

## Sixty years of book design at St. Gallen, Switzerland

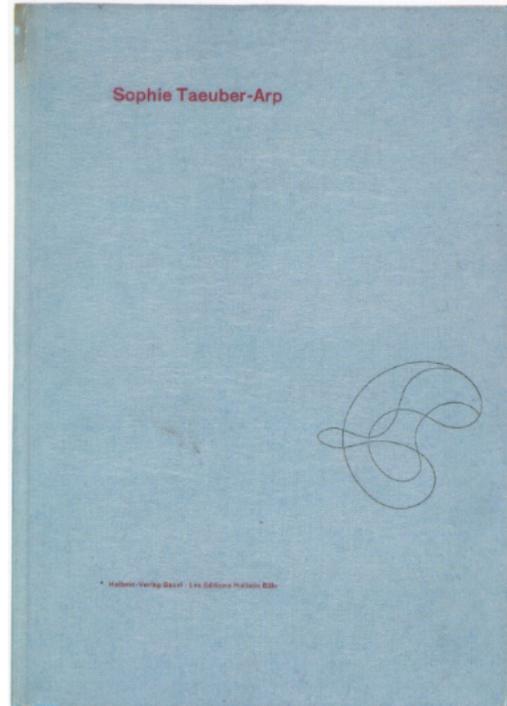
Paul Shaw

Editor’s note: The worlds of T<sub>E</sub>Xnicians and book designers sometimes overlap. T<sub>E</sub>X and friends are a beautiful set of programs, but they are means to an end: the creation of beautiful texts, both in print and on screen. Thus a magazine about visual culture and design, *Print* (<http://www.printmag.com>) may be of interest to TUG members. As an introduction to this magazine we reproduce here, with permission, an article from its online newsletter *Imprint* (<http://imprint.printmag.com>). The online version contains many additional links.

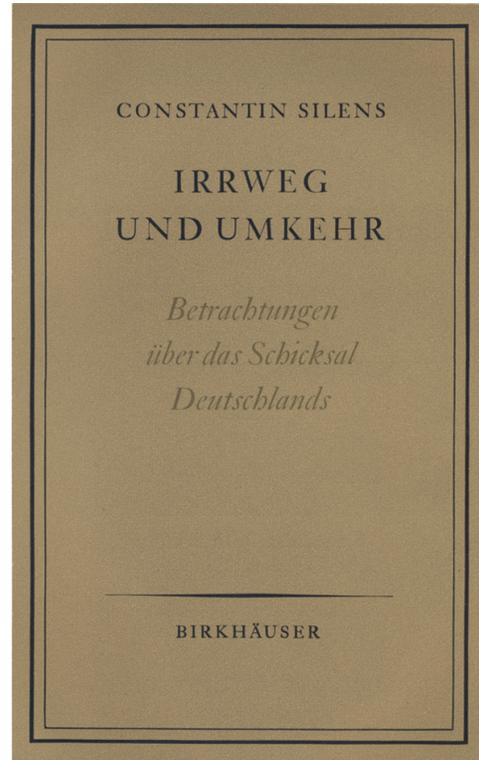
Fifty-five years ago Swiss design was at a crossroads. In “Über Typographie” (*Schweizer Graphische Mitteilungen*, April 1946) Max Bill urged Swiss designers to follow “‘asymmetric’ or organically formed typography”, to reject “the conventional text-image of axial symmetry” and the retreat into historicism that it represented. Jan Tschichold’s rebuttal, “Glaube und Wirklichkeit” (*SGM*, June 1946), repeated his assertion that “The New Typography has not yet been superseded, but it has proved itself to be suitable only for advertising and jobbing. For the book, and particularly for literature, it is completely unsuitable.” He defended the need to design some books “in the manner of traditional typography” while allowing that others might be more suitably done in Bill’s “functional” typography. The Swiss design that won worldwide recognition in the decades following the Second World War followed the path laid down by Bill rather than that of Tschichold. “Swiss” design became the source of “the International Typographic Style” associated with sans serif type—usually Helvetica, a face that ironically most Swiss designers rejected—and grids. (Both essays have been translated into English and published, accompanied by “Über moderne Typographie”, an essay by Paul Renner attempting to mediate the conflict, and contextual essays by Christopher Burke and Robin Kinross in *Typography Papers* 4 (2000), pp. 57–90. Sadly, the issue is out of print.)

