

Book Review

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Wolf Telescopes - A Collection of Historical Telescopes

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The cover states '111 Telescopes by 70 Makers in 8 Countries during 5 Centuries' (Fig. 1). On first impression this collection certainly has a unique character: its originator Professor Edward Wolf. With a truly phe-

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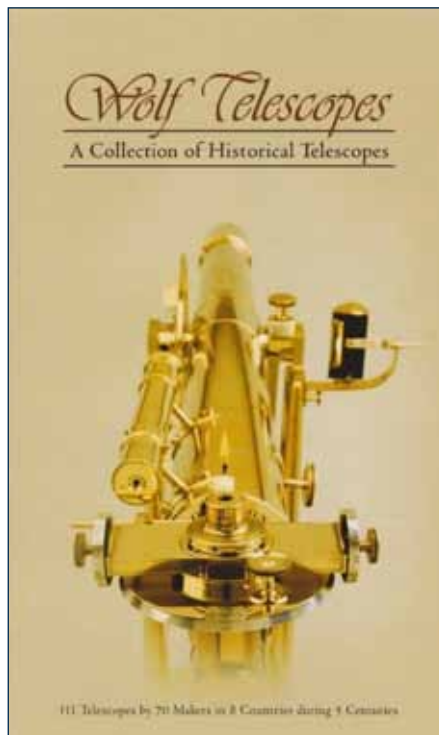


Fig. 1 *The catalogue's cover. For browsing the material click on www.wolftelescopes.com.*

nominal energy and drive he has created within a decade his 'Wolf Collection of Historical Telescopes'. Acquiring many instruments in varying states of mechanical disrepair, he then with great skill and insight demonstrates in many 'before and after' images, how he then personally restored many of the examples displayed. They are re-assembled to their original working specifications wherever possible. All the work carried out is shown in a series of 'before and after images', and is well-tabulated.

Edward Wolf is Professor Emeritus at Cornell University School of Electrical & Computer Engineering, Ithaca, N.Y., U.S.A. He acquired many unique examples from Telescope Dealers, the Internet and Auction Rooms worldwide. All this has been achieved in the collecting space of just 10 years since the year 2000. Perhaps the last window of opportunity to assemble such a brilliant variety of unique period astronomical telescopes, also featuring a few surveying instruments with refracting telescopes.

Since 2010 it has taken another six years for Ed Wolf to assemble, restore and photograph the entire collection with all their accessories, seen both within and without their boxes and cases, photographing each isolated image on the white page without distracting backgrounds creating a sharp

digital image. Tripods, Equatorial Mounts, Supporting Rods and Wands, all detailed, not to mention Ed Wolf's version of the classic Pole-and-Rope Trapeze mount to support and direct a 12-foot Dollond refracting telescope. Comparisons of Makers signatures and progression in their engraved styles is a great first here and unique feature.

The photography alone a Mount Olympus, pun intended, to ascend in terms of the detail it conveys. Thousands of hours and no expense spared have certainly gone into it making this a state-of-the-art catalogue, featuring the finest pin-sharp digital photography by Gary L. Hodges who is based in Ithaca, N.Y., USA. A difficult project to direct in photographic terms as reflecting differentials seen in wood, brass, shagreen, aluminium, with many painted and enameled convoluted surfaces is extremely tricky to light and capture in unison, without shadows and reflections recurring.

The photographs feature brilliantly-spaced telescopes and tripods, their components both optical and mechanical printed in isolation on stark white ground. The superb graphics, printing and tables are designed by his daughter Shelly Muray at Digital Designs based in Moraga, California, USA. Very useful comparative catalogue tabulations enable the reader to quickly locate any given Maker or Type within the collection.

Maker's marks, graphics and Makers signatures and restorations: such details so clearly tabulated and signposted becoming authentic contributions to our knowledge of how such period telescopes were originally constructed. No other reference work on the history of the telescope delineates the craftsmanship involved in such detail. This book may become the benchmark publication of its kind, setting a previously unknown standard in both the optical and constructional materials detail. Science museums, collectors, connoisseurs and dealers in the historic optical field are recommended to make every effort to acquire this ground-breaking reference work.

Verdict: an essential and unique new authority on historical telescopes. Job incredibly well done! This is a classic telescope reference for the ages. The Wolf Collection has recently been acquired for the Beijing Planetarium in China. Dr Jin Zhu who is the current Director should be congratulated for looking after this wonderful collection.

Stuart Talbot, FRAS