



## Cover

*Peter Mendelsund*

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### Cover Peter Mendelsund

Peter Mendelsund has enjoyed years as a much-sought-after book cover designer and art director. Among the many recognizable jackets he has created are those for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*; collections of the works of Joyce, Kafka, Dostoevsky, de Beauvoir, and Foucault; the contemporary works of Martin Amis, Tom McCarthy, Ben Marcus, Jo Nesbø, and James Gleick; and many more. All have greatly benefitted from the care and touch Mendelsund gave them.

*Cover* abounds with Mendelsund's completed book jackets along with ephemera from his previously unseen creative method, including jacket sketches, interior art and editorial illustrations, and scores of rejected drafts. These images are punctuated by Mendelsund's reflections on his work and his process, as well as by texts from writers with whom he has worked and designed for.

*Cover* is a compendium of beautiful design and a beautiful design object itself; a profile and celebration of one of the publishing world's most talented and prolific contemporary creators, and a brilliant showcase of his deft touch for balanced and innovative design.

### Cover Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by powerHouse Books (first published April 8th 2014)

ISBN : 9781576876671

Author : Peter Mendelsund

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Design, Nonfiction, Art, Writing, Books About Books, Art Design

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generation. Mendelsund's ingenuity and creativity, as well as resourcefulness and respect for his work is astonishing - and what is perhaps most impressive is learning that he has absolutely no formal training in the work whatsoever and fell into it through a series of impressive connections at the perfect time of his life. It is as if the man has lived two American Dreams.

Cover is a gorgeous book that would easily serve as a centerpiece to a room as well as be home in the reading curriculum of any design student; a pleasure to read and browse. Besides the contents, it is well constructed and printed.

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### **Gina says**

Peter Mendelsund's career sounds pretty improbable (he interviewed with Chip Kidd holding a few designs for friends in bands and immediately got a job), but there's no denying that he's good at what he does. The covers are organized by genre, and many examples include rejected covers or comments from the authors. I found the latter to be overly fawning (yes, I know it's a monograph to showcase his work, but still), but the former elucidating. When I worked in publishing, my favorite part was going to cover meetings with the designers and sales and marketing. Mendelsund's comments about how he gets away with some of his designs (i.e. his work isn't so outré to need excessive justification, just good) is kind of disingenuous because some of his work is unexpected treatments that might cause hesitation in people whose job it is to position a book in terms of what customers already know. In any case, I found a couple of books to add to my tbr list.

(Also because I feel the need to say this: does anyone else feel like the proposed public domain package just looked lazy? Same with the folk tales.)

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### **Peter Barlow says**

A book that gives really great insight into the work of a great cover designer. I especially liked the fact that rejected covers were included which helps to show how particular cover designs evolved. Highly recommended to anyone wanting to embark on a professional book design career.

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### **Phoenix says**

#### **Under Cover**

I was driven to pick up this book after reading Mendelsund's *What We See When We Read* which I wanted to like, but didn't. As a frequent haunter of book stores both new and used I've found that well designed covers will draw the eye. Mendelsund is a dust jacket designer for Alfred E. Knopf, and has done brilliant and distinctive work on series such as Steig Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Turing's *Cathedral: The Origins of the Digital Universe*, a biography of Benoit Mandelbrot, *The The Flame Alphabet* by Ben Marcus and republished works by Foucault and Hannah Arendt's collection of essays by Walter Benjamin with it's emblematic representation of Benjamin's titles as Paris streets.

Most of the content consists of book covers that Mendelsund created, including a series of rejected covers –for example the original for Gleicks “*The Information*” was far better than the one that was finally accepted. Inside are some modestly interesting short essays – on how Mendelsund changed careers from

being a classical pianist and fell into the publishing industry, thoughts on creativity and the role of covers in representing the ideas inside. Also included are some tributes to the author from people who've worked with him. Unlike some designers, thanks to the ethos of Alfred Knopf publications who grant him the time, Mendelsund reads if not devours the books that he designs for, and it is this connection to the writing that informs his art.

The drawback is that it was published in an overly large and heavy coffee table edition, not suitable for reading in bed or on the go. It's quite good looking but the inconvenience of the form factor drops my rating from just under 4 to a tad above 3. Recommended as library read, especially for graphic designers, but not a keeper.

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### **Tomas Ramanauskas says**

This is a diamond if you love appreciate book covers (who doesn't?) or/and are a designer.

Peter Mendelsund is my new found hero.

This is one of the most tickling reads about the design process, the thinking on art direction, the obsessive depth of detail in one's work.

And it's more than just a monograph of designer's work, it features quite a few passages on thinking about the books itself (Tom McCarthy intriguingly begins by stating that "Only bad books have message")

Buy two, give someone else as a gift.

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### **Gabby says**

Very informative and a cool read if you are interested in book cover design. Also, very inspiring, I loved it.

