



Your library will never look like the same again! *The Book on the Bookshelf*



Consider the book and the bookshelf. Ordinary though they may appear, they do have extraordinary knowledge inside. Books are taken for granted as things vertically placed on shelves with spines facing out, but Henry Petroski tells us that this has not always been the case.

In *The Book on the Bookshelf*, Petroski traces how the book and its companion, the bookshelf, evolved to adapt to physical changes in the former.

The author challenges the above taken-for-granted view by telling readers that the storage and shelving of books, as well as the design and construction of libraries, are constantly evolving. Roman and Greek scrolls were usually stored in a hatbox-like container. The development of codices and the use of papyrus, vellum and other materials all called for different storage methods. It is very interesting to learn that in monasteries in medieval Europe that books were shelved horizontally and were chained to the shelving unit against theft. Petroski notes that the vertical arrangement of books did not become a regular practice until overcrowding created the need which, in turn, arose as a result of the mass production of books after Gutenberg.

Petroski also does a wonderful job in describing famous libraries such as those at St. John's College at Cambridge, Merton College at Oxford, the Bodleian, the Laurentian Library in Florence, the British Museum Reading Room and the American Library of Congress. He depicts not only existing libraries, but also the future of library and book printing.

Unimpeachably researched, well-written and richly illustrated, *The Book on the Bookshelf* is really every bookworm's cup of tea.

As fellow of numerous professional institutes of engineering, Henry Petroski is the Aleksandar S. Vesic Professor of Civil Engineering and Professor of History of Duke University. He authored a number of books including *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* (1990) and *Remaking the World: Adventures in Engineering* (1997).

