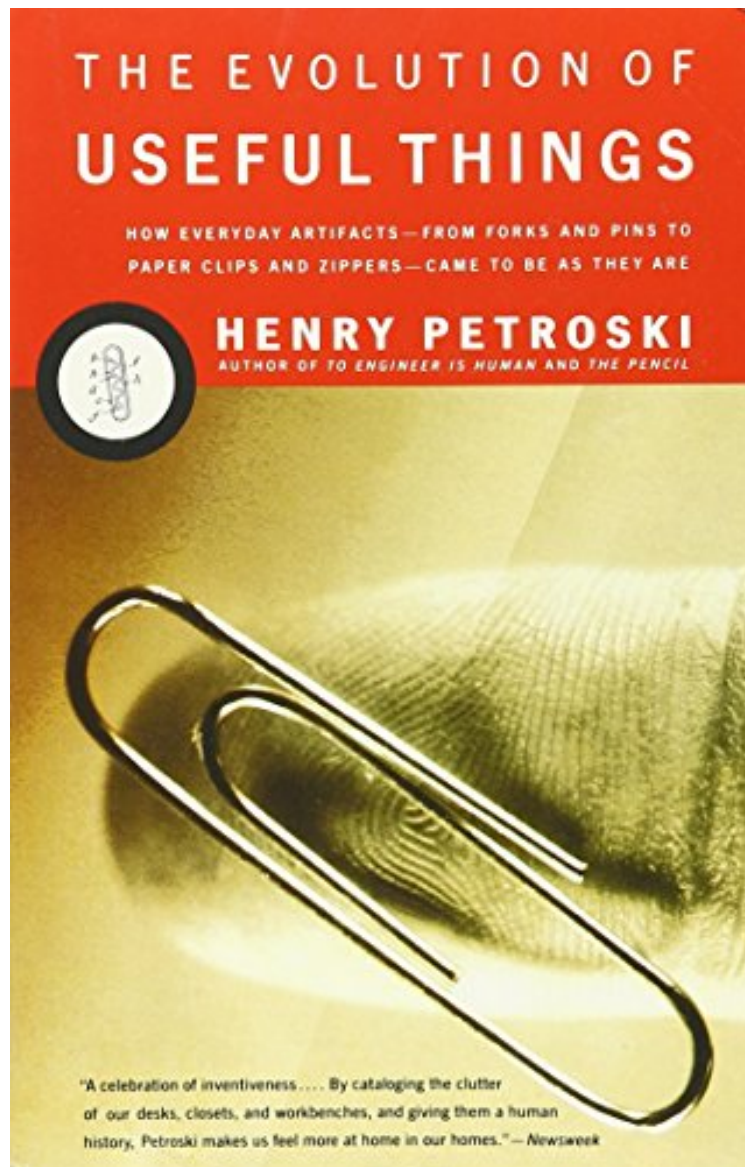


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The Evolution of Useful Things: How Everyday Artifacts-From Forks and Pins to Paper Clips and Zippers-Came to be as They are

