

# The Shell Desk Diary turns 60: reminiscing an iconic publication

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The Shell Desk Diaries, shown left to right (1960-2010, except 1962).

## Introduction:

Gone now for a decade, ‘The Shell Desk Diary/Shell Desk Calendar’ was an iconic and highly-collectable ephemera for The Shell Companies (Shell Oil) and seashell collectors. Produced in a 7-by-7-inch format, its issues spanned 1960-2010, with several publishers, name variations, and many notable editors, authors, artists, and photographers.

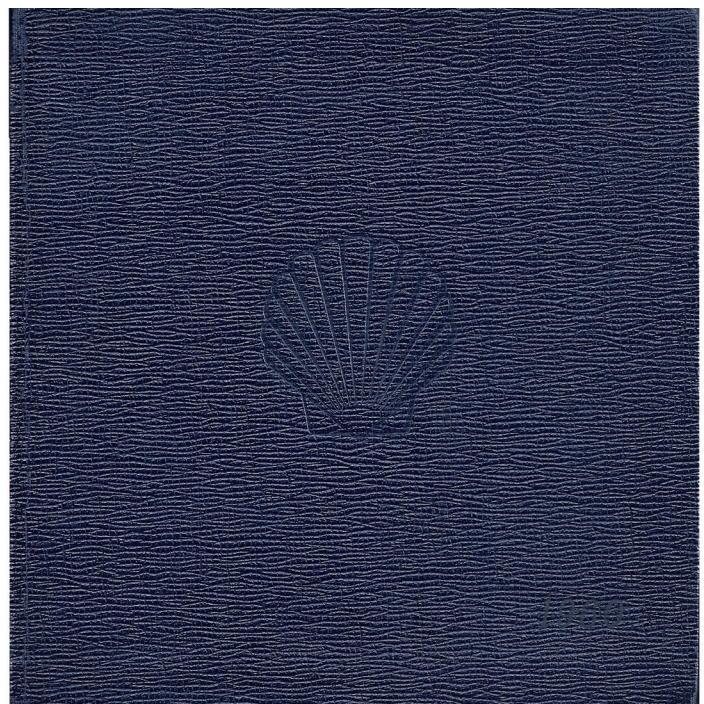
The covers were diverse and quite handsome, and are as much an art-piece as the content, changing every year, incorporating embossing, gilding, leather and marbled papers, buckram, canvas, etc. Each issue featured a ribbon bookmark that was matched to or enhanced the cover theme. The 1960, 1963-1966, editions were bonded leather covered with a different color each year. Starting in 1967, the covers became more ornate with antique styling.

Shell did not originate the 7-by-7-inch format and idea of this book. From the early 1950s to the 1970s, the “CBS Television Notebook Calendar” was published in the same format.<sup>1</sup> The original marketing company that developed it is unknown. Shell quickly edited this publication into their image, and dominantly into the context of seashells. Notably, 50 of 51 issues retained the approximate 7-by-7-inch size format, with the exception of 1962 being taller.

In its private publication years (1993-2010), viability of the publication was based upon pre-orders each year. When the oil and gas sector struggled in 2010, cost cutting meant many Shell divisions canceled pre-orders for the 2011 edition, and as such it never went to press, thus concluding the series.

## History:

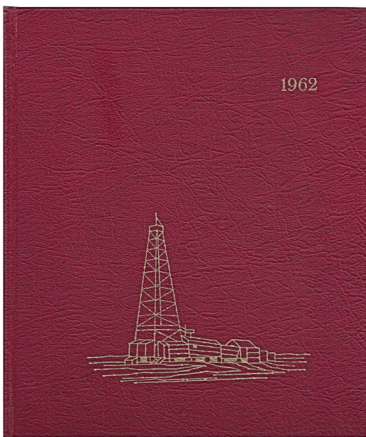
1959 – The Shell Desk Diary, originally ‘The Shell Chemical Desk Calendar’, began when Shell Chemical’s



1960

Advertising Department developed a desk calendar to use as a corporate gift at a trade show. At the 1959 ‘National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Exposition’ in Washington, D.C. (a premier trade show), Shell Chemical gave away 5000 copies of the 1960, 1<sup>st</sup> edition. The enthusiasm among customers led to more editions.