Tschichold’s plea for “the right to work in the way that I find best”, whether “newly revived traditional typography” or “functional typography”, although ignored by the graphic design community, took root among book designers, especially those in St. Gallen, a town fifty miles east of Zurich. It is an appropriate place since St. Gallen is renowned for

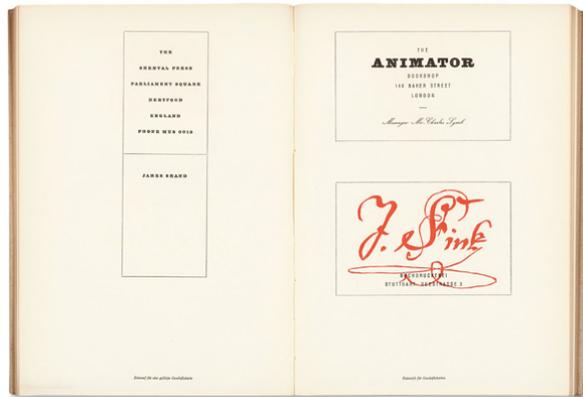
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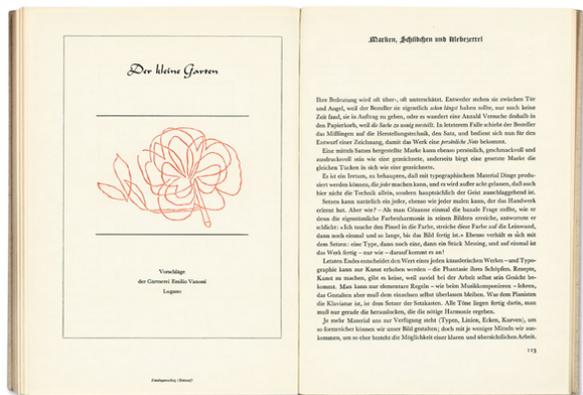
*Sophie Taeuber-Arp* by Georg Schmidt (Basel: Holbein-Verlag, 1948). Binding, title page spread and two double page spreads. Design by Max Bill.



*Irrweg und Umkehr* by Constantin Silens (Zurich: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1945). Jacket. Design by Jan Tschichold.



*Typo-Graphik: Studien und Versuche* by Imre Reiner (St. Gallen: Zollikofer AG, 1943). Spread designed by Imre Reiner.



*Typo-Graphik: Studien und Versuche* by Imre Reiner (St. Gallen: Zollikofer AG, 1943). Spread designed by Imre Reiner.

the Abbey Library of the Benedictine monastery of St. Gall (established 747) which houses one of the most important collections of **early Medieval manuscripts** in the world. It is also the home of Zollikofer, a printer founded in 1789 that became a publisher as well, first of newspapers in 1803, then of the trade journal *Schweizer Graphische Mitteilungen* in 1884, and of books in 1943. (Zollikofer Druck AG is now part of Ringier AG, an international media company.)

The first book from Zollikofer Verlag was *Typo-Graphik: studien und versuche* by Imre Reiner (1900–1987), a Hungarian-born type designer, book designer and illustrator. Appropriately, it is the first book on display in the exhibition *60 Years of Book Design at St. Gallen, Switzerland* at the AIGA National Design Center in New York City. Reiner studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule (Am Weissenhof) in Stuttgart under F.H.E. Schneider, a charismatic teacher who followed a middle path between the modernism of the Bauhaus and *die neue typographie* and the traditional

book design of contemporaries such as E.R. Weiss and F.H. Ehmcke. This was similar to the attitude that Rudolf Hostettler (1919–1981), the progenitor of the “St. Gallen” style, adopted in the wake of the Bill/Tschichold debate.

Hostettler, the designer and editor of *SGM* at the time of the debate, began his career in 1943 at Zollikofer as a layout artist for the journal as well as for the newspaper *St. Galler Tagblatt*. In 1951, when *SGM* merged with *Typographische Monatsblätter* (TM) and *Revue Suisse de l’Imprimerie* (RSI), he became the chief editor, a position he held until his death. From 1952 on TM became one of the primary outlets for the new Swiss style of design, the magazine that showcased the work of Robert Böhler, Emil Ruder, Karl Gerstner and others. At the same time Hostettler, with Hermann Strehler, established an imprint for *SGM* which published books about the graphic arts in a new traditional style. Three of the books were written by Hostettler himself: *The Printer’s Terms* (1949), *Type: A Selection of Types* (1949) and *Klassierung der Schriften* (1964). Hostettler was thus a man in the middle in the Swiss typographic wars, someone who was able to remain on good terms with protagonists on both sides.

