

New York Times (NYTimes.com)

September 12, 2006

Tom Suzuki, 76, a Designer Who Transformed Textbooks, Dies

By [STEVEN HELLER](#)

Tom Suzuki, an art director and graphic designer who in the 1970's transformed academic textbooks by introducing vibrant color and pictorial variety to a genre long strait-jacketed by outdated formats, died on Sept. 3 in Fairfax, Va. He was 76.

The cause was complications of leukemia, said his wife, Virginia.

When Mr. Suzuki was starting out as a designer, American textbook publishers had been adhering to formulaic designs for decades, with printing often done in black and white to save money and professor-authors required to furnish their own often-prosaic photographs and sketched diagrams. Mr. Suzuki "turned the process on its head," said a former colleague, Eugene Schwartz, currently an editor at large of ForeWord Magazine, devoted to independent publishing.

In the late-1960's, as art director of the textbook division of CRM, publishers of Psychology Today magazine, Mr. Suzuki developed original design concepts and fluid production methods and created mold-breaking typography and visuals.

To make textbook design more efficient, he introduced a storyboard approach adapted from magazine-production techniques. With each book's content precisely plotted, it was possible to commission photography and illustrations while the authors were still writing. He developed novel ideas for images, like designing three-dimensional models and having professional stylists stage editorial photography.

“He had that important editorial designer gift — he actually read what he was designing for,” Mr. Schwartz said. “And the art department worked interactively with the editorial department and the authors and consultants in developing art and photo concepts.”

The so-called coffee table textbook eventually became standard.

Mr. Suzuki’s most ambitious books were “Psychology Today: An Introduction,” in 1970, followed by “Anthropology Today” and its companion “Cultural Anthropology Today” and “Physical Anthropology Today.” Other titles included “Biology: An Appreciation of Life,” “Educational Psychology: A Contemporary View,” and “Social Psychology: Explorations in Understanding.” All were published by CRM.

Mr. Suzuki was born on Feb. 16, 1930, in Brawley, Calif., a son of Japanese immigrants who farmed leased land. He and his family were interned during World War II at the Gila, Ariz., relocation camp from April 1942 to May 1945; four of his elder brothers joined the Army.

Mr. Suzuki returned to Los Angeles for high school. After graduating from Los Angeles City College in 1951, he entered the Air Force, serving as a first lieutenant and radar navigation officer in the Korean War. In 1956 he entered the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles (now the California School of Fine Arts), graduating in 1958 with a B.F.A.

After brief stints at a newspaper and a printing firm, in 1961 he became assistant art director at General Dynamics/Aeronautics in San Diego, which had already earned a reputation for progressive corporate identity design and advertising. He was supervising a staff of designers and typographers when he met the designer Don Wright; in 1965, he and Mr. Wright founded the graphic design firm Suzuki & Wright in San Diego. Their major client was CRM (Communications Research Machines), publisher of the groundbreaking magazine Psychology Today, which was known for its design. In 1968, their firm was absorbed by CRM, and Mr. Suzuki became the chief designer for its burgeoning college textbook division.

In the early 1970's, Mr. Suzuki moved to England to design magazines for Clareville Publishing. He returned to the United States in 1976 to become the art director for Time/Life Books. From 1982 to 2004, he had his own design firm.

For 25 summers he taught master classes in design for non-designers at Stanford Professional Publishing Course at [Stanford University](#).

In addition to his wife of 50 years, Mr. Suzuki is survived by a daughter, Mariko Stombaugh of Fairfax; two grandchildren; two brothers, Willie, of Torrance, Calif., and Robert, of Fullerton, Calif.; and two sisters, Nancy Watanabe of Glendale, Ariz., and Dorothy Suzuki of Torrance. His son, John, died earlier this year.