



## Riveting stuff

It is one of those brilliantly simple publishing ideas: take Gustave Eiffel's big book on his celebrated tower, and reissue it in facsimile, with un peu d'histoire as an introduction – *La Tour de 300 metres* is out in a new edition by Taschen at £70.

The original was a two-volume limited edition of 500, essentially a VIP giveaway for the World's Fair of 1900. Taschen will be hoping for bigger numbers than that, given that the introduction is printed in eight languages.

The construction photos are as evocative as you'd expect, but the real revelation is the beauty and intricacy of the Eiffel Company's working drawings, done at scales of 1:200 down to 1:10 for the details.

The position of every rivet is painstakingly drawn, as they would have to be: the rivet-holes were punched to a tolerance of a tenth of a millimetre. Where the four great legs meet at the first

floor the tolerance was one millimetre.

Eiffel's first volume contained all the text, which was highly technical and as minutely detailed as the drawings (prepared by 40 engineers and draughtsmen). In this pictures-only volume you are getting half of the 1900 experience, but it would have taken peculiar dedication to read through a long explanation of the great engineer's mathematical calculations. By 1900, the tower was becoming unfashionable, its lightly decorated functionalism out of step with the frou-frou of the Belle Epoque. The book was an attempt to regain prestige.

Those of a forensic bent will find the design changes Eiffel made between 1889 and 1900. It would have been nice, say, to have had pop philosopher Roland Barthes' famous essay on the tower as an afterword, but never mind. This is a lovely thing, but won't fit on many bookshelves.