

Australian Publishing House Creates World Record

The largest atlas ever printed has been published by Australian publishing company, Millennium House. The atlas, *Earth Platinum*, is leather-bound, weighs 150 kilograms, and each single page measures approximately 1.8 m high x 1.4 m wide. Only 31 copies of the atlas exist, making each one as rare as it is valuable.

The aim in producing *Earth Platinum* has been to create a benchmark in cartography and to leave a legacy for future generations, as the atlas shows the world in as much detail as was possible at the time of publication. In the creation of this unique geographical time capsule, over 100 professionals from around the globe have contributed their knowledge and skills. Some of these professionals include 24 photographers, 88 cartographers, computer programmers and a shipwreck expert who has located the exact position of wrecks worldwide. Details of mountains, valleys and plates under the ocean were the realm of an oceanographer. An engineer devised a mechanism to assist the turning of pages and also give protection to the time-honoured unique bookbinding process which has been used. The atlas contains the most recent and comprehensive record of flags. It is expected to be the definitive reference for cartographers, oceanographers as well as those who are curious about many aspects of our planet. *Earth Platinum* has a purchase price of \$US100,000.

The large format allows for far more detail than is usual to be displayed. Towns, rivers and islands that normally would not be shown due to size restrictions are clearly visible. Because of the size of the book, a person is actually enveloped by what they are seeing when viewing the atlas. The combination of 'surround sight', the 3D like effect of the maps, and the clarity of the photos causes a different level of awareness to be experienced by the viewer as their mind and body become engaged in taking in the information before them. This all-encompassing sensory response is triggered as the vastness of continents, cities, oceans and mountain chains become apparent. Such is the clarity of the photography that people who have visited some of the sites have commented that it makes them feel as if they are back there.

In creating *Earth Platinum*, many problems were encountered. At the start of the project, computers crashed each time a map was downloaded due to the amount of information on each one. Computer memory had to be considerably increased to allow editors and cartographic consultants to continue working on the project.

Linguistic experts were called on as not all countries use the Roman alphabet. It was necessary to devise and introduce special alphabetical characters within standard font ranges and also to standardize names so they can be used as reference internationally. Fortunately, Millennium House had a reasonably large database of names as they had encountered this problem previously during production of their first atlas, *Earth Blue*. Because of its much larger format, *Earth Platinum* is able to display a far greater number of towns, islands and rivers than *Earth Blue* or any of the other smaller atlases published by Millennium House.

Cutting-edge technology in the photographic process called gigapan was used in the reproduction of some of the 60 photos in the atlas. The photo of the skyline of Shanghai for instance, is a composite image of over 12,000 individual photos that were taken over a period of time. An eagle eye was needed to join the images together so they would read as one image. As changing light conditions were unavoidable during the process, any variations in color had to be adjusted. Over the time span required to take the multiple images, everything that could move did move. This resulted in images of headless bodies and half cars that had to be deleted and the resulting space needing to be blended in.

The traditional offset printing process was used but the process was employed in conjunction with photo images being burnt into the plates using a high-tech machine. The result is a much greater level of detail in the plates and an enhancement of the final 3D like effect. Only one type of printing press can cope with the size of *Earth Platinum* and the level of detail in it. Although there are 26 of these presses globally, only one company in Milan was willing to undertake the risk for such a ground-breaking project. An ancient form of Chinese book-binding that uses hand stitching was the one most suited to the size of the atlas, so the printed pages were sent to Hong Kong for assembly and binding.

The only atlas that is similar in size to *Earth Platinum*, is the *Klencke Atlas*, which is housed in the Antiquarian Mapping Division of the British Library in London. It was produced as a one-off over 350 years ago, and, like *Earth Platinum*, is said to encompass all geographical knowledge of that time. Thanks to today's technology and accumulated knowledge, *Earth Platinum* surpasses the *Klencke Atlas* in detail and size. *Earth Platinum* is considered to be one of the most comprehensive atlases ever produced and the unique processes used in creating it have delivered an atlas that is a combination of science and art. Owning a copy of *Earth Platinum* is regarded as a fascinating investment and a fine bequest by private collectors, institutions and companies alike.

Since the production of their first atlas in 2008, Millennium House has been awarded a number of cartographic awards including: IMTA Asia-Pacific Best Overall Award 2010; IMTA Best Book Award 2008, 2009, 2010; *Earth Blue* voted Best World Atlas at the International Cartographic Conference 2009. Guinness World Records has also informed the company that *Earth Platinum* will break a record that has been held since 1660.

Chris Sheedy from Guinness World Records says that once *Earth Platinum* has finished final production in early 2012 it will enter the Guinness World Records

"We at Guinness World Records are thrilled and honored to be witnessing the production of what we're sure will be the world's largest atlas," says Chris Sheedy from Guinness World Records Australia/NZ. "It will represent the breaking of a record that has stood since circa 1660 and, in this era of digital content, will provide a unique, valuable, enduring and unforgettable perspective on the world we live in."

For further information contact

Jannine Doyle
Media Consultant
janninedoyle@yahoo.com.au

Phone (61) (0) 432 298 417
website: www.millenniumhouse.com.au