

Dateline: RIT – The Podcast (Nov. 8, 2007) (Season 2, Episode 5)

ANNCR: Welcome to Dateline: RIT with Mike Saffran.

HOST: Dateline: RIT (Nov. 8, 2007)

Former RIT printing professor Hermann Zapf, who served as the second Cary Professor at RIT from 1977 to 1987, is recognized as one of the world's greatest type designers. Recently profiled in *Step Inside Design* magazine, Zapf described the biggest-ever design challenge he's faced. It wasn't an intricate typeface design, but rather a wall of 27 eight-foot-high glass panels, each etched with famous quotations about reading, books, the future of books, and typography and design that's part of RIT's Alexander S. Lawson Publishing Center. RIT also happens to be the home to some of Zapf's personal archive, which he donated to RIT.

David Pankow is curator of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection and director of the Cary Graphic Arts Press at RIT. He conceived the idea for the glass wall etchings, and reached out to Zapf.

ACTUALITY [DAVID PANKOW]: The Cary Collection at RIT actually owns the biggest collection of Hermann Zapf material—as well as work by his wife, who's a very accomplished type designer and calligrapher herself, Gudrun Zapf—we have the biggest collection of Zapf material outside of Germany. As a close friend of the Cary Collection, Hermann has always been interested in our progress and our development, and when we began designing this new facility, which I wanted to name in honor of Alex Lawson, who had once hoped that there could be a university press at RIT, but something that never came to pass during his tenure here, I contacted Hermann and said, "Hermann, here we've got this basic design, which is going to call for a glass wall of 27 eight-foot-high glass panels, and we're thinking it needs some kind of imagery on it, some kind of typography. Would this be something you'd be interested in working on?" And, Hermann was immediately taken with the idea because for him it represented the biggest single commission he'd ever gotten in terms of size, and he did this entirely as a contribution, as a gift to RIT.

HOST: What were some of the challenges that needed to be overcome for this massive undertaking?

ACTUALITY [PANKOW]: The first challenge was selecting the quotations because we knew that once these quotations were engraved or affixed to the glass somehow that they would be there for all to see. We wanted there to be some multicultural aspects, so we included some quotations in Hebrew and Greek and Arabic, as well as the Latin alphabet. And we picked quotations or text that had to do with the development of the alphabet, with the importance of reading, with the importance of books, with the role that typography and design plays in books, and a little bit about sort of the future of books. And then all these selections, all these quotations, were turned over to Hermann, and we said, "OK, now figure out a way to get these quotations on to the glass." And the

challenge, of course, was either put all the quotations on individual panels of glass or have them sort of bridge the gaps between these panels. And that turned out to be the single biggest design problem, was how to get these quotations to go across the glass in ways that didn't interfere with the aesthetic appreciation of the quotes with respect to wordspacing or letterspacing, to try to get some kind of typographic flow around this big curve. It was a huge challenge.

HOST: And just how was the feat accomplished? How were the panels engraved?

ACTUALITY [PANKOW]: This was, I think, one of the most amazing parts of the project outside of the design itself. And here we called on a graduate of RIT by the name of Valerie O'Hara. And I thought, well, maybe we could get her to sandblast these panels. And she immediately saw this as one of the biggest challenges that she had ever undertaken because never had she worked on a scale like this before. And she also pointed out that we could not use regular glass, that we had to use tempered glass. And the problem with etching or sandblasting tempered glass is that there's a lot of tension on the surface of the glass, which is why it's tempered—if there's an accident with this kind of glass, if somebody runs into it, it shatters into many thousands of pieces so nobody actually gets cut. But because of that surface tension, it's very, very hard to engrave or sandblast or etch an image into it because if you go too deep the glass itself will just explode. And so Valerie agreed to take this on even though she warned us that she couldn't etch the letter forms very deep, but she'd go as deep as she could making sure that where there was a transition of one quote into the rest of the quote on another panel that they would line up perfectly, and then she would pass them through a sandblasting machine where she would hold a gun inside the machine that was shooting this spray of silicon carbide making individual individual judgments about every letter that she was sandblasting. This was not an automated process. And I'll tell you, Mike, that it came right down to the wire. We had the last panel installed on the day of the dedication of the facility—that's how close things were. But it makes for an absolutely amazing effect when you see all these panels following this beautiful spiral curve and read these wonderful quotes, that it was well worth the work. And Hermann is so proud of this accomplishment that he is literally talking it up all across the European continent as the greatest challenge he ever undertook—which, for him to say this, as the world's greatest type designer and calligrapher, to say that a project he did for RIT was his greatest challenge I think is testimony to his love and affection for RIT as well as to how extraordinary an accomplishment it really is. It was an absolutely amazing process.

