SOFTWARE & TECH

How To Draw By Scott Robertson Thomas Bertling

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Mastering the Art of Visualization: A Deep Dive into How to Draw by Scott Robertson and Thomas Bertling

For anyone serious about learning to draw objects and environments from their imagination, one name consistently rises to the top: Scott Robertson. Alongside co-author Thomas Bertling, Robertson has created a definitive guide that has transformed the way aspiring artists, industrial designers, and concept artists approach drawing. **How to Draw** is not just another instructional art book; it is a rigorous, systematic course in visual thinking. Whether you are a beginner struggling with basic perspective or a seasoned professional looking to refine your workflow, this book offers a wealth of knowledge that is both practical and deeply informative. In this article, we will explore the core teachings, the unique methodology, and the lasting impact of *How to Draw*by Scott Robertson and Thomas Bertling.

What Makes How to Draw Different?

Many drawing books focus on copying photographs or building a skill set through repetitive exercises. Robertson and Bertling take a fundamentally different approach. Their method is rooted in **analytical perspective drawing** and the ability to construct objects logically from simple geometric primitives. Instead of teaching you how to draw a specific car or a chair, they teach you the underlying principles that allow you to draw virtually any object from any angle. This emphasis on understanding over imitation is what sets *How to Draw* apart. It is a guide to **visual problem-solving**, where every line you put on paper has a reason and a relationship to the object's three-dimensional form.

The Authors' Credentials

Scott Robertson is a renowned industrial designer, educator, and co-founder of the Design Studio Press. He has worked on projects for major companies like Nike, Sony, and BMW. His experience in the professional design world informs every page of the book. Thomas Bertling, a former student and later colleague of Robertson, brings a complementary perspective, having taught at the Art Center College of Design. Together, they have distilled decades of teaching and professional practice into a single, coherent system. This real-world background ensures that the techniques taught are not only theoretically sound but also immediately applicable to industry-standard design workflows.

Key Concepts and Techniques in the Book

The book is structured to build complexity gradually. Below are some of the most critical concepts covered.

1. The Foundation: Perspective Drawing

Robertson and Bertling dedicate a significant portion of the book to perspective, the bedrock of all spatial drawing. They go far beyond simple one-point and two-point perspective, delving into the nuances of three-point perspective, **foreshortening**, and curvilinear perspective. The authors introduce the concept of the "camera" (the viewer's eye) and explain how to set up a consistent perspective grid. By mastering these grids, you can plot any object's position, size, and proportion with mathematical accuracy. The book provides step-by-step instructions for

constructing ellipses in perspective, which is essential for drawing cylinders, wheels, and any circular form.

2. Drawing Tools and Materials

At the beginning of the book, Robertson outlines his essential toolkit: mechanical pencils, fine liners, markers, and colored pencils. He also emphasizes the importance of **lighting**and paper quality. However, he is quick to note that the tools are secondary to the understanding of form. The text encourages readers to experiment but provides clear recommendations for those who want to emulate his clean, precise sketching style. For digital artists, many of the principles translate directly into software like Photoshop or Procreate, though the book's exercises are designed for traditional media.

3. The "Draw-Through" Method

Perhaps the most distinctive technique in *How to Draw* is the **draw-through**method. When constructing a complex object, you draw the hidden parts (the back of a wheel, the internal armature of a robot) using light construction lines. This approach forces you to think of the object as a solid, three-dimensional form rather than a flat silhouette. It prevents common errors like misaligned wheels or inconsistent proportions. The draw-through technique is applied rigorously throughout the book, especially in chapters on vehicles, aircraft, and complex mechanical designs.

4. Ellipse Construction and Rotation

Ellipses are the bane of many artists. Robertson provides a simple, repeatable method for drawing an ellipse that fits perfectly into a perspective grid. He explains the concept of **major and minor axes**and demonstrates how to rotate any ellipse in space. This is crucial for drawing wheels on a car that is turning, or a coffee mug that is tilted. The book includes many practice exercises where you repeatedly draw ellipses of varying degrees of rotation until the muscle memory becomes automatic.