Henry Petroski

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Henry Petroski : The Evolution of Useful Things: How Everyday Artifacts-From Forks and Pins to Paper Clips and Zippers-Came to be as They are before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Evolution of Useful Things: How Everyday Artifacts-From Forks and Pins to Paper Clips and Zippers-Came to be as They are:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Hidden DepthBy Vincent PoirierOn the face of it, the Evolution of Useful Things simply lists fun trivia about familiar objects. Why does a fork have four tines and not two or three? What's a perfect paperclip? Is there such a thing? Who invented the zipper? How many things can you see on your desk right now?However the book gives us much more. Petroski uses a large number of concrete facts to present general laws of human thought and activity. The paper clip appeared because pins used to hold papers together made holes in them and could injure someone looking through files, but it took a while for it to reach the form we know today. We invent new things because we are dissatisfied when we find problems. Form follows not function, but failure.While small objects play the center role here, large machines such as locomotives and large projects such as bridges also come up. Petroski argues that for his concepts to be valid, they must apply to the great as well as the small and he shows that engineers design new bridges or tunnels by solving problems observed found while building other bridges and tunnels.The book's title is especially good. The evolution of man-made things differs fundamentally from the evolution of living things. Natural selection follows a mindless process of sifting through countless minute _random_ changes. Things, however, evolve through a different process of sifting through countless _intended_ changes (sometimes small, sometimes large) until something arises that works better than before.Petroski's writing does annoy me a little; he's got some really bad puns. For example he follows two different quotations of how to manufacture a needle with the phrase "there's more than one way to make a point." Another problem is that he repeats himself. For instance, he twice mentions Karl Marx's astonishment at finding 500 different kinds of hammers in a Birmingham factory.But the originality of his thesis far outweighs these minor flaws. Henry Petroski is a philosopher of engineering examining the question of why we invent things. He asks why we are always perfecting our inventions, why we are never satisfied with our tools as they are. His proposed answers in no small way explain much of the history of our rich living environment with its tens of thousands of useful things.Vincent Poirier, Tokyo0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I love all of Petroski's booksBy CustomerI love all of Petroski's books, and this is no exception. A fantastic look at the design process and how failure governs the advancement of even the most mundane objects. Worth a read for any aspiring engineer, designer, or anyone with a hands-on or technical bent.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting account of how every day items began and ...By Ron FanninVery interesting account of how every day items began and evolved. From the development of the paper to the remarkable changes to the telephone. The material was interesting and presented in an entertaining way.

How did the table fork acquire a fourth tine? What advantage does the Phillips-head screw have over its single-grooved predecessor? Why does the paper clip look the way it does? What makes Scotch tape Scotch? In this delightful book Henry, Petroski takes a microscopic look at artifacts that most of us count on but rarely contemplate, including such icons of the everyday as pins, Post-its, and fast-food "clamshell" containers. At the same time, he offers a convincing new theory of technological innovation as a response to the perceived failures of existing productsuggesting that irritation, and not necessity, is the mother of invention.

.com This surprising book may appear to be about the simple things of life--forks, paper clips, zippers--but in fact it is a far-flung historical adventure on the evolution of common culture. To trace the fork's history, Duke University professor of civil engineering Henry Petroski travels from prehistoric times to Texas barbecue to Cardinal Richelieu to England's Industrial Revolution to the American Civil War--and beyond. Each item described offers a cultural history lesson, plus there's plenty of engineering detail for those so inclined.From Library JournalFor armchair inventors or those who are curious about the way things work, this book offers hours of delight. Petroski (engineering, Duke Univ.) provides an intricate look, in lay reader's terms, at the technology and basic rationale behind a number of items we often take for granted. The list is comprehensive: kitchen utensils, zippers, tools, paper clips, fast-food packaging, and more. The text is far from a recital of mere facts. Petroski's anecdotes and stories about individual designers and inventors are told with warm regard. Petroski also provides illuminating thoughts on the theoretical, historical, and cultural frameworks that influenced these creations. Although this book will appeal to a somewhat specialized audience, many general readers will find it fascinating and educational. For circulating libraries.- Carol J. Binkowski, Bloomfield, N.J.Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A celebration of inventiveness...By cataloging the clutter of our desks, closets, and workbenches, and giving them a human history, Petroski makes us feel more at home in our homes."- Newsweek"Petroski is a valuable resourcean engineer who examines the simplest, most ubiquitous tools in our live with an appraising eye."- Washington Post Book World"Mr. Petroski's case histories delightfully illustrate his thesis... You never know when you will turn a page and find some tiny corner of your mind enlightened."- The New York Times"Petroski has an eye for the mundane that distracts and delights... [His] wealth of literary and cultural references runs from Aristotle... to Russell Baker... The book has substance."- Newsday