

# THE "LOOK" OF THE BOOK DESIGN & ILLUSTRATION



01 Main image - Where's Bear?!  
Images © Lauren Wood, Takara Beech

What constitutes successful book design? Are you hankering to understand a little more about what it's like to be a professional book illustrator? In this article, author Jenny Poulter interviews one of her favourite designers.

**W**e have all heard the proverbial "You can't tell a book by its cover!" But everyone in the Book industry knows if you DON'T have an eye-catching cover, the book will not leave the shelf!

Then there is the internal design - this is very important for any book, but critical for a picture book or chapter book, given the latter are increasingly being given the full illustrative treatment.

Do you go for industry awards for arty innovation or do you go for a book that teachers will easily be able to hold up and read to the class and that children will easily be able to read themselves? The challenge is to go for BOTH without sacrificing readability - a fine balance...

**Takara Beech** is a Book Designer / Illustrator Extraordinaire with Word Wings. Her trademark is innovation! She shares with us her designer intuition as well as the practical nitty gritty in this interview, highlighting

some of her most joyous design experiences and how she overcame some of the bigger challenges.

**Q.** Takara, what are your first thoughts when presented with a 'raw' manuscript and illustrative roughs for a new project?

**A.** Haha, often I swear and think 'what am I going to do with this?!

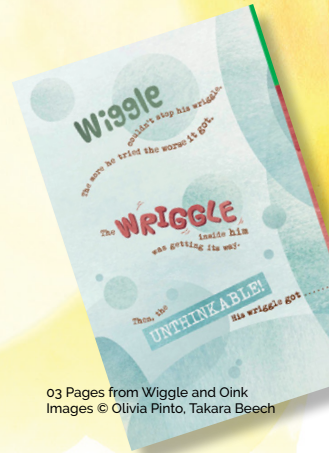
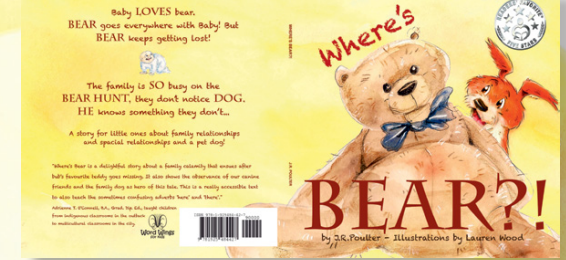
**Q.** How important is the concept of 'collaboration' in what you do as Book designer? How does that work?

**A.** My personality is mostly that of a collaborator. I love sharing experiences and taking other people's work and ideas and making them better, bringing them to life in a way that surprises and pleases them and which pleases me. Plus it's more rewarding celebrating success with friends and work mates, than it is on your own.

02 Hip Hop Hoorah receiving a haircut  
Images © Jade Potts, Tara Beech



“Make it readable.  
Make it look fabulous.  
Make people want more.”



03 Pages from Wiggle and Oink  
Images © Olivia Pinto, Takara Beech

**Q.** How does collaboration work?

**A.** Thankfully for me, I receive a LOT of trust from those I collaborate with. They let me have creative freedom with their work which takes an extreme amount of courage because I have a tendency to pull things apart and cut them up, like a scissor happy hairdresser. I respect that kind of courage and trust! It also helps me produce a better product, plus I love the surprise and excitement I receive when I send my collaborators a finished draft. Usually there aren't many changes so a finished draft looks like it's ready for print - a real live book! I love it. I love their excited reactions.

**Q.** Do you follow a set process or is each project a 'go with your gut' from start to finish?

**A.** It is always a go with my gut process! Although having said that I'm certain my graphic design training is really what has become the

intuitive, gut instinct in me - 'Make it readable, make it look fabulous, make people want more'. I also spent a LOT of time reading and looking at picture books as well as studying the craft of making them. I like that we live in a day where the boundaries of what a picture book should look like can be pushed... that's creative fun!

**Q.** What are the elements you look for in the critical title font? How important is this for cover design?

**A.** I look for readability, and a way to illustrate the story but with type. I ask myself what is this story telling me, how does it feel? Does my font tell that story and convey that feeling? Does the font look like it is part of the whole illustration? I don't see pictures and then type, I see a whole illustration using pictures and type. I see a piece of art. A lot of what I do with fonts is instinct and training too. I usually don't just type in the title and go "voilà, perfect".

I play around with spacing and kerning - on individual letters if I have to - Oh dear, I just revealed a little of my designer OCD. All elements of the cover are important. Your cover has to say 'pick me up, look inside me!' The cover for *Where's Bear?!* Also demonstrates how I play around with illustrators images to come up with a nice composition which also hints at the story...

