviews in other journals and believing also that readers of *Nature* would be more interested in the industrial significance of Sir Gordon Russell's work. To read his autobiography is to be inspired by the excellence that he perceives, or induces, in every object or action, and to feel, almost directly, the invisible, magical influence that he has exercised throughout the long life that he so modestly and entertainingly describes.

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WORLD CLIMATES

Climatology and the World's Climates

By George R. Rumney. Pp. x+656. (Collier-Macmillan: New York, London, 1968.) 115s.

THE primary purpose of this large book is to introduce the reader to the nature and distribution of world climates. As, however, a regional treatment of climates demands an understanding of meteorological processes, the first six chapters (pages 1-102) outline the fundamental physical principles. This physical climatology opens with an account of the progress of atmospheric studies from ancient times to today. Here the work of Richard Brinsley Hinds in 1842 should be added (see *Weather*, July, 276-88; 1967).

The following chapter deals with the chemical properties of the atmosphere in its broadest sense. The approach is informative and comprehensive rather than selective. Thus the author includes radon (emanations from radium present in the soil) as an "important component of the atmosphere".

The three succeeding chapters—on atmospheric relationships and processes; the general circulation of the atmosphere; and air masses, fronts and storms—are suitably basic for a largely verbal and visual treatment of such complex topics. The two following chapters present the world patterns of climatic elements and analyse the properties of the Earth's surface that modify these patterns so as to form an assemblage of distinguishable climatic regions. Climates are classified by means of "readily identifiable features of the Earth that reflect with reasonable accuracy the many varieties of climatic influence". These features are considered to be primarily major plant associations and secondarily landforms and drainage. The easiest way to recognize a climatic region, at least at the introductory level of investigation, is said to be through the effect of climate on the predominant groupings of local plants.

The author admits the impossibility of identifying distinct boundaries in such groupings but considers this weakness immaterial as the transitional areas are so extensive that regional boundaries are "provided only as a convenience for purposes of discussion". Many readers, however, will doubt the utility and convenience of any taxonomy that is not based on scientific criteria, capable of mathematical expression, itself capable of testing and improvement. It happens that in large areas the relationship of present climate to present vegetation is very obscure. For example, the scarcity of tropical semi-deciduous forest in Africa and the absence of tree growth about the Plate estuary do not appear to be caused by climate. Indeed, grasslands pose awkward problems for climatic determinists. Even a climatological novice may be surprised that in this volume the genial long grass pampa of Uruguay (Montevideo: mean of coldest month 51° F) is placed in the same climatic class as the frigid winter prairie of the American mid-West (Winnipeg: mean of coldest month -3° F). As stated above, however, the classification used is considered merely a convenient framework for the discussion of characteristic climates.