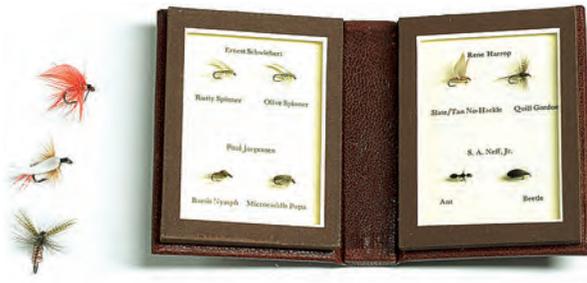


There is a certain madness to the world of miniature books. The smallest ones, which measure less than a quarter of an inch, cannot be opened; even if they could, their type could not be read without the aid of a microscope. Louis Bondy, the now-deceased guru of 20th-century miniature book collecting, once had a terrifying experience with one that measured less than a millimetre: he breathed onto it and it blew away “like a speck of dust”. “It was a miracle,” he later wrote, “that I managed to find it again.”

Tiny books inspire grand passions. Neale Albert, a 75-year-old former lawyer, has been collecting them for 20 years. The reason, he says, speaking from his home in Manhattan, is practical: “What would you do,” he says, “if you loved to collect things and you lived in a two-bedroom apartment?” Yet as time went on, and his collection swelled to 3,500 volumes, Albert found it necessary to purchase a second apartment to accommodate his burgeoning library. Julian Edison was hooked by miniature books in 1960, when his wife presented him with a complete miniature set of Shakespeare on their first wedding anniversary: “I said



‘A BOOK OF SMALL FLIES’ This 1983 book holds the coveted title of the only miniature book to incorporate actual fishing flies, inset under glass.

JOAN MIRÓ’S ‘POINT DE MIRE’

Miró was commissioned by French publisher Pierre-André Benoit to illustrate four miniature books; this one-inch square example was the tiniest. Benoit also commissioned books from Picasso and Braque.



ALL IN THE SMALL PRINT

They’re written with a magnifying glass, cost anything up to £3 million and are sometimes so small they cannot be opened. Horatia Harrod enters the mad world of the miniature book

what you would say, ‘Wow! I’ve never seen anything like that.’” Four years later, the library of a chemist, Percy Spielmann, came up for auction; Edison bought all 800 books, housed in custom-made Lilliputian bookcases, and his collection now runs to 15,000 volumes.

Small books don’t necessarily mean small prices: London-based dealer Sam Fogg recently sold a 16th-century miniature prayer book for close to £3 million. Edison himself recently acquired a miniature diary kept by a 13-year-old girl who was in the last lifeboat to cast off from the Titanic; it is worth just over £15,000. However he is keen to point out that he aims to create a comprehensive collection: “I’d buy something for a \$1 or \$5, if it was of interest.”

Miniature books – books of three inches or less – have been around for almost as long as full-size books. “They were created for reasons of practicality, curiosity and aesthetics,” says Edison, who owns two-inch clay tablets onto which ancient Babylonians inscribed cuneiform lettering in around 2200 BC. Within 20 years of Gutenberg printing his Bible in 1455, miniature printed books were being produced and for several centuries afterwards religious books dominated the market. Book-makers worked with magnifying aids and miniature tools, binding their creations in leather, and adorning them with gold thread and precious gems.

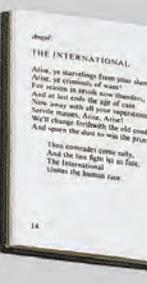
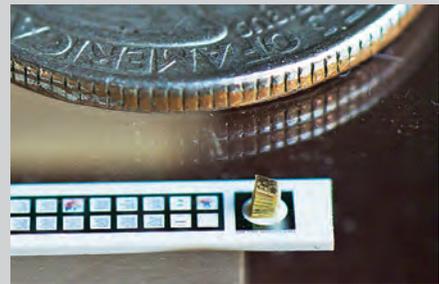
Edison’s most prized book is *The Fruits of Philosophy*, a guide to contraception published in 1832 by a Massachusetts physician in a 3-inch-edition, hoping, perhaps, to evade the authorities. The tiny type did not save him. He was fined and imprisoned for his corrupting text.

Edison likes to read his books, but Albert thrills to the bindings. His favourite is one he acquired in Barcelona. “It was bound in the year I was born,” says Albert. What’s it about? “I don’t know! It’s in Catalan, so I can’t read it.”

For more information on miniature books, visit mbs.org

‘THE CHAMELEON’

Until recently the smallest book in the world, this edition of a Chekhov short story measures 0.9mm, and was made by Siberian artist Anatoly Konenko. The white squares to its left are the book’s unbound pages.



AMERICAN ALMANACS Unlike their elegant European counterparts (see below), American almanacs were generally printed to advertise products. Hazeltine – later the PISO Company – began producing theirs in 1879.

‘THE LONDON ALMANACK’

This 1736 almanac was part of a series printed from the mid-17th to the 20th century. Almanacs were filled with useful information: dates, statistics and maps. Proto-iPhones, you could say.