**Q.** How do you determine which font for the internal pages? What are the critical factors and how do you marry font style and image?

**A.** I treat the inside of the story the same as I do the cover. I usually bring the cover font inside the book because I have already determined that's how the story feels. Each page is a piece of art to me, each spread is a piece of art. Art with words and pictures. In *Wiggle and Oink* it was so much fun playing with fonts that illustrated the feeling of the words.

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**Q.** What do you think are the standout elements that separate a professional book design from an amateur production?

**A.** Haha, most everyone who goes into a book store can tell the difference between a self published book and a professionally designed book.

I think the short answer is. It's the designer, and even if I wasn't a designer this would still be my answer.

You can just tell there's something different - Professional, university educated Graphic Designers spend years training in all elements of design. They do layout drills every day for three to four years. They do type drills. They design their own fonts and integrate them into good page design. They are asking themselves, "How does that A sit against that E? How does that word sit against the next word? How do those words work on that page? How do they work with the image? Does the image look like it's moving or stationary? Where is your eye looking? Is it supposed to be looking that way?" ... years of drilling down on the details and then doing.

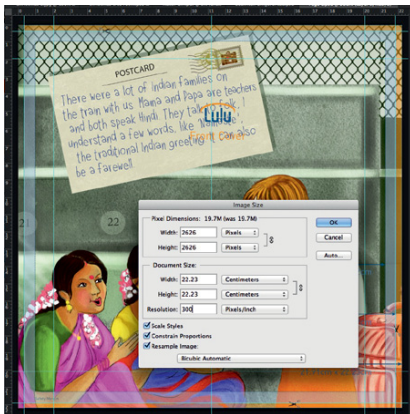
Then there's picture books, even as a designer you have to study the art of creating a picture book! Because good design alone won't carry the story. You have to understand how to make it a moving piece of art from one page to the next. You have to know how to design the book so the reader wants to keep turning the pages.

**Q.** Back to the internal file, what are the most important considerations in page layout and why?

**A.** Keep all your important stuff inside the margins, the margins are large, about 2cm - 2.5cm all the way around one page, stay inside this space with all your critical information. Yes, you can illustrate to the edge of the book.

Do that, but just know that it's possible, even probable that anything within that 2cm buffer can get chopped off.

Please, please make sure your characters are moving in the general direction of your page turn. They need to be moving from left to right. If they're facing the other way and moving from right to left, there is a subconscious pause in the reader. It stops them from turning the page. Now if you deliberately want to stop the reader, then it's a method that can be used to keep the reader inside the moment on that page, but I would say, unless you know what you're doing and the story cries out for it, don't do it. It's like turning your back on the reader. We don't want to do that. We want to invite them deeper into the story.



04 Square page set up for left and right pages Images © Takara Beech

The image above shows how I set up green guides at the 2cm mark.

You can see all the critical information is inside these guides. Even if the page got chopped here, it still works as a nice image with all the text intact.

**Q.** Some books are cover to cover double page spreads. Some are text opposite image. Others are a mix. What are the key issues in making these decisions?

How much does story flow buy into it? **A.** I think story flow definitely determines what is done with text and where it is placed within the layout of the pages.

The sheer number of words used to tell the story also influences design decisions. Not a lot of words, means text can be integrated into the pictures. It can be super large or tiny. It can dance around the pictures or inside the pictures. Lots of words, means you need more space for them. It's easier to put them on a blank white page but I really struggle with typing lots of plain text on a white page all by itself and then have an image on the opposing page. It's too generic for me.

I want to treat text like an illustration. I want to play with it. I want it to illustrate the story and convey emotion too.

**Q.** Would you share with us your favourite/s? What are you working on now?

**A.** My absolute favourite book cover at the moment is **The Passing**, which is almost ready for publication. I just loved grabbing elements and mashing together something that told the whole story in one single image.

I love the contrast of the texture against Rose's gorgeous naive character illustration. I love the contrast of black and white against the colour and the symbols within the image.

It's a piece of art and looking at art makes me happy. It's also a beautiful, emotional story about the passing of time, human nature and the ability the earth has to heal and make everything right again.

Rose also has an eye for layout, so she was easy to art direct. In the beginning I was worried.

I think she might have been torn

between her own art flair and what she thought a picture book should look like. We're all so guilty of this. Her first image didn't work, yet some of her online videos where she used naive characters in photographic settings were absolutely beautiful.

"Do that Rose, do that!"  
And she did.  
It's gorgeous.



