BOOKS

Materials for Sustainable Sites, by Meg Calkins, ASLA: Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009; 452 pages, $64.

Reviewed by Virginia Russell, FASLA

This book is a serious reference manual, comparable in scope, depth, and indispensability to Time Saver Standards for Landscape Architecture (Harris and Dines, 1998). It is divided into two sensible parts: the first part is an in-depth scrutiny in four chapters of the tools and methods for determining sustainable metrics, sourcing, and specifying; the second part is a series of chapters for each of nine material genera.

The majority of the book’s photos are black and white—and there aren’t many of them, with only an eight-page collection of color photos of select installations—but readers can team Calkins’s book with Living Systems: Innovative Materials and Technologies for Landscape Architecture (Margolis and Robinson, 2007) for full-color inspiration. Nearly every page has diagrams, tables of definitions and comparisons, and lists of guidelines. The appendices are tables of the materials’ embodied energy, embodied carbon, and health and environmental impacts.

In the first chapter, key principles of sustainable materials are outlined, as defined by Calkins. The boundaries of her definition of “sustainable” are permeable; she includes conventional materials such as asphalt when used in the most efficient and innovative methods and mixtures, until the day when a comparable renewable material becomes available. This pragmatism in her approach—to be smart about using what we have at hand—is a relief from extremism. Calkins does not neglect the third leg of the stool: when economic and environmental implications are discussed, social equity, usually in terms of human health, is given integrated coverage.

Another chapter describes the impact of construction materials, not just in the materials themselves, but also in their extraction, production, distribution, and so on, so that the reader fully appreciates the magnitude of an impact spectrum. The breadth of this chapter’s citations from international reports and fields like industrial design is impressive, current, and, for some readers, an unnecessary or perhaps unpleasant expedition into just how bad off we are on this planet. Calkins tilts the evidence in a productive way, toward alternative policies, principles, ideologies, and practices.

This review of alternative approaches is followed in the next chapter by descriptions of the methods for evaluating environmental and health impacts, specifically life cycle assessment (LCA), sustainability assessment, embodied energy analysis, and embodied carbon. Calkins describes the strengths and weaknesses of each method. This chapter goes deeper into LCA, citing two tools: Building for Environmental and Economic Sustainability (BEES), and the Athena Sustainable Materials Institute’s Environmental Impact Estimator and EcoCalculator for Assemblies. I would have liked to see a walk-through that used one of the tools to evaluate at least one of the sustainable materials in the book, like a more sustainable recipe for asphalt versus the traditional recipe taken through BEES. Knowing that these tools exist is useful, but demonstrating their application would be enlightening.

There is a chapter for designers. Calkins contrasts the process for design and specification of new materials against the process for reclaimed materials and addresses the processes for each life cycle phase of materials, including designing for disassembly and other approaches to reuse. The second part of the book, with separate chapters for nine materials (concrete, earthen materials, brick masonry, asphalt pavement, aggregates and stone, wood and wood products, metals, plastics and rubber, and biobased materials), includes photos of the materials in various stages of manufacture or installation, construction details, and an overview of the impact spectrum for each material. Calkins makes no pretense that this book is exhaustive. This said, perhaps vegetated roof materials can be included in the next edition.

Calkins’s background in both architecture and landscape architecture may explain why these chapters include extensive coverage of building architecture materials, which one might regret for distracting from landscape architecture materials. For example, in a chapter on earthen materials, rammed earth, adobe bricks, and cob are discussed at length in the context of their use for structures. Their use in landscape applications is limited, although Calkins assures us that leftover rammed earth material can be used as soil cement for paving, and there is a lengthy treatment of the considerations for using adobe bricks in site walls. This coverage straddles professional boundaries and will appeal to readers outside the community of landscape architects. The integrated design process required of sustainable design obliges professionals to be aware of the materials and methods as well as the expertise of varied disciplines. A case study of this integrated design approach, blending professions and materials, could be used to conclude this book, effectively putting all of the essentials into one carry-on bag.

The timing of this book’s publication is ideal, being aligned with the launch of the Sustainable Sites Initiative, to which Calkins has contributed expertise. Materials for Sustainable Sites
will be the constant companion of landscape architects and related professionals who want both inspiration and credible information about the sustainable palette of our art.

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**Computer Graphics for Landscape Architects: An Introduction**, by Joe Buitrago, ASLA, and Ashley Calabria, ASLA; Florence, Kentucky: Delmar Cengage Learning, 2009; 272 pages, $86.95.

**Reviewed by Madis Pihlak**

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS NEED more digital media books like this. AutoCAD undergoes a major revision every 12 months. Google’s SketchUp Pro adds major features on a similar time scale. Landscape architects who aren’t digitally enabled fall farther behind every year with the continuing transition to digital media. They need clearly written books demystifying drafting and image editing software so they can learn the most up-to-date graphic software programs.

This book is a simple one-stop-shopping introduction to the four most common computer graphic programs used by the majority of landscape architects. Still, one book that gets you started with AutoCAD, Photoshop, InDesign, and SketchUp is a tall order. The way this book copes with the complexity is to use simple case study projects, which continue throughout the book.