5. Mirroring, Scaling, and Duplicating Forms

Once you can draw a single form in perspective, the next challenge is to create multiples, mirrors, or scaled versions of that form. Robertson teaches a clever method using **diagonals and vanishing points**to duplicate a shape at the same size, reflect it across a plane, or scale it uniformly. These techniques are invaluable for drawing symmetrical objects like cars, where the left side must perfectly mirror the right, even in extreme three-point perspective.

Who Should Read This Book?

*How to Draw*by Scott Robertson and Thomas Bertling is not a casual read. It is a textbook, and it demands practice. It is ideal for:

- Aspiring concept artists who want to design characters, vehicles, and environments for games or films.
- Industrial design students who need to communicate their ideas clearly through sketches.
- Architects and interior designers looking to improve their freehand perspective skills.
- Hobbyists who are serious about moving beyond copying photographs and want to draw from their imagination.
- Art teachers seeking a structured curriculum to teach perspective and construction.

The book assumes no prior knowledge, but it moves quickly. Beginners may need to spend extra time on the early chapters, while advanced artists can skip to the more complex sections on curvature, overlapping forms, and composition. The companion video tutorials, available separately, are highly recommended for visual learners who want to see Robertson's hand in action.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

Simply reading the text is not enough. To truly benefit from *How to Draw*, follow a deliberate practice routine:

1. Work through the exercises in order. Each chapter builds on the previous one. Skipping ahead will leave you confused.
2. Use a sketchbook dedicated to practice. Fill pages with grids, ellipses, and simple blocks before moving to complex objects.
3. Repeat the same drawing multiple times. Robertson often says that the first attempt is about understanding, the second is about refinement, and the third is about speed.
4. Apply the techniques to your own designs. Once you learn how to construct a cylinder, try drawing a flashlight or a bottle from imagination. The transfer from exercise to original work is where real growth happens.
5. Join online communities. Platforms like Reddit, Discord, or the Design Studio Press forum have groups dedicated to this book. Sharing your progress and getting feedback can accelerate your learning.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Many readers struggle with the mathematical precision required early in the book. Perspective grids can feel tedious and restrictive. However, Robertson emphasizes that these grids are training wheels. Once you internalize the logic, you will be able to sketch freehand with a much better sense of depth and proportion. Another common challenge is **ellipse fatigue**—drawing ellipse after ellipse can become monotonous. To overcome this, alternate between ellipse drills and more creative exercises, such as drawing a simple object like a wheel or a cup.

Digital vs. Traditional Medium

While the book is written for traditional pen-and-paper sketching, digital artists can adapt the techniques easily. Robertson himself uses a mix of analog and digital tools in his professional work. Many concepts, such as drawing guidelines on separate layers, align perfectly with digital workflows. However, for the initial learning phase, using a physical pencil and paper is often more effective because it forces you to commit to each line without the ability to undo effortlessly.

The Impact of How to Draw on the Art Community

Since its publication, *How to Draw* has become a staple in art schools and self-taught artists' libraries worldwide. Its rigorous, systematic approach has influenced a generation of designers. The book's reputation is such that it is often cited alongside classic texts like *Figure Drawing for All It's Worth* by Andrew Loomis and *Perspective for Comic Book Artists* by David Chelsea. What makes Robertson's book unique is its focus on **design drawing**—not just recording what you see, but creating what you imagine. This distinction has made it an essential resource in fields like automotive design, product design, and entertainment design.

The companion volume, *How to Render*, extends these principles into shading, lighting, and color. Together, the two books provide a complete education in visual communication. Many professionals in the industry keep both books on their shelves as reference guides.

Conclusion

*How to Draw*by Scott Robertson and Thomas Bertling is more than a book; it is a comprehensive training system for anyone who wants to draw the world from their mind's eye. By focusing on perspective, construction, and analytical thinking, the authors equip readers with a reliable methodology that works for any subject, from simple

household objects to complex sci-fi vehicles. The book demands time, patience, and practice, but the results are transformative. If you are ready to stop copying and start creating, this is the guide that will teach you how to draw with confidence and precision. Embrace the process, fill your sketchbook with grids and ellipses, and watch your ability to visualize and draw from imagination grow beyond what you thought possible.

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