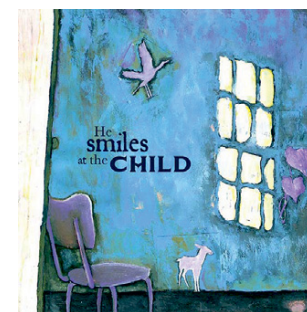
Another book I love is **Catching a Dream**, the story is beautiful, just beautiful and I love Claudia's painterly style and the strangeness of the images.

My teenage and adult kids thought the symbolism was not suitable for a picture book. I didn't understand. I loved them and felt they would fit a picture book format perfectly, even though it was written for a more grown up readership as an illustrated, ballad form poem and not for little children. Now they have seen the final product, they love it. Mum was right :)

Oh there's so many, The comic book style of **Zippity Bears** was so much fun and right now I'm working on **Dark Watch** which is totally different again, it's monochromatic and creepy.



05 The Passing Images © Rose Clark, Takara Beech



06 Catching a Dream Image © Claudia Emanuela Coppola, Takara Beech



07 Zippity Bears Image © Ankolie, Takara Beech

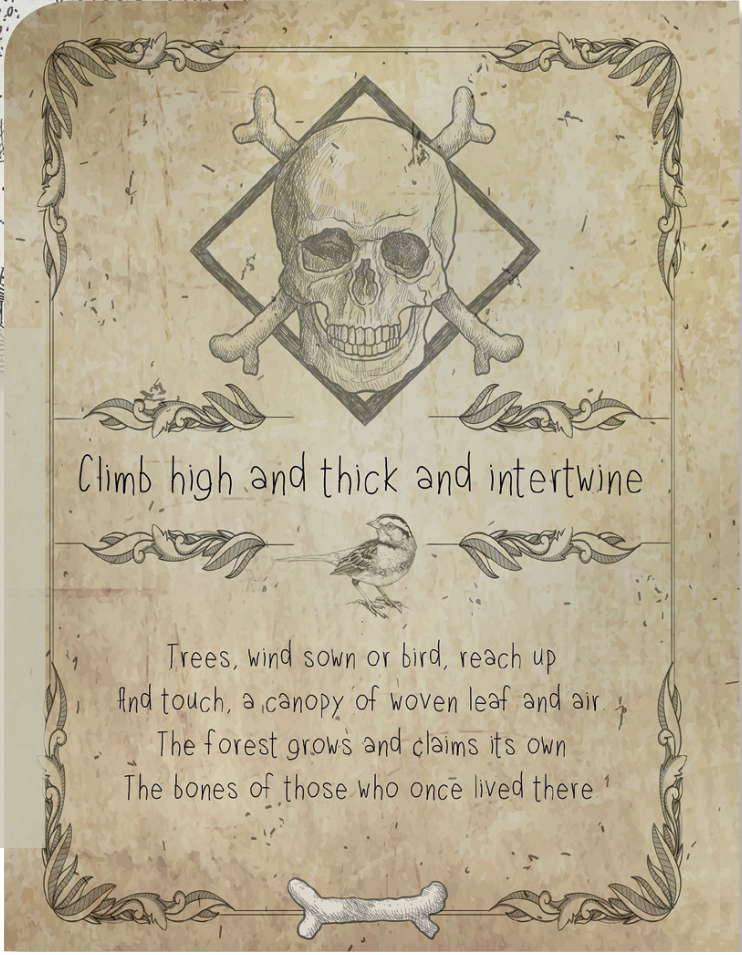
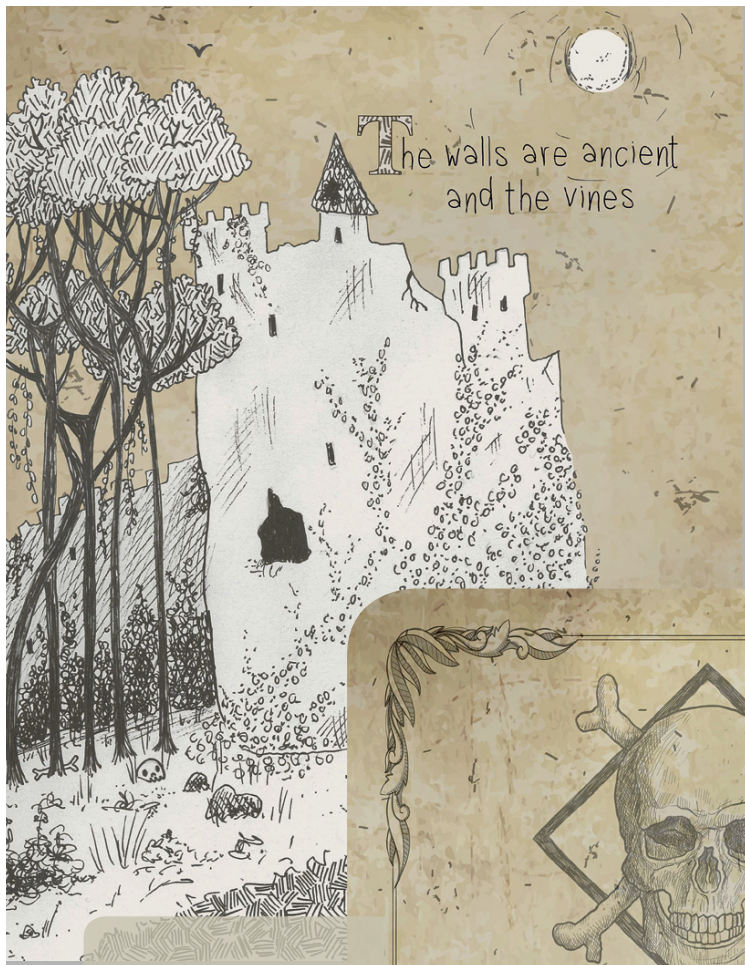
I love the end result of so many of the books I've been privileged to design.