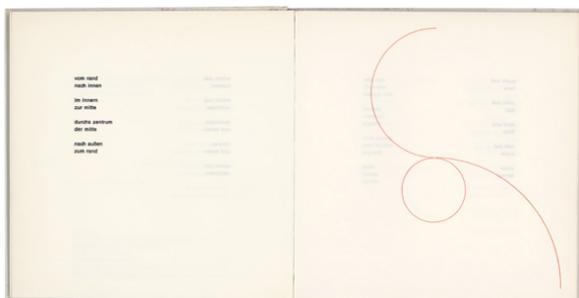
The AIGA exhibition includes all of these books by Hostettler along with Strehler’s *Die Buchdruckerkunst im alten St. Gallen* (1967) which he designed. With the exception of squarish *Type*, these books typify the St. Gallen style. Jost Hochuli, at the event organized by AIGA NY on June 16 to celebrate the exhibition, objected to the idea that there is a “St. Gallen style” yet there is no doubt that the books on display (as well as others by Hochuli himself) share some common design attributes and a similar design sensibility. Following Tschichold, the St. Gallen attitude is that books are for reading above all else. Thus, content comes before design. Depending upon the content, the design may be symmetrical (traditional) or it may be asymmetrical or it may be a combination of both. The typeface may be serifed or sans serif or the two may be used together. Above all, as Hochuli has reiterated on several occasions, the designer must not follow dogma. This open approach is the legacy of Hostettler that Hochuli has passed down in his work, his teaching and his writings. The books in the AIGA exhibition tend to mix symmetry with asymmetry and often to combine serif and sans serif types.

The emphasis on books for reading influences their physical appearance. Here again, Tschichold is a guiding spirit. He emphasized the handiness of a book, decrying formats that were too wide, too large or square:





*33 konstellationen* by eugen gomringer (St. Gallen: Tschudy-Verlag, 1960). Title page spread. Design by Max Bill. Set in Neue Haas Grotesk.



*33 konstellationen* by eugen gomringer (St. Gallen: Tschudy-Verlag, 1960). Double page spread. Design by Max Bill. Set in Neue Haas Grotesk.

the occasion of the centennial of his birth.) They are part of a 44-book series edited by Hans Rudolf Hilty between 1959 and 1964 called *Reihe Quadrat-Bücher*. No. 11 in the series is *33 konstellationen* (1960) by Eugen Gomringer, the Concrete poet, designed and illustrated by Max Bill. It is set in Neue Haas Grotesk (which later that year was renamed Helvetica by D. Stempel AG). No. 15/16 is *Die dritte Generation: 42 Junge Schweizer kunstler...* (1960) by Hilty: was designed by Hochuli's teacher Willy Baus. (For Hochuli's tribute to him see [Typotron 6](#). It is set in Akzidenz Grotesk and uses a self-evident grid. Unfortunately, not enough pages are on display to fully appreciate the grid.

These books are from St. Gall but they are far from the St. Gall "style". Equally far though are



*Die dritte Generation: 42 junge Schweizer Künstler* (St. Gallen: Tschudy-Verlag, 1960). Title page spread. Design by Willi Baus.



*Ein ABC um alte Segelschiffe* by Albert Saner (St. Gallen: Tschudy-Verlag, 1958). Spread with woodcuts by Albert Saner. Design by Willi Baus.

two older books by Baus for Tschudy-Verlag: *Von der Kunst und vom Künstler* by Josef Weinheber (1954) and *Ein ABC um alte Segelschiffe* by Albert Saner (1958). Both are set in typefaces by Baus' mentor Rudolf Koch, Marathon for the former and the blackletter Jessenschrift for the latter. (Marathon, one of Koch's least known faces, was singled out for opprobrium by Tschichold in "Glaube und Wirklichkeit.") They are beautiful books — the balance of the text block in Jessenschrift with the woodcut illustrations of ships by Saner in *Ein ABC* is outstanding — despite looking like strays from an Arts & Crafts exhibition.