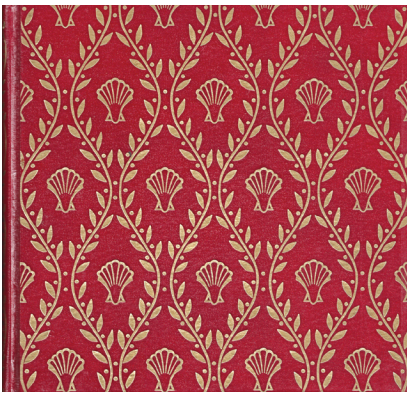
1960 – Evolution of Chemistry with Interpretation by David Stone Martin. The theme of the 1960 Shell Desk Calendar featured chemistry milestones depicted in 54 original pen-and-ink drawings by artist David Stone Martin.



1962

The product is not named, no references to publisher, editors, printer, copyright, etc. David Stone Martin provides a verse “A glimpse of greatness...” then line drawing illustrations with captions on every other page. Black bonded leather covers (6.69-inch sq.) embossed with the “Shell Oil” scallop logo and 1960. It had 148 light blue paper-stock pages.

1961 – The Scallop Shell in Art. The Shell Chemical Desk Calendar for 1961. Shell Chemical Company Copyright 1960. Dark red buckram covers with 10 gilt laurel leaf rings with a stylized scallop inside and 1961. Uncredited, the entire 1961 edition content, including endpapers, is derived from: “The Scallop: Studies of a Shell and its Influences on Humankind by Eight Authors.” Edited by Ian Cox, C.B.E., M.A., published in London by The Shell Transport and Trading Co., Ltd. 1957. This design was used for the cover in 1969.



1969

1962 enigma – Extensive institutional and private library inquiries produced no 1962 edition. After searching for 30 years to find it, the author referred back to the archives of the last publisher, “Sea Promotions,” and found it was a book titled “The Shell Companies 50th Anniversary Calendar,

1912-1962: Historical Highlights of Half a Century”, size 6.62-by-7.75-inch.<sup>2</sup>

Starting with the 1963 edition, The Shell Companies’ public relations department, under the direction of F.H. (Bud) Roberts, artist, began publishing the diary. Roberts, who won more than 30 awards for the diary, determined the annual theme, took the photographs, designed the book, wrote the copy, and supervised the printing in conjunction with a diverse team of designers, authors, consultants, artists, illustrators, and photographers. Roberts continued as the heart and soul of the Shell Desk Diary for 33 years (last credit is 2003) — elevating it to a worldwide public relations and artistic success, synonymous with The Shell Companies. In addition to the diaries, Roberts designed other books

dealing with shells including: “Kingdom of the Seashell” (1972 - R.T. Abbott, Author), and “Shells: Treasures from the Sea” (1979 - James A. Cox, Author).

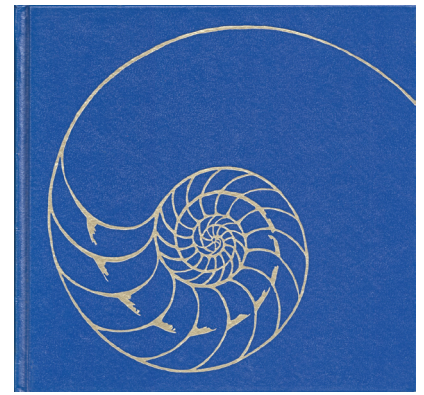
1963 – The Glory of the Seashore: The Shell Chemical Desk Calendar for 1963. Shell Chemical Company, a division of Shell Oil Company © 1962. Developed by M.H. Keel for Shell. Color painting illustrations throughout by many artists. Near the end is “Facts About Sea Shells,” with a discussion and line drawings, not credited. Green bonded leather covers gilded and embossed with the “Shell” scallop, small waves, and 1963. Printed on linen paper, tabbed by month, endpapers and seashell insets on art by Birney Lettick. Its 7” x 7-3/8” cover size is now the standard.

