

ON THE BOOKSHELF

Books Every Pilot Should Own

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By Jan W. Steenblik, Technical Editor

The last three Decembers, “On the Bookshelf” has reviewed 11 classics of aviation literature (to read about these books, plus the recommendations of readers, visit www.alpa.org/bookshelf). This year, it’s time to give the visual arts their due.

In addition to great writing, aviation has inspired some great art—paintings (by, for example, Keith Ferris, Bill Phillips, R.G. Smith, and Frank Wootten), pen-and-ink caricatures (Hank Caruso’s military stuff), photography, even sculpture (the Collier Trophy in ALPA’s lobby comes to mind). Some of the best of that art has been embodied in aviation posters. Two of the best books to bring this eye candy to your coffee table are *Looping the Loop: Posters of Flight* by Henry Serrano Villard and Willis M. Allen, Jr. and *The Art of the Airways* by Geza Szurovy.

Both poster books explain that, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, improvements in printing around 1880 coincided with the rise of consumer societies in the rapidly growing U.S. and European cities; posters were the medium for hawking everything imaginable. When airplanes joined balloons and airships in the skies, the result was an explosion of the art form.

In artistic style, aviation posters generally followed period trends, from frilly Art Nouveau to German advertising’s poster style to Art Deco, from realistic destination scenes to abstract, cubist, and psychedelic styles. The color photo posters that came along in the late 1950s are not included in either book.

Meticulously researched, these two art books complement each other well. Each offers up a delightfully surprising smorgasbord of aviation, airline, and social history.

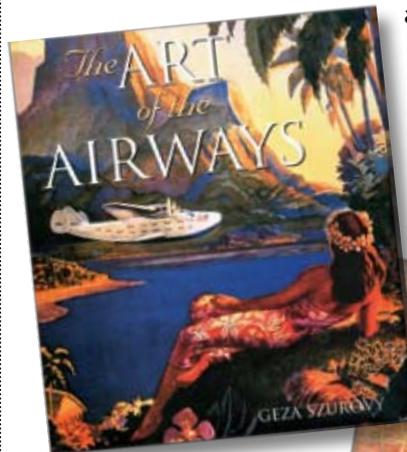
For example, from *Looping the Loop*—

- An unusual linen poster trumpets “the sensation of the century”—the first nonstop transcontinental journey, Robert Fowler’s daring 57-minute seaplane flight across the Isthmus of Panama on April 27, 1913. But the motion pictures taken by photographer Ray A. Duhem during the short hop “not only surprised but alarmed Congress and caused President Woodrow Wilson to issue an executive order forbidding under heavy penalties unauthorized flights over the Panama Canal and its defenses.”
- The pre-World War I Zeppelin dirigibles boasted a luxurious cabin, lined with teak and mahogany, for 20 passengers, who admired the view from comfortable wicker chairs and enjoyed sumptuous lunches and afternoon teas. During the Great War, however, nocturnal bombing raids by Zeppelin airships terrorized English citizens. “Though often picked out by search lights and subjected to heavy gunfire, the Zeppelin raiders can still be regarded as the first strategic bombing force in the world,” the authors assert. Both sides of the Zeppelins’ history are represented here.

While the focus of *Looping the Loop* is primarily on pre-World War II aviation, including the balloon races and early airplane meets that were all the craze in pre-World War I Europe (and, to a lesser degree, the United States), *The Art of the Airways* is exclusively airlines, from before World War I until the end of the 20th century. The latter book is particularly lavish in its treatment of the last decades of the great piston airliners.

A personal favorite: A vertiginous view of Manhattan from above with the shadow of a Braniff DC-6 streaking across skyscraper rooftops.

The Art of the Airways makes the point—in words and



pictures—that, as the decades passed, the bold images of the aircraft that dominated the earliest posters gave way to increasingly smaller, more distant airplanes and greater emphasis on the destination. By the late 1950s, the airplane had disappeared entirely from the poster, with the airline relying only on its name to persuade the potential passenger to book a flight.

Some things don’t change—or perhaps they move in great cycles. Think discounted fares are a product of deregulation of the airline industry? *The Art of the Airways* includes a 1926 Lufthansa poster offering 20 percent off published round-trip fares.

Szurovy concludes that “the modern airliner was one of the most stunning achievements of the 20th century.” However, “Airline flying has matured into just another safe, swift, reliable, affordable, and all too often gridlocked form of mass transportation.... Today we have to look back to sense the thrill of air travel in exotic machines, the delicious tinge of danger aloft, and the rewards of alighting in strange new worlds barely touched by outside influence.”

These lovely poster books will take you there; both are available through Internet shopping sites. 🌐