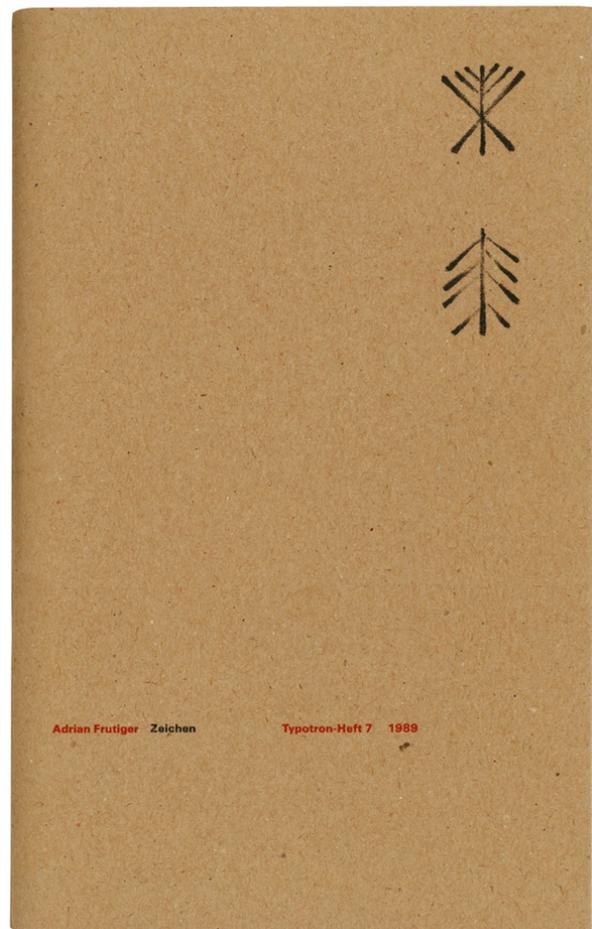
The St. Gallen style of Hostettler, Hochuli and their students tends to be less self-conscious as well as undogmatic. Typefaces are chosen for their readability, rather than their trendiness. Most are seriffed faces in a classical manner, but not wholly of the past. Along with Bembo, Stempel Garamond and Sabon, there is Trump Medieval, Scala, Trinite, Collis and Rialto. (The latter three are fonts rarely seen in the United States.) The preferred sans serif is Univers,

but there is also Franklin Gothic, Futura and Scala Sans — and two instances of Helvetica, a face that Hochuli has studiously avoided in his book designs. Text blocks tend to have indented paragraphs — as Tschichold argued for — rather than the skipped lines typical of Bill and his followers. Grids are present but rarely overtly so. Despite the small size of most of these books, they have generous margins. The side margins, used often for side notes, keep one's thumbs from covering the main text. Two attributes seem to be specifically typical of Hochuli and his disciples, though the first may be traceable to Hostettler: a preference for anchoring the running heads with a thin rule, and the common use of solidly colored endpapers.

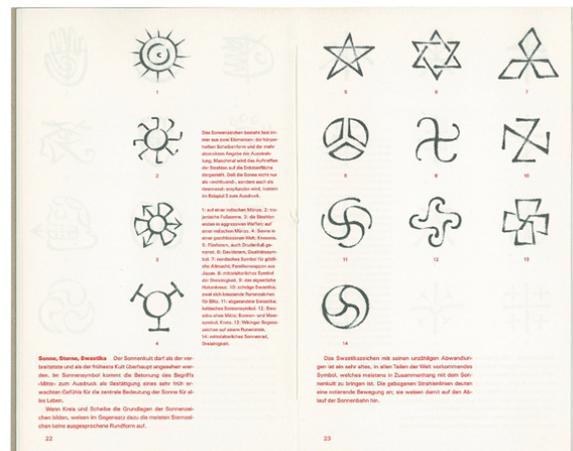
Although Tschichold is the godfather and Hostettler is the father of the St. Gallen style, it is Jost Hochuli (b. 1933) who is the pivotal figure in the exhibition. It is Hochuli who organized the show, handled the installation and designed the accompanying catalogue. After studying at the Kunstgewerbeschule St. Gallen where Willi Baus (1909–1985) was one of his teachers, he worked for Zollikofer under Hostettler. He then spent the year 1959 studying with Adrian Frutiger at the Ecole Estienne in Paris. In 1979 he co-founded the cooperative publisher VGS Verlagsgemeinschaft St. Gallen for whom he has been the chief book designer until recent years. For *Typotron AG*, a typesetter and printer in St. Gallen, he designed (and sometimes wrote) a series of small booklets from 1983 to 1998 as promotional efforts. Since 2000 he has designed a similar series of booklets for Edition “Ostschweiz”.

