

## Interview with Chuck Fischer

Adie C. Peña  
Makati, Philippines

After the 6<sup>th</sup> Movable Book Conference in Chicago, I flew to New York for a week or so to have my yearly dose of Broadway plays. One morning, I dropped by Chuck Fischer's studio along Broadway and had a pleasant chat with the artist behind the following successful pop-up books -- *Great American Houses and Gardens*, *The White House* and *Christmas in New York*. Before our goodbyes, I asked Chuck if he was amenable to a virtual interview (yep, via e-mail) and he gamely said "Yes." Below is the e-interview, the result of several electronic missives between him and me during the past few months. Enjoy!



Chuck Fischer and Adie Peña

**Q.** What was first pop-up book you read as a child?

The most vivid memories of books I read as a child are of beautifully illustrated picture books that my sisters and I shared. I can still remember the lush color and detail of *The Snow Queen* and *Cinderella*, as well as a book of Bible Stories (I recently bought a copy of the book from a second hand book dealer who set up a table on a street near my studio in New York City), published in the 1950s.

**Q.** Who got you into creating pop-up books?

I don't know why, but since I was young, I always knew I would someday create books, though I never imagined it would become a passion, and bring me such pleasure.

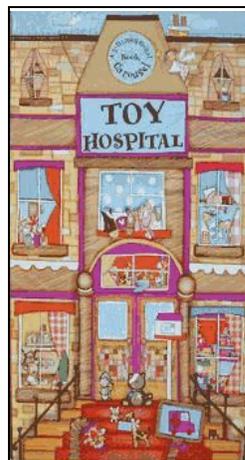
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## Frankfurt Book Fair 2006: Part 2

Theo Gielen  
The Netherlands

Whereas the world of pop-up books during the last 40 years or so has been dominated by Waldo Hunt's various companies, especially Intervisual, and by Artia from Prague in Czechoslovakia, I think we have seen in recent years a strong return of companies from the United Kingdom, the country where movable books originated. Surely, Sadie Fields Productions/Tango Books has been active since the 1980s, but they have always operated on a more modest scale than American packagers. In recent years there have been other British companies that have brought a substantial number of titles and innovations to the field. Let us look at some of the most important ones and see what they offered in Frankfurt in 2006.

**Tango Books** has an eight-room carousel illustrated by Katie Saunders: *Toy Hospital: 3-Dimensional Carousel Book* (1-85707-604-4). Two titles were added in a new series of shaped books with plastic handles, foil, and pop-ups, *My First Pop-up Books* by Yvette Lodge with illustrations by Peter Lawson: *My First Handbag* (1-85707-614-1) and *My First Toolbox* (1-85707-619-2). They continue their



successful series of pop-up board games with three new titles: *Storm the Castle! A 3-dimensional Game Book* (1-85707-643-5), illustrated by Bob Moulder, and *The Book of Great Explorers Pop-up Board Games* (1-85707-609-5), illustrated by Virginia Gray - both published last spring. *The Book of Prehistoric Pop-up Board Games* (1-85707-644-3), with four games starring dinosaurs illustrated by Robert Nicholls was issued in the fall. Their large series of lift-the-flaps *All Kinds of ...*, was expanded with another title by Emma Damon: *All Kinds of*

*Transport* (1-85707-653-2) in the spring and a new part by Emma Brownjohn, *All Kinds of Fears* (1-85707-634-6) in October. And two new titles have been added to Simon Abbott's 2003 "Noisy Book" series with pop-ups and sounds: *Oink!* (1-85707-624-9) and *Quack!* (1-85707-629-X).

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### **Chuck Fischer, Continued from page 1**

I started becoming aware of sophisticated pop-up books for adults when the architecture and art packs were first published, and I have always had a fascination with Edward Gorey's work. I recall seeing his *Tunnel Calamity* in the mid-1980s, and loving it.

Enjoying these books planted the seed of the pop-up format's possibilities, but my first book proposal was not pitched as a pop-up.

My first book proposal featured architectural water color renderings I had created for mural projects I had painted in some of the finest residences in America. These renderings were juxtaposed with lyrics from popular songs that I associated with the project and a short story tying the two together.

My agent sent the proposal to many publishers and we got a number of encouraging rejections. One of these came from Charles Miers, at the time the publisher of Universe, a division of Rizzoli. Charles said he liked my paintings, but didn't think the proposal really worked, but he said he would like to meet me.

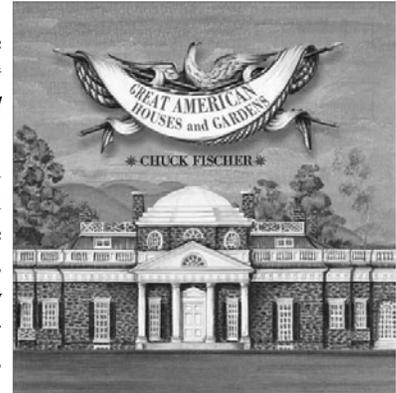
**Q.** Who came up with the idea of doing *Great American Houses and Gardens*, you, or the publisher?

It was fortuitous that my studio in New York City was located a few blocks from Rizzoli's offices, so a meeting was set up with Charles Miers to visit me at my studio. Charles got to see much more of my design and painting projects, including some three dimensional painted architectural pieces I was working on.

Charles had recently had great success with *The New*

*York City Pop-up Book*, and he asked if I had ever considered doing a pop-up book. I said I hadn't, but I loved pop-ups, and I thought it was a great way to add the third dimension to my painting. I knew right away the subject would be American architecture, because I could combine my interests in architecture, design, decorative painting and American history in one book.

I began work on the proposal for a *Great American Houses and Gardens* pop-up book, (I engineered and painted a simple v-fold pop to accompany the proposal) and it was approved by Universe/Rizzoli for publication. As soon as I accepted the offer, Rizzoli introduced me to David Hawcock, who would be the paper engineer for my first three books. I began to learn a great deal about the history and variety of pop-up books with the help of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum's Head Librarian, Stephen Van Dyk.



**Q.** Who thought of the White House book?

One of the challenges in creating a book with a subject matter as broad as *Great American Houses and Gardens*, was to choose which houses and gardens to feature in a format that is limited to seven or eight double-page spreads.

I wanted to include the White House in the book, but it was decided to only include venues that are open to the public, and the White House only offers restricted tours. As soon as it was decided not to include the White House in *Great American Houses and Gardens*, I began to think about how the White House, Washington D.C., and the presidency would make a wonderful companion book.



Soon after *Great American Houses and Gardens* was published (to very favorable press and strong sales) I contacted the White House Historical Association. The WHHA was very receptive to my idea of creating a pop-up book of the White House, and offered me complete access to their archives.

My agent and I eagerly pitched the idea to Rizzoli. To our surprise, they passed on the proposal, so we took the proposal to another publisher. **Continued on page 9**