Each chapter begins with a simple learning objective. The end of each chapter has a short definition of terms, but not all of the definitions are as clear as they should be for the novice software user. DWG is not just an “abbreviation of drawing” but is also the all-important native AutoCAD file format. Knowing what DWG means is important to be able to move the AutoCAD files into Photoshop.

AutoCAD, SketchUp, and InDesign all have one chapter devoted to them. Photoshop has two chapters, one about importing an AutoCAD file into Photoshop and the next about Photoshop image manipulation issues. The Photoshop chapters are perhaps the greatest weakness of the book. The version of Photoshop covered is two versions out of date. Software change is the perpetual problem with software-oriented books, but most software books are only one version out of date, not two.

The last chapter summarizes file exchange among the selected programs. Examples of student work are also provided in this last chapter. Unfortunately, some of the student work is not up to publication standards. A more selective group of student work would have been more convincing for landscape architects skeptical about digital media possibilities.

One distraction is the frequent use of the title of professor for both authors. In future editions of the book the text should focus on getting the reader to understand the complex software commands, not on the authors’ academic titles. This book addresses a very important topic in a straightforward manner that will not confuse even the most computer-phobic landscape architect. The simple approach of the book is the greatest reason for landscape architects to buy it and apply these new skills to their practice.

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**Noteworthy**


**San Francisco-based landscape architects** Gabriell Meil and Emily Rylander wrote and illustrated this charming children’s book chronicling a mass migration, led by a group of disgruntled penguins, of animals from the despoiled Earth to the more pristine moon.

The detailed, whimsical drawings and laid-back theme of conservation with a dash of adventure will appeal to adults as well as their kids.


**This report by the American Planning Association provides case studies of urban forestry programs in cities and towns across the United States. It is heavy on policy issues and aimed at landscape architects, arborists, and bureaucrats working in the public sector to manage or expand the urban forest.**

However, it could have been improved by providing examples of diagrams that cities and counties can use to make their laws clearer.


**The title of this book is misleading. It’s not primarily about ornamental grasses but rather a flattering (to put it mildly) biography of Wolfgang Oehme, FASLA, who uses such grasses, among other plants, in his garden designs. Readers who are not put off by the “vanity” portrayal of Oehme may glean some useful information about the “New American Gardens” designed by Oehme, Van Sweden & Associates.**

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House of Stone and Light

The Lamar Dodd School of Art gets a new home on East Campus

Washington Semester Program offers students a capital experience
Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: A Girl's Guide to Benching the Bad Boys
Tate Publishing Enterprises, 2008
By Robert Williams (ME '88)
Teacher, counselor and Baptist minister Williams offers a practical and humorous playbook that illustrates secrets of "the game" while enlightening and encouraging young women to form positive, lasting relationships.

Selling the American Way
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008
By Laura A. Belmonte (AB '89)
Selling the American Way examines the context, content, and reception of U.S. propaganda during the early Cold War as its creators faced the challenge of reconciling their symbolic America with the complex political realities of the time.

Down Home: Dispatches from Dixie
Southern Lion Books, 2008
By Bob Dart (MA '73)
In this nostalgic account of growing up in the South, the author has compiled, with humor and insightful prose, some of his favorite true-life yarns about traditions and memories unique to the South.

Color Mastery: 10 Principles for Creating Stunning Quilts
Willow Ridge Press, 2009
By Maria Peagler (ABU '87)
The author—an award-winning quilter and instructor living in the foothills of the Georgia Appalachians—has created a detailed and colorful workbook filled with instructions, artist’s tips, exercises and easy-to-do quilting projects.

From Mounds to Megachurches: Georgia’s Religious Heritage
University of Georgia Press, 2008
By David S. Williams (AB '79, MA '82)
From Mounds to Megachurches is an account of Georgia’s religious heritage, analyzed across a social, cultural and political context. The author includes historical narratives of important figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., intertwining historical issues with Georgia’s religious past.

Mama Does Time
Midnight Ink, 2008
By Deborah Sharp (MS '82)
Meet Mama: a true Southern woman with impeccable manners, sherbet-hued pantsuits and four prior husbands. Mama’s antics—especially her penchant for finding trouble—drive her daughters Mace, Maddie and Marty to distraction.

Computer Graphics for Landscape Architects: An Introduction
Delmar-Cengage Learning, 2008
By Ashley Calabria (MLA '94) and Jose Buitrago
This text highlights the computer programs most commonly used by landscape architecture professionals, serving as a step-by-step guide for beginning landscape architecture students and anyone interested in graphics programs.

Swallow Savannah
Evening Post Publishing Co., 2008
By Ken Burger (ABJ '73)
Swallow Savannah is the story of a rural Southern community caught between one man’s all-consuming ambition and the dawning of civil rights. In a single, violent day, decades of racial conflict and government corruption explode.

The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Agriculture and Industry
University of North Carolina Press, 2008
Edited by James C. Cobb (AB '69, MA '72, PhD '75) and Melissa Walker
This encyclopedia examines the economic culture of the South by pairing two categories that account for the ways many Southerners have made their living—agriculture and industry.

Georgia Odyssey
University of Georgia Press, 2008
By James C. Cobb (AB '69, MA '72, PhD '75)
Georgia Odyssey surveys the state’s history, marking its European colonial beginnings and isolated Jim Crow era and analyzing its current position as an international business mecca. Cobb takes a unique look at the interaction of Georgia’s past with its present and future.

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