Hochuli paid homage to Hostettler, his friend as well as mentor, in the first *Typotron* book, *Epitaph für Rudolf Hostettler* (1983), a book not on display in the AIGA exhibition. Instead, *Zeichen* by Adrian Frutiger (Typotron 7, 1989), Hochuli's other mentor, is on display. Hochuli's other works in the show are *Herbstlaub* by Rudolf Widmer (Edition Ostschweiz 4, 2003) and two titles from a 58-book series of the works of Thomas Mann (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002).

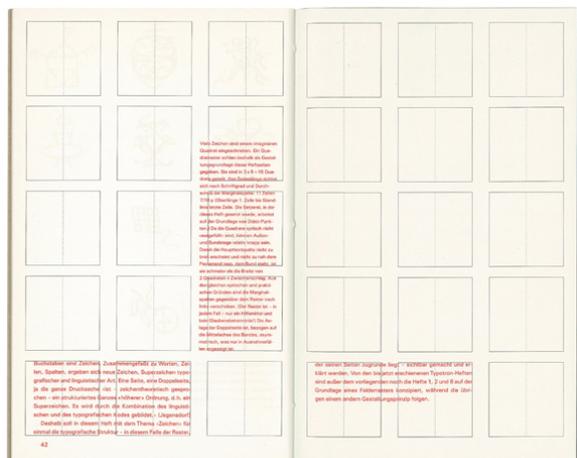
Hochuli has had a slow but steadily widening impact on modern book design and typography in the past thirty years. First, through his work, especially that for VGS and Typotron; then through his teaching at the Schule für Gestaltung in St. Gallen; and more widely through his publications on typography and book design and the traveling exhibitions such as this one that he has orchestrated. In the late 1980s Agfa Compugraphic (now Monotype Imaging) published *Detail in Typography* (1987), *Designing Books* (1990) and *Alphabugs* (1990), each in several



*Zeichen* by Adrian Frutiger (St. Gallen: Typotron, 1989). Cover, designed by Jost Hochuli.



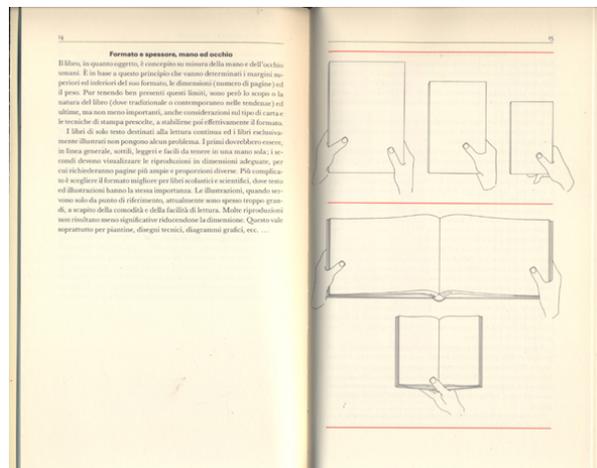
*Zeichen* by Adrian Frutiger (St. Gallen: Typotron, 1989). Title page. Designed by Jost Hochuli.



*Zeichen* by Adrian Frutiger (St. Gallen: Typotron, 1989). Spread showing the book's grid structure. Design by Jost Hochuli.

languages. *Designing Books* became the central part of *Bücher machen* (St. Gallen: VGS, 1996) — translated into English as *Designing Books: Practice and Theory* (London: Hyphen Press, 1996; reprinted 2007 but now out of print) — and *Detail in Typography* was reissued in English in an updated version in 2009 by Hyphen Press. An overview of Hochuli's career can be found in *Jost Hochuli: Printed Matter, Mainly Books* (Sulgen, Switzerland: Niggli, 2002). Through these books, especially the English language edition of *Designing Books*, he has become probably the most influential theorist of book design since Jan Tschichold.