I love that moment when there's a spark and I know exactly what I'm going to do to make them shine. It's so frustrating and so rewarding all at the same time.

Thanks guys for your courage and trust, chop, chop, chop xx

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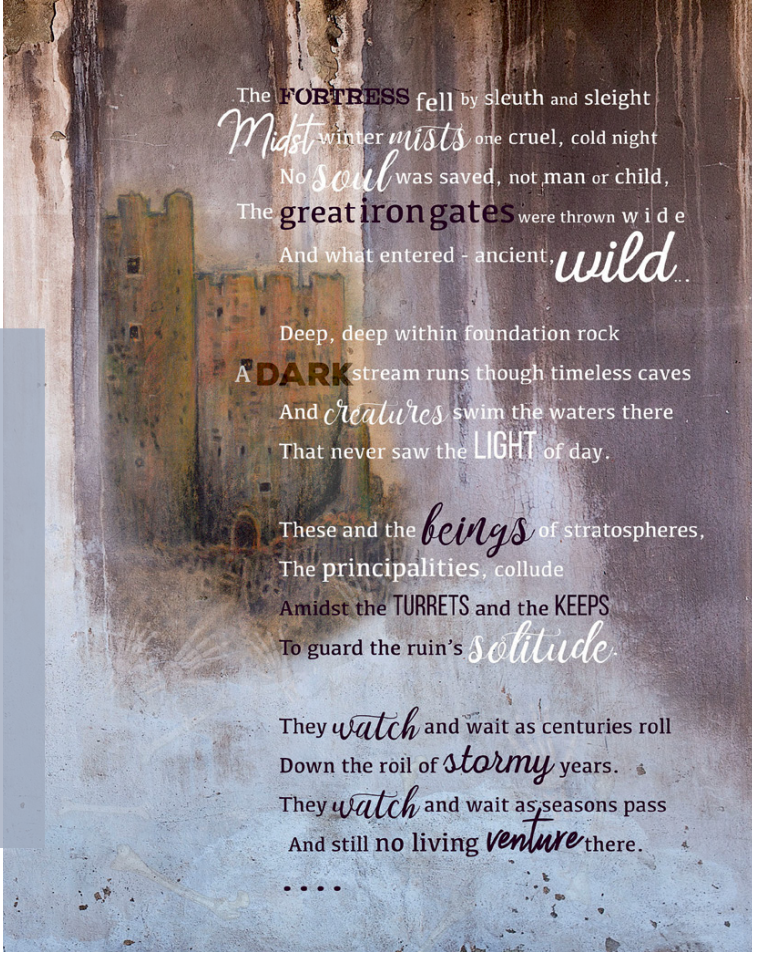
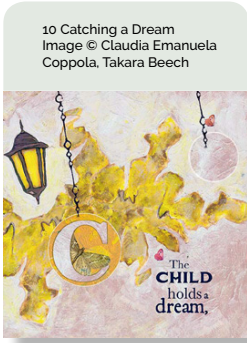




08 Dark Watch  
Images © Heather Peters,  
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09 The Passing  
Image © Rose Clark,  
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11 Phantasmagoria  
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