The long list of Shell divisions on the title pages includes the Shell Companies: Shell Oil Company, Shell Chemical Company, Shell Pipeline Corporation, and Shell Development Company.

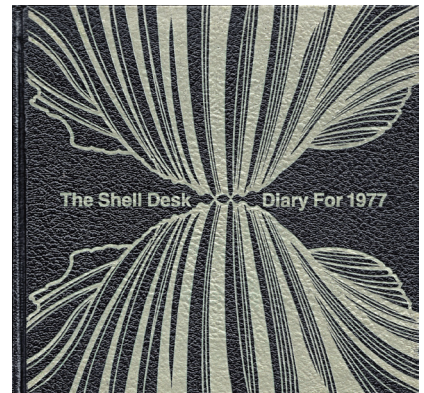
1971 – The diary changed names from The Shell Desk Calendar to The Shell Desk Diary, and began a center photo piece that included 32 pages of color photographs featuring seashells and marine life set on a background of breathtaking seascapes and tropical locales. The later editions have featured the Philippines, the Galapagos, Palau, Hawaii, Australia, and Indonesia, featuring the underwater photography of Lynn Funkhouser.

Lynn Funkhouser, a Chicago Shell Club member since 1970, was inducted as an inaugural member of the Women Divers Hall of Fame in 2000 for her photography & environmental activism. Her first photos in the diary were 1988, then 1991, and from 1996 to 2009 her photos were featured exclusively. She took over captioning in 1997 and copy in 1998 through 2009. Also from 1999 to 2009 they published five wall calendars exclusively using her work.

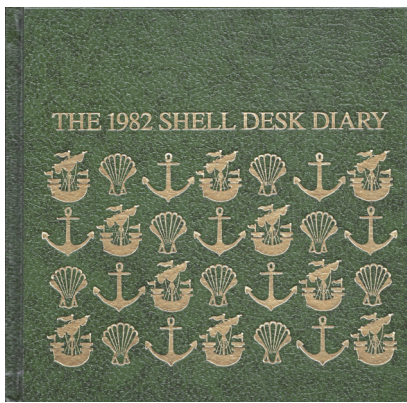
1992 – This was the last edition published by the Shell Companies. Upon retiring in 1992 from Shell, Robert (Bob) Ashfield, started RobAllen Press Inc., with the backing



1970



1977

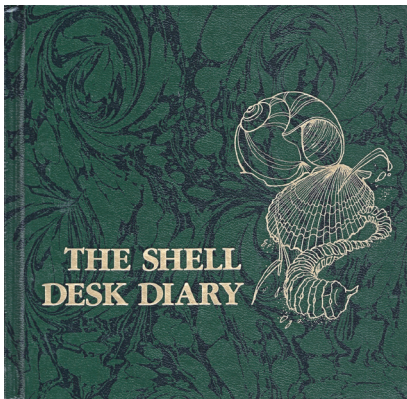


1982

Shellmark Press, Inc.

In these latter years, covers were available in leather and custom embossed upon request, and also a spiral-bound edition, and the diary was packaged in a colorful gift box. The cover and title pages were sometimes published for other Shell divisions also, such as 'The Pecten Companies'. A soft-cover out-take of the diary's 32 center photo plates called "Collectables," was also produced as a promotional piece to advertise the diary from 1997-2000.

1999 – The notable 40th Anniversary edition celebrated the grand opening of the new "Strake Hall of Malacology" at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. The new Strake Hall was celebrated again at the 2000 Conchologist of America Convention in Houston.