HOST: That's RIT's David Pankow on the contributions of Hermann Zapf in the creation of RIT's new Alexander S. Lawson Publishing Center. Lawson, Zapf and Pankow—three reasons reasons why RIT is known as “the Harvard of printing.”

On the RIT campus this week . . . Chief Communications Officer Bob Finnerty with more on this week's inauguration of Bill Destler as RIT's ninth president and the prospects for a new RIT ice arena . . . and News & Events managing editor Vienna Carvalho with highlights from the latest issue.

SEGMENT [BOB FINNERTY]: This is Bob Finnerty. The formal inauguration of President Bill Destler as RIT's ninth president takes place Nov. 9. More than 3,000 people—including nearly 40 leaders from colleges and universities from throughout the country—are expected to attend the event, held in the Gordon Field House and Activities Center. Dr. David J. Skorton, president of Cornell University, is the keynote speaker. For more coverage on the ceremony, including a streamed video available November 12th, go to [rit.edu/news](http://rit.edu/news). . . . There's been quite a lot of buzz about the popularity of RIT hockey. The Democrat and Chronicle recently published a story about the potential of expanding Ritter Arena or even building a new arena. Ritter currently holds 2,100 fans. The Tigers are selling out at home and 5,200 fans watched the Tigers beat nationally ranked Cornell in Rochester's Blue Cross Arena. President Destler says he is pleased with the progress the hockey team has made in its first three years at the Division I level and we will need more time to review the arena question. Stay tuned hockey fans! . . . This is Bob Finnerty on the RIT campus.

SEGMENT [VIENNA CARVALHO]: This is News & Events Managing Editor Vienna Carvalho. In the current issue of News & Events . . . RIT announces a first-of-its-kind degree program that combines mechanical engineering and public policy courses. The B.S./M.S. five-year program allows engineering students to begin taking graduate-level public policy courses in their fourth year with a complete transfer to policy coursework in their fifth year. The new degree is expected to give engineers and policymakers an understanding of the social, political and technology implications of their work. . . . Also in the current issue of News & Events, RIT's Image Permanence Institute has received several grants totaling more than \$1.25 million for two major projects. One project will help library and museum collections staff move large volumes of environmental data directly to the Web. The other project will study the effects of enclosure and physical handling on digital prints, as well as the stability of digitally printed materials when exposed to light, airborne pollutants, heat and humidity. . . . And, read about members of the RIT staff who were recently honored for their outstanding service at the annual Staff Recognition Awards. . . . Read more about these stories and other RIT news in the Nov. 1st issue of News & Events. This is Vienna Carvalho on the RIT campus.

HOST: This has been Dateline: RIT (Nov. 8, 2007). The next Dateline: RIT podcast will be on Dec. 13. I'm Mike Saffran on the RIT campus. Have a happy Thanksgiving.

ANNCR: For more on these stories and other RIT news, visit [www.rit.edu/news](http://www.rit.edu/news).  
Dateline: RIT is produced by RIT University News Services.

NOTE: Dateline: RIT (Nov. 8, 2007) audio podcast available at:  
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