

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation, 5th Edition

REFERENCE: Fisher, Barry A. J., *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation, 5th Edition*, 1992, Elsevier, New York, NY, 526 pp.

I first encountered Svensson and Wendel's *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation* as a Berkeley undergraduate where it was used as a text in a criminal investigation course. The cases were riveting and the photographs gory and wonderful. It was a fine textbook. Barry A. J. Fisher's *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation, 5th Edition* is the latest rendition in the evolution of the original Swedish text by Arne Svensson and Otto Wendel. The value of the prior edition was recognized by the International Association of Identification and was a recommended text for their Crime Scene Certification test. This latest edition continues the series of changes and improvements found in the earlier editions.

Techniques, fifth edition, continues to remain a valuable resource for those interested in a detailed overview of the many facets of crime scene investigations.

The fifth edition is largely distinguished from the fourth edition by the inclusion of different photographs (but still gory and wonderful), the Americanization of additional text, the addition of newer developments in the forensic sciences, principally DNA, and dropping the names of Svensson and Wendel as authors. While this edition is generally excellent, it still suffers from some of the same deficiencies of earlier editions.

Mr. Fisher has again taken a great deal of time to assemble photographs from a wide range of international contributors and this is reflected in the interesting cases depicted. As with prior editions, the quality of some photographs suffer from poor exposure and soft focus. It is perhaps more of an indictment of the quality of crime scene photographs taken by some, than a criticism of the selection of photographs for the book. Occasionally, though, the photographs distract from the impact of the text. Some photographic series extend over several pages and breaks up the flow of the text. In other cases, such as the "Night Stalker" case in the final chapter, the photographs are interesting but not strictly relevant to the text. Perhaps future editions can include a section of the book dedicated to extended photographic displays only.

Unlike some photographs, however, the drawings remain clear, well drawn and compliment the accompanying text.

One significant feature of all editions of *Techniques* is the reporting of specific cases to illustrate important lessons in crime scene investigations. These case histories enrich

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the book and provide significance to the text. Much earlier editions, however, clearly distinguished these cases through the use of appropriately styled and sized typefaces. The fifth edition inconsistently distinguishes the case histories from the text. In some instances, the “case” is boxed from the text, in other instances, it is distinguished with a short dark upper line and still other instances, it runs into the text. This inconsistency affects the readability of this valuable material and detracts from the impact of the case histories.

The hallmark of a book on crime scene investigations offered for the international market should be the universality of the techniques taught. It is difficult to account for local customs in writing a book that can be used as a textbook worldwide. The author again does a fine job with explaining the reasoning behind certain procedures, but not including overwhelmingly specific details that may conflict with the desires of crime labs in specific jurisdictions. He is wise, for example, to sidestep potential search and seizure issues with the sage advice to consult a local prosecutor.

The book contains excellent references in the bibliography, yet I see value to specifically reference authors in the text itself. This is especially necessary when a specific technique is contrary to newer practices (for example, placing soil specimens in closed containers versus porous containers). The specific source of that technique would enable the reader to weigh the value of alternative collection techniques to decide the proper method for them.

There are some minor typographical errors, and a few technical errors. I don't think the definition of a *blank* sample used in several places in the text would be universally embraced, as I don't believe the use of a pocket knife to collect paint is generally acceptable. In blood stain collection, gauze padded bandages are no longer readily available, and many agencies promote the use of cotton swabs instead of forceps-held gauze in collecting blood stains to minimize the risk of contamination of the gauze by the forceps. Despite a generally superb discussion on blood collection in an early chapter, it is contradicted later on by advising that dried blood from weapons should be placed into a test tube. The washing of an unidentified decedent's bloody clothing to look for laundry marks is also not an established practice for many, nor should it be.

Some material from earlier editions should be critically evaluated for relevance and length. *Techniques* takes more pages explaining the nuances of safe burglary than providing a unified approach to the collection of physical evidence in sexual assault cases. This chapter could be expanded to restate the potential of discovering all types of medical and physical evidence found in these crimes as well as including information on the collection of evidence from sexual assault suspects.

The most important and profound change in this fifth edition has been the inclusion of a prologue. The prologue reminds the reader of their ethical responsibility as forensic science professionals to practice the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct. The tone and content of this book fosters those goals.

Techniques of Crime Scene Investigations, 5th Edition, is an indispensable book for anyone involved in crime scenes, as a crime scene investigator, criminalist, detective, or pathologist. It is important as a textbook for the student to learn these techniques and as a reference for experienced personnel to review new and emerging techniques. Barry Fisher's fifth edition is a valuable continuation of the quality of the earlier editions by Svensson and Wendel.

Hello Barry. Good bye, Arne and Otto, we will remember you fondly.