The AIGA exhibition includes several of his students, most notably Roland Steiger (b. 1970) of TGG Hafen Seen Steiger — the other partners are Dominik Hafen (b. 1967) and Bernhard Senn (b. 1965) — and Gaston Isoz (b. 1969). Steiger is responsible for *Spitzen umschreiben Gesichter* (1997), *Cultura Sangallensis* by Peter Ochsenbein (2000) and *Leopold Iklé* by Anne Wanner-JeanRichard (2002), the latter two another pair of narrow books. *Spitzen umschreiben Gesichte* is also narrow but it opens vertically, something which Tschichold would surely have criticized, despite the fact that this structure guarantees a strong spine. *Cultura Sangallensis* is unusual in this show for having traditional footnotes. Isoz, who works in Berlin, is represented by *Arbeiterlyrik 1842–1932* (2003) and *Geschichte der Partei des gemäßigten Fortschritts im Rahmen des Gesetzes* (2005). Both of these deviate from the pure St. Gallen style in the use of an exposed binding without a headband. In the latter the boards are flush with the pages, making opening the book and



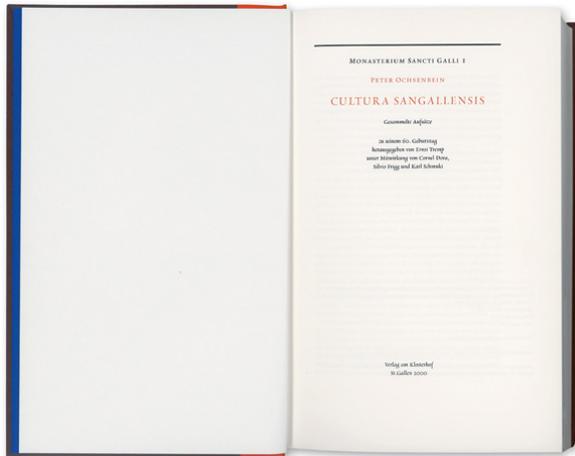
*Come si fa un libro* by Jost Hochuli (Wilmington, Massachusetts: Agfa Compugraphic, 1989). Spread showing the importance of designing books that can be held comfortably by readers. Design by Jost Hochuli.

riffling its pages difficult. In its style of illustration it also shows more of the influence of Oldrich Hlavsa (1909–1965), author and designer of the three-volume *Typographia* (1976, 1981 and 1986).

Another of the teachers at the Schule für Gestaltung in St. Gallen was Max Koller (b. 1933). Koller worked for Zollikofer and later for Gerstner + Kutter and its successor GGK. He is responsible for *Schriftverzeichnis* (1989), the Druckerei Zollikofer type specimen with the lovely patterned letters in the show. Another example of his work for Zollikofer can be found at <http://wiedler.ch/felix/books/story/146>.

There are two other books in the AIGA exhibition that are worth mentioning: *Künstlerheft* by Ian Anüll (St. Gallen: Vexer Verlag, 1987) and *Rund ums Blaue Haus* edited by Ernst Ziegler (St. Gallen: Ophir-Verlag, 1993). Both fit into the St. Gallen style even though they are not designed by individuals with direct connections to Hostettler, Koller or Hochuli. The first is designed by sculptor and painter Josef Felix Müller (b. 1955) for his own Vexer Verlag. *Künstlerheft* is one of the most covetable books in the entire exhibition with its translucent pages that change the images as the pages turn. *Rund ums Blaue Haus* is notable for the way designer Antje Krausch of Atelier Tachezy, Kleger & Partner has used an abstract motif of blue lines derived from the timbers of the titular blue house.