1991

Gail Adams (Gail Bergan). SeaPromo also produced "My Journal," a version with blank pages, in both hard cover and spiral bindings.

End of an era: After 50 years, the series concluded when the 2011 edition was halted after several Shell Divisions canceled their annual orders due to budget cuts.

#### Trivial Matters:

R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Chicago, was the printer for the years 1972-1975 (derived from imprint pages). R. Tucker Abbott is not mentioned after 1976. Production appears to have become based in Houston starting in 1979. The first edition with an ISBN number is 1994. The last issue referencing: Typografix Inc., Kingsport Press/Rose Printing,

of Shell, to continue publishing the diary in Houston. Although no longer affiliated with Shell, the diary retained the original style and format that is so popular with corporate customers and seashell collectors throughout the world. In 2000 the company changed its name to

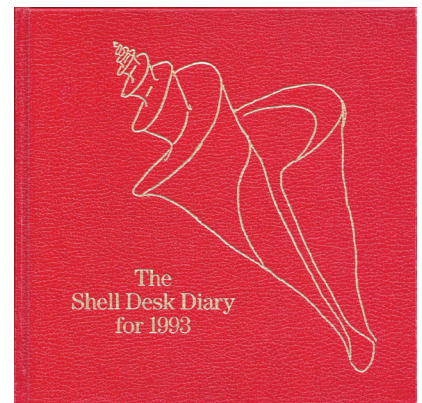
or Sun Graphics is 2000. Wetmore Printing Co. in Houston was the printer and binder for 2001-2010.

#### Back Issues:

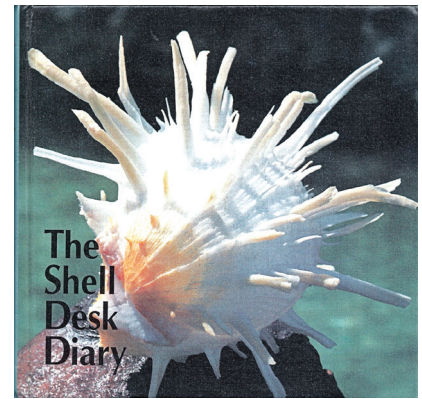
In the past few years, the author of this article has donated several hundred issues to institutions. There are still many institutions that would love to have a collection in their library, whole or partial. Some only need certain issues and your few might help. As such, you may contact the author for names of interested institutions. If you are looking for back issues, especially of the last 20 years, Contact Sea Promotions at (281) 546-7117 and they may be able to help. The author also has some remaining back issues for free (just cover postage).

#### Author's Notes:

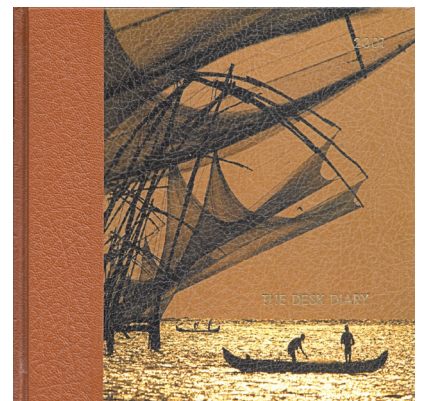
Contents of this article were derived from interviews with Bob Ashfield, Lynn Funkhouser, and Brenda Gail Adams, all diary editors, and more specifically from the history in the 2009 edition. Bob Ashfield was a neighbor of the author in the 1990s, and we worked together closely with Sea Promotions through 2010 to promote the products. The author's next-door neighbor worked for Wetmore Printing, providing additional insights.<sup>1</sup> The author's 1960 edition was found in a lot of CBS books.<sup>2</sup> The 1962 copy as described herein was purchased on eBay in July of 2020. Special thanks to: P.B. 'Rusti' Stover for gleaning data, review and proofing. 🐚



