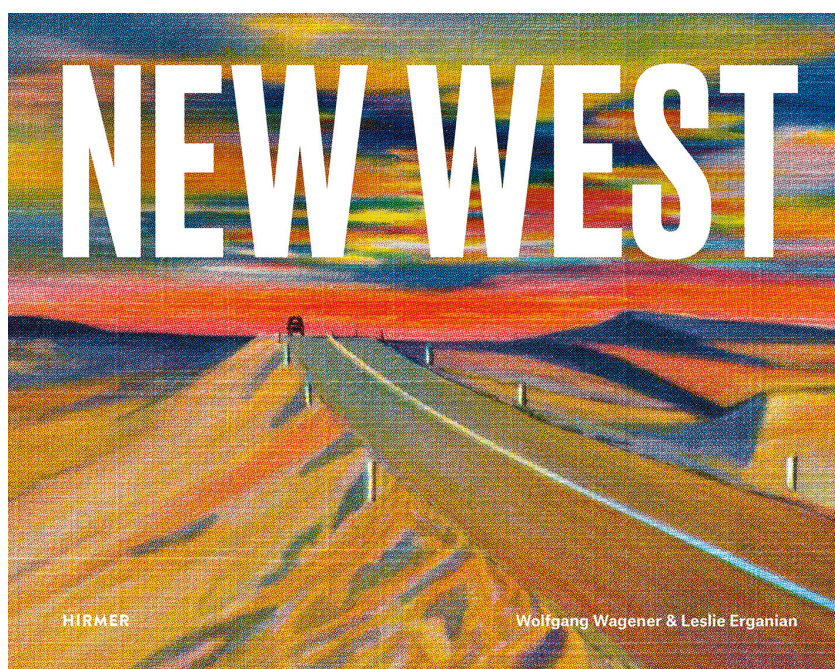


New West: Innovating at the Intersection

by Wolfgang Wagener and Leslie Erganian. Hirmer Publishers, October 2019. 320 p. ill. ISBN 9783777431895 (h/c), \$65.00.

Reviewed January 2020 Dan McClure, Library Director, Clatsop Community College, dmclure@clatsopcc.edu



Who knew that deltiology—the study and collection of postcards—is the third largest hobby after coin and stamp collecting? New West, the thoughtful view into the postcard collection of architect Wolfgang Wagener and journalist Leslie Erganian, then, should have broad appeal. Organized thematically and presented with a contemplative analysis of the rapid development of the region, it flows with haptic energy while

edifying on multiple fronts.

At once a study of a specific subset of postcards—fabric-textured, high rag-content lithographically reproduced “linen” postcards—created between 1931 and 1959 by their originator, Curt Teich & Company of Chicago, and a study of the four innovation waves steam, steel, oil, and information as they manifest throughout history, New West is full of life. Over 400 cards are beautifully reproduced throughout six chapters, with essays and supporting graphics. Each reproduction provides enticing views of material culture through visions of hyperreal colors on photographs touched up to highlight details. Overall, the greater Wagener-Erganian collection includes more than 5,000 mid-century Curt Teich linen postcards as well as photographs from Julius Shulman, New Topographics photographs and correspondence, and additional works on paper.

The first chapter introduces the innovation waves, with the next four unpacking the concepts through “Landscape,” “Infrastructure,” “Architecture,” and “Entertainment.” For those more curious about the form of the Teich postcards than the themes and subject matter, the final chapter provides some history on Teich’s innovations that ultimately achieved a ubiquitous stature and dominated the postcard market for a third of the twentieth century until glossy photochromes supplanted them in the 1950s. Linen cards, with almost 200 million produced by the company before it closed in 1959, used a five-color process over a black and white print.

Teich was a German émigré and descendant from generations of printers, who rose to employ over 1000 workers, from photographers to hand colorists to a vast sales team at the height of the company’s run. Teich was also an accomplished photographer in his own right, and his extensive documentation of US landscapes formed the nucleus of his catalog.

The book excels in its design. Infographics are a treat for the eye while the textural quality of the cards is readily palpable. Leafing through the pages of this colorful assemblage of natural and manmade wonders is great fun, yielding many intriguing views of landscapes and architectural feats. Sunsets, canyons, bridges, strip mines, factories, and city vistas fill this engaging tome. For more object-oriented readers, an index would have been a helpful addition. That said, the book is laid out logically and appealingly, and there is an extensive bibliography for further study. This title can occupy a worthy and unique niche in design and photography collections.