

# Pride of place on coffee tables

In the iPad age, pricey, oversized art books have found a new niche as objets d'art.

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REPORTING FROM CHICAGO

When architect and design firm owner Steve Kadlec was asked recently whether bookshelves were becoming obsolete in the iPad age, he wisecracked: "Who reads books? We buy them for pretty!"

He was only half-joking. With digital competition, hardcover books are being judged by their covers more than ever before, some earning their keep by doubling as objets d'art.

"It's sort of a trite phrase, but when you have people over, you don't show off your iPad library," said Josh Baker, art director for Taschen, publisher of books on art, architecture, design and photography. "There's something about physical books that allows owners to make a statement about themselves in their home and life that other people can immediately pick up on and relate to or not relate to."

Baker enjoys reading fiction on his iPad. "But for oversized art and photos and biographies of Leonardo da Vinci, it's a lot more difficult to get impact on a 7-by-9-inch thumbnail of a book cover."

That sustains coffee-table books' popularity as holiday gifts.

"Coffee-table book sales during this time of year are much, much higher than during the rest of the year," said Chris Schlupe, senior editor for books at Amazon.com. He expects hot holiday sellers to include:

"Lady Gaga x Terry Richardson" (Grand Central Publishing, \$50), a provocative year-in-pictures of the pop star onstage, behind the scenes, shot by the acclaimed photographer Richardson.

"Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty" (Metropolitan Museum of Art, \$45), the hologram-covered companion to an exhibition at the museum, which closed in August in New York. "The cover is a hologram," Schlupe said. "It blew me away.... And it's working. It's the biggest seller so far by far."

"The Louvre: All the Paintings" (Black Dog & Leventhal, \$75), which comes in a slipcase and includes a DVD with images of all the paintings.

Technological capabilities — and competition — have pushed publishers to experiment with other enhancements to coffee-table books. "DC Comics did 'The Batman Files' [Andrews McMeel, \$100]," Schlupe said. "It's a dossier, and you take it apart, and there are all these pieces to it."

More books are becoming pricey collector's items.

Assouline's limited-edition "The Impossible Collection of Cars" (\$650) comes in a tire-rubber box with a metal plate. Inside, on cotton paper, it features 100 exceptional cars such as the 1997 Porsche 993 Turbo S.

Taschen's new "Marilyn Monroe" pairs Norman Mailer's 1973 biography "Marilyn" with Bert Stern's photographs of the 36-year-old sex symbol, shot at the Hotel Bel-Air for Vogue six

weeks before her death. Signed by Stern and limited to 1,962 numbered copies in a clamshell box, it's \$1,000. There are also two Art Editions of 125 copies each, which include a signed pigment print, for \$2,500. Often, a lower-priced trade edition without the bells and whistles comes out later.

That's the case with Taschen's editions of Norman Mailer's "MoonFire," the story of the Apollo 11 mission. Taschen's Lunar Rock editions feature an actual chunk of moon rock and a framed print signed by Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin. They come in a case made from a single piece of aluminum, its surface a 3-D topography of the moon. One of the 12 sold for \$112,500. There's also a Collector's Edition (\$1,800), which includes the print and comes in a custom-molded white resin box with a domed Plexiglas window. Those amenities are dropped in the trade edition, \$39.99.

"We're producing these historical objects that are about a moment in time," Baker said.

The desire for cultural souvenirs is why Steve Tager, senior vice president and publisher at Abrams, calls "The Oprah Winfrey Show: Reflections on an American Legacy" (\$50) one of the biggest releases in Abrams' history. It presents the queen of talk's aha moments through photos, tributes and essays on personal growth, social action and literature, from Nelson Mandela, Ellen DeGeneres, Bono and others.

Landing that deal with Harpo Inc., the show's parent company, gave Abrams access to behind-the-scenes images and information that other outlets didn't have.

"We're competing with a lot of media out there," Tager said. "Buying an illustrated book isn't like buying a mystery novel. You'd better appeal to a passionate fan."

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