1993



1994



2001

**Name Evolution:**

1960 – Un-named  
 1961 – The Shell Chemical Desk Calendar  
 1964 – The Shell Desk Calendar  
 1971 – The Shell Desk Diary  
 1996 – The Desk Diary

**Publishers:**

1960-1992 – The Shell Companies (under various corporate name variations)  
 1993-1998 – RobAllen Press, Inc.  
 1999-2002 – Shellmark Press, Inc.  
 2003-2010 – Sea Promotions, Inc. (SeaPromo)

**Reoccurring Contributors:**

*(n) is number of issues a name appears.*

Names that reoccur frequently in credits for - Designer, Author, Consultant, Artist, Illustrator, Photographer, etc. F. H. 'Bud' Roberts (33), Russell H. Jensen (20), Lynn Funkhouser (16), James A. Cox (13), John R.H. 'Jack' Lightbourn (13), R. Tucker Abbott (9), Renate Luebge-Kraus (9), Alex Kerstitch (6); and starting in 2000 - Chris Adams (13) and Betty Wester (8).

**Annual Themes:**

1960 – Evolution of Chemistry with interpretation by David Stone Martin  
 1961 – The Scallop (Ian Cox 1957)  
 1962 – The Shell Companies 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History  
 1963 – The Glory of the Seashore  
 1964 – The Sign of the Shell  
 1965 – Something of the Sea  
 1966 – The Scallop (R.T. Abbott)  
 1967 – Sea shells in aspects: practical, scientific, and ornamental  
 1968 – Ships cultures and historic shell collecting  
 1969 – The Sea and the Shell  
 1970 – Shells Are Where You Find Them  
 1971 – An Intimate Glimpse of the Sea  
 1972 – The Scallop Shell in Art  
 1973 – All Creatures Great and Small  
 1974 – Glory be to God for Dappled Things  
 1975 – The Shell – Something of Value  
 1976 – The Birth of a Nation - America's Bicentennial  
 1977 – A Taste for Collecting Shells  
 1978 – What's in a Name?  
 1979 – Treasures Rare & Beautiful That Once Lay Hidden in the Depths of The Sea  
 1980 – Art in Many Forms Enriched by the Variety & Beauty of Seashells  
 1981 – Scientific Illustrations & Photographs Showing Treasures from the Sea  
 1982 – Illustrations Old & New of Shells, Ships & Maritime Views  
 1983 – Illustrations Old & New, Including Magnificently Hand-Colored Specimens from L.C. Kiener's Coquilles Vivantes. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (wrong year)  
 1984 – The Incredible World of the Sea  
 1985 – Treasures from the Sea

1986 – Shells are Where You Find Them  
 1987 – Shells in Religion, Myth & Mythology  
 1988 – Photographic Record of Shells and Other Undersea Animals  
 1989 – Illuminated with Illustrations from Vintage Source Illustrations of Seashells from Kiener & Chenu's Manuel de Conchyliologie  
 1990 – The Glory of the Seashore  
 1991 – Sea, Sand and Scallops  
 1992 – History of Bermuda and the Joys of Shell Collecting  
 1993 – Jewelry Made From Shells That Once Lived in the Sea  
 1994 – Sea of Cortez Marine Invertebrates & Other Worldwide Sea Shells  
 1995 – Partial History of England and Shells of the World  
 1996 – Galapagos Islands Archipelago  
 1997 – The Philippine Islands: Paradise for Shell Collectors  
 1998 – The Republic of Palau  
 1999 – The Strake Hall of Malacology, HMNS. 2000 – Discovering Hawaii 40th Anniversary  
 2001 – Discovering Australia  
 2002 – Discovering Indonesia  
 2003 – Coral Reefs of the World  
 2004 – Marine Life Masterpieces  
 2005 – Creatures of the Deep  
 2006 – The Deep Blue  
 2007 – Protecting Critters of the Deep  
 2008 – Ocean Environment and Human Health  
 2009 – Celebrating 50 Years!  
 2010 – Ocean Marvels

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