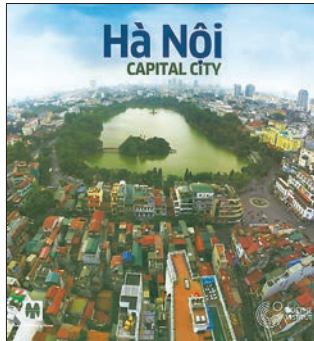




Book Buff

★★ CAPTURING THE CITY ★★



This month, Bookworm's **Truong** takes a look at Hanoi on the printed page

We can always tell how good a photographic book about Hanoi or other parts of the country is by gauging its appeal on Vietnamese readers.

Two recently published books have triumphed in the most critical test we could give them. We offered 50 Hanoians from different walks of life the opportunity to have a book on loan for a day or two. Only one copy of each book was used, and at the end of the trial their dog-eared, well-thumbed pages attested to the mostly five-star approval ratings.

Ha Noi Capital City

This hefty, coffee table-sized 300-pager — with more than 600 high-quality images — comes with the seal of the Goethe-Institut, with backing from a host of German sponsors. Its text is in Vietnamese, English and German, and editor Michael Waibel has used the photographs, essays and design skills of a host of talented Vietnamese and expats.

There are six sections, ranging from aerial views of the city, change over time, architecture and housing, people of the city, urban transport and the soul of the city. The city is considered as a whole entity, without preference for any particular quarter.

Mostly the text escapes the triteness or cuteness that too often occurs when expats have their say, and does not founder on suppositions or emotive banalities.

It's a very rare book, a must-have. With future updates, it should remain at the top of the heap.

Tourists have only one complaint: it's too heavy to carry home!

Vietnam — Twenty-Five Years Documenting a Changing Country

If you were the child of a very famous

parent, you'd probably think about changing your name if you couldn't live up to the golden aura that emanates from him or her.

Catherine Karnow doesn't have to worry. Her photographic skills have allowed her to live up to her famous patronym.

Her father, Stanley Karnow, wrote what is considered to be the definitive book on the French and American conflicts in Vietnam last century. The mini-series based on it is history at its best.

Catherine's Vietnamese photography book is more a fascinating documentary of her travels into Vietnam, beginning in 1990 when she first came with her father. This opened the doors of photographic and experiential opportunity to her.

She was invited by General Giap to accompany him on his first return to the battlefields of Dien Bien Phu, 30 years after the struggle he masterminded, which put him in the upper echelons of international military history.

But Catherine's photographic documentation doesn't stop with past history, and her most recent prints show her compassionate understanding of the country.

Prints from the book were exhibited last month at **Art Vietnam**, and the response from Vietnamese viewers was phenomenal.

One featured photo is of a woman on the Reunification Express train, which was used on the cover of the 2007 edition of *Lonely Planet Vietnam*.

Bajo La Gloriosa Bandera Del Partido

On a different tip, what is now a rare item has come into our possession. It's a Vietnamese publication aimed at a Cuban audience, covering Vietnamese history from the time of the 1858 French Invasion up to

Liberation in 1975, and the *expulsar a los Yanquis*.

It highlights a time when, besides Cuba, Vietnam's greatest allies were the USSR, East Germany, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and North Korea. We assume that this brilliantly informative book was also published for distribution in their languages.

It's a book for connoisseur collectors of Vietnamese history.

Old Saigon — The Color Of Nostalgia

Architect and artist Trong Lee is in love with Saigon, and to celebrate he has published the most delightful book of fanciful and factual architectural buildings and places in Saigon.

His first emphasis is on century-old, symbolic buildings in the city, and the drawings will appeal to aficionados of the Art Nouveau/Aubrey Beardsley-style prints.

The second section is a portrait of street architecture in old town Saigon in 1969, with pen-and-ink and watercolour drawings that are reminiscent of Parisian cityscapes for sale as you stroll along the Seine.

Lee is fascinated, too, with old modes of city travel, and combines the two types of drawing to portray canal boats through to late 1960s motorised transport.

A section of drawings of historical advertisements rounds off the book.

The first few pages are devoted to exquisitely drawn and coloured floor tiles, and these alone are worth the price of admission.

Vietnamese readers also gave this book both thumbs up!

For more information on Bookworm go to bookwormhanoi.com