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### **Mac says**

How to meet and then exceed my expectations for Peter Mendelsund's *Cover*.

First, include numerous book cover samples--some beautiful, some clever, some puzzling (at first), many simple (yet somehow complex), all imaginative. Also, include numerous rejects, the precursors to the final selections, rejects that reveal the designer's development process and the creative mind at work. It's all there, what I had expected from a large format book by a prestigious designer. But there's more...

Include stimulating, thought-provoking text that describes the designer's task, the ultimate goal, the choices at hand, and the interactions with authors and editors. Then include a touch of biography (but not too much), some observations from others (always over-the-top glowing appreciations), and some of Mendelsund's philosophical musings. Add a coda that looks warily to the author's future, and you have thought-provoking

prose interspersed among the many delightful book covers.

So exquisite book jackets and stimulating text; it's what I had expected from *Cover* and much, much more.

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## **M says**

What an interesting book! I heard about it from NPR. Book cover design is something that I see a lot of but have never really given much thought too. It is one of those things in life that someone spent time creating and designing, but what little thought most of us probably spend thinking about covers (aside from the grand or unimpressive). This book has me seeing cover design in a whole new way. Peter Mendelsund takes you through his basic ideas for designing covers and his multiple approaches. His work is very distinctive that I recognized some of the covers in the book though I had never read them. The most interesting covers exhibited were the one that was excepted compared to all the other designs that were not. I would have liked to have seen more rejected covers in this compendium. I really like his understated style. He ends with good advice to budding designers, that the problem isn't having five great ideas but rather trying to cram five great ideas into one little cover.

I highly recommend this gorgeous book.

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## **Neil Coulter says**

Peter Mendelsund couldn't have known he was writing *Cover* just for me; but he was. (Peter, if you're reading this--thank you!)

As a musician who loves books and dreams of designing book covers, this book is like a dream come true. I love every inch of it. Rarely do I find someone else who is a lot like me, but the way Mendelsund views books and reading is almost exactly the way I do. I feel like tearing out his "What Is a Book Cover?" text from pages 110-111 and putting it up on my wall. (Since this is a library book, I won't do that.)

*Cover* makes me want to design book covers (I think I'd be really good at it), and it makes me want to read books Mendelsund designed the covers for (I'm especially eager for the Kafka series and the *Black Jack* series, which look so beautiful). It also makes me want to meet Mendelsund and hang out with him.

I don't know what's in my future, but it's encouraging to read about someone else who made the kind of career switch that I dream of. Maybe, someday . . .

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## **Brent Woo says**

My celebrity book designer crush. Chock full of insight and uncannily written vignettes about Der Prozess of book cover design. It's nearly impossible to put into words what one's aesthetic taste or design sensibilities boil down to, but Mendelsund manages to do so, by presenting the successes alongside the many, many, many failures, and narrating the journey to the finished product. There is a surprising amount of text in this massive coffee table-style book; a mix of transcribed interviews and articles written by Mendelsund himself, editors and authors he's collaborated with, and others.

What strikes me is Mendelsund's life story. He's a classically-trained pianist, and by accident of fate happened on the job of a lifetime, book designing, by being in the right place at the right time. Despite all of that, he's somehow a brilliant designer *and* writer, and despite looking like a simple gawkbok to browse through, his writing actively challenges you:

*Every choice, each step, a step closer to the concretization of the book and thus its impoverishment. It is my job to drag the text, the author's work, perfect in its disembodiment, into awful specificity.*

*If design itself is predicated on youth then late style isn't feasible. If design is not predicated on youth; perhaps it demands timeliness. Familiarity with the zeitgeist is integral to design. Conversely, repudiation of the zeitgeist is integral to late style.*

Goddammit, that's so GOOD. All this insight taken together with innovative cover after cover turns this from a mere showcase of book covers into a biography of an inspiration—an endlessly creative individual who encourages and surprises at every turn:

*Be a citizen of the world, and at least attempt to know a little something about life outside of your own InDesign files. .. Engage in something that matters to you more than your latest project. Some perspective and a modicum of circumspection will improve your mood, expand your horizons, and improve your design work.*

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## **Jill Mackin says**

Peter Mendelsund's beautiful book cover designs.

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## **Joseph Raffetto says**

How Mendelsund, with little design experience, was hired by Knopf is one of the most amazing stories I've ever read. *Cover* is more than a book about design; it's a meditation on the creative process and the love of books by a genius designer. A must for book lovers!

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## **Tim says**

Great book as Mendelsund delivers his insights on the creative process and design. I enjoyed how this famous book cover designer explained his process and looking at his drafts as he developed a cover. Mendelsund is just amazing, and it was great to see the process behind the curtain. Though this book focuses on book cover design, the process Mendulsund covers is about design generally and uses cover design just as an example.