*60 Years of Book Design at St. Gallen, Switzerland* is a quiet show, one that requires time and patience to reveal its treasures. Hochuli's exhibition



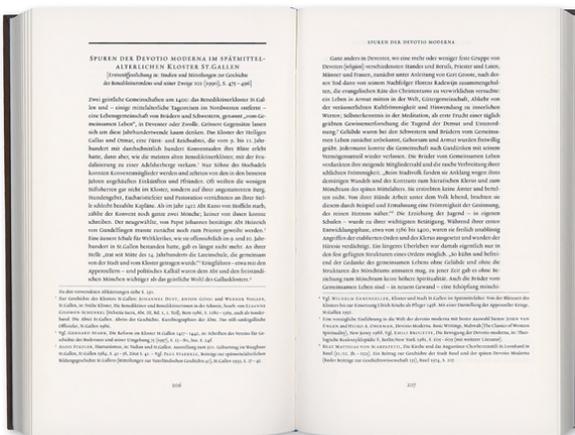
*Cultura Sangallensis* by Peter Ochsenbein (St. Gallen: Verlag am Klosterhof, 2000). Title page, designed by Roland Steiger of TGG Hafen Senn Steiger.



*Künstlerheft* by Ian Anüll (St. Gallen: Vexer Verlag, 1987). Spread. Designed by Josef Felix Müller.



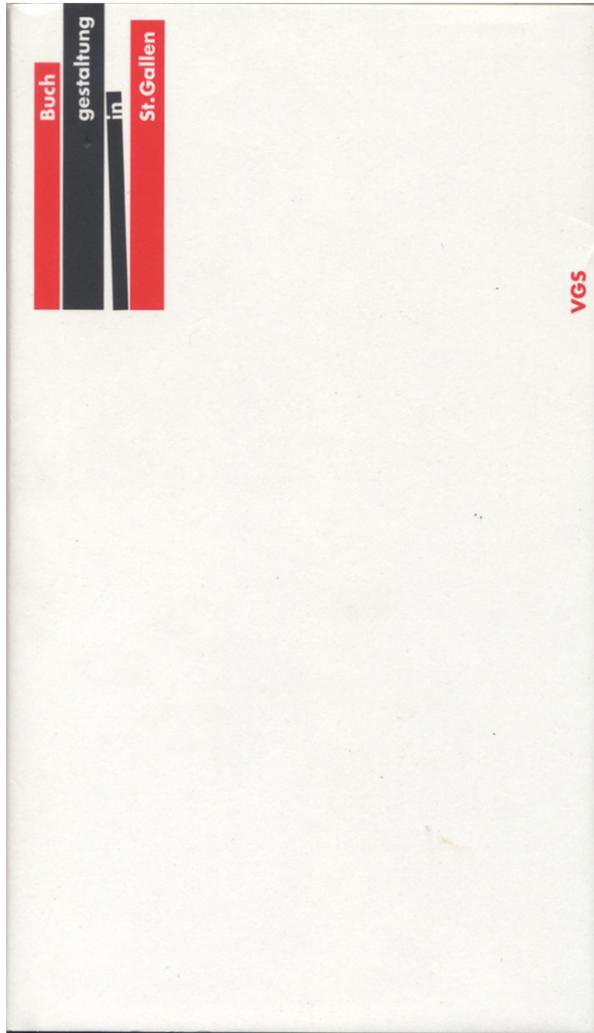
*Cultura Sangallensis* by Peter Ochsenbein (St. Gallen: Verlag am Klosterhof, 2000). Spread designed by Roland Steiger of TGG Hafen Senn Steiger.



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design, a model of simplicity and restraint, encourages close reading of the books on display. The cases, arranged in a zig-zag fashion, are lined in gray to make the paper of each book stand out. There are multiple copies of each book so that the viewer can see them from a variety of perspectives — cover, title page, sample spread for instance — as should be done for an interactive, three-dimensional object. The downside is that this means only a few titles are in each case, making for a small show. But the intent of Hochuli and the organizers is not quantity but quality and that is something that they have achieved.

The catalogue mentioned above is available for sale at AIGA, but unfortunately it is in German only. For book designers and die-hard book lovers it is still worth purchasing since it is itself an example of the St. Gallen style of bookmaking — small and light — and reasonably priced at \$20. The one quibble I have with both it and the exhibition labels — written by Hochuli himself and usually sharply observed — is that the typefaces used in each book are not routinely noted. For the record, Collis by Christoph Noordzij (TEFF, 1993) is used in the catalogue.



*Buchgestaltung in St. Gallen* by Roland Früh  
(St. Gallen: VGS Verlagsgemeinschaft St. Gallen,  
2008). Jacket. Design by Jost Hochuli.

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