

# Deco Bookshelf

By Jim Sweeney

***Diners: People and Places*, Gerd Kittel (Thames & Hudson, \$17.95 paperback)**

Reading Gerd Kittel's *Diners: People and Places* got me to thinking about diners and their current status. Some seem to be on the way up, others on the way down.

Silver Spring's famous Tastee Diner has been moved north several blocks, refurbished and reopened. On the other hand, I saw a different kind of diner on a recent visit to Pittsburgh. Charlie's is grimy and worn out and looks like it's still standing only because it's in no worse shape than the rest of the decaying neighborhood in which it stands.

Kittel's book shows the same dichotomy. Some diners are polished and well preserved. Take the shot of two men eating in the Teamster's Diner in Fairfield, N.J. The metalwork is shiny, the windows are clean, a wall of glass block glows in the background.

Other diners have obviously had a hard life. Some of them are closed or for sale, but most of the photos depict operating diners. Most are vintage diners, but there are a few shots of the newer fashionable pseudo-diners such as San Francisco's Fog City Diner.

The book shows the range of diner architecture. Aside from the polished metal and glass palaces, there are more modest structures such as New York's brick and cinderblock Broadway Diner. There are also hybrids showing the changes over time. Joann's Diner in Providence, R.I., is the classic polished metal and glass diner. Behind it is a more modest brick and glass block addition. Behind that is a very modest wooden shed addition.

Kittel, a German photographer, has a good eye. He knows how to arrange the scene so you linger over the image: sun lighting up interior or exterior metal and glass, neon glowing in twilight, a brightly lit diner looming out of a foggy night.

The book has 68 color photos by Kittel, and is a revised edition of a book first published in 1990. My one beef with the book is that the promotional

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text on the back cover says Kittel "scoured the American city and countryside" for these images. But with the exception of Fog City Diner, every diner here is in New England, New York and New Jersey.