

# Google SketchUp: A review of two books

Donna Kamper

Google must be an incredible place to work; just look at the variety of products it releases. Of course there's the search engine, Google itself. Then there's Google *Earth* (which now includes the moon and Mars), *Picasa* (for image editing), *Chrome* (a new browser to compete with *Firefox* and *Internet Explorer*)...and lots more. I stumbled across Google *SketchUp* by accident, and was immediately taken with it.

*SketchUp* (<http://SketchUp.google.com>) is a 3D-sketching program in which you can create anything from a simple bench to San Francisco's Coit Tower. Not only can you create it, you can upload it into the Google 3D Warehouse (<http://SketchUp.google.com/3dwarehouse>), joining other designers and sharing it with the world. It may be placed in situ on Google Earth for anyone using the 3D overlay to see. Or you can choose anything from the Warehouse and place it in your personal copy of Google Earth to enjoy.

## Wow!

I've never had any kind of drawing, painting or architectural instruction. Perspective is pretty much a nebulous concept to me. It occurred to me that working in a 3D program might give me a little bit of practice in the subject, and maybe help me in other areas.

The program is free for the download for either Mac and PC. There is a Pro version, for which Google charges \$495. If you're curious about the difference, you can find a side-by-side comparison [here](#).

Downloading and installing the program is a snap. Once installation was complete I simply double-clicked the icon to launch the program and immediately realized I'm totally out of my depth. HELP!

That's when I looked around for some resources. I was mildly surprised at the number of books supporting a free program. I finally settled on two: *Google SketchUp: The Missing Manual* and *Google SketchUp for Site Design*. I couldn't have picked two more dissimilar books if I'd tried, and I wound up the richer for it.

## *Google SketchUp: The Missing Manual*

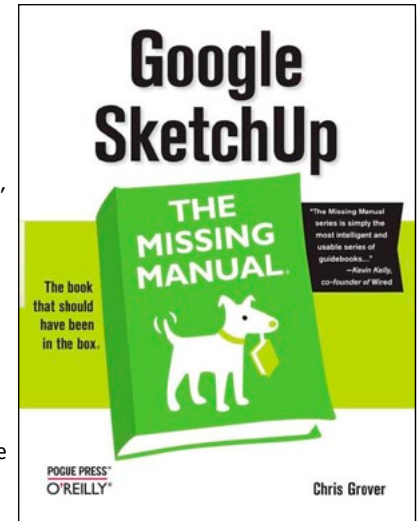
I've written (just a few) handouts, manuals and books about using software, mainly graphics software. These programs are so full-featured it's easy to overwhelm a novice. When you're new to the subject, never mind the program itself, it's almost impossible not to feel at sea. Which is why we buy books like those in the Missing Manual series.

I hoped for a step-by-step procedure: Double-click the icon, this window appears, click this to have this happen, click that to set a preference, click this tool and do...something.

I began on page 13, Chapter 1, "Building a Bench: Your First *SketchUp* Model." After a short introduction to the program and the concept of 3D, the next page is "Firing up *SketchUp* for the First Time."

Three different methods for launching the program for both *Mac* and *Windows* are given. Then the author talks about the first window that opens. Buried in the 12-line paragraph is a casual mention that if you're creating something (like the project later in this chapter?) you should choose the Woodworking template. Unmentioned (but pretty obvious) is "click OK to continue."

Then there's a tour of the interface and instructions on how to set it up and how to change how you're viewing your creation. Then there's a digression on templates and how to create templates (which I'm a long way from attempting). Then, finally, on page 32 is "Bench: Starting Your



First Mode." It begins with "1. Open a new *SketchUp* document with **File > New.**" Hello! That's where you left me, some 18 pages ago! But at least here are instructions.

Things got much better down the road. The instructions are step-by-step, and there are frequent sidebars, call-outs and other notes that add more information as you go.

The book begins by orienting you to the three-dimensional world. Yes, we live in a 3D world, but working with one is a little (a LOT) different. Starting with a simple bench, you move on to create a house. Once the house is created, you can add textures or work with photos to create a realistic appearance.

The book is fairly-well illustrated with black and white screenshots throughout. The author is very good about providing instruction for both Mac and Windows users. Too often it's assumed that both platforms work identically. It was nice to see the differences recognized and spelled out.

The last two chapters (of 15) contain instructions for working with features included with *SketchUp Pro*, the \$495 version for industry professionals. Not having any plans to move up to that version, I skipped them.

By carefully reading and following the instructions I've been able to create and complete several projects. I'm finding that 3D is an entirely new ballgame. Learning my way around it has been quite an adventure.

### ***Google SketchUp for Site Design: A Guide to Modeling Site Plans, Terrain and Architecture***

I am so glad I also asked to review this book. This book adds valuable information about features not even mentioned in the Missing Manual and is the perfect accompaniment to that book.

Why? This book allows you to create settings for your creations. *SketchUp* provides a "Sandbox," an interface with tools that create organic geometry. In other words, you can push and pull "terrain" around to create hills and valleys. Then using other tools create streets, sidewalks and planters. Place the buildings you've created on the terrain, and add vegetation around them.

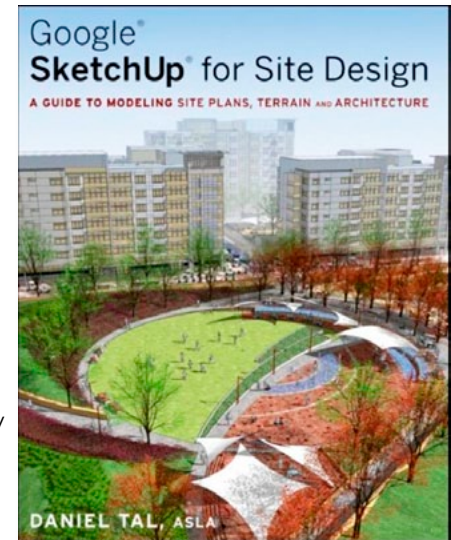
Suddenly you have a world! And if you're an AutoCad user, you can integrate work done in AutoCad into your *SketchUp* designs. (I skipped this part.)

This 360+ page book is broken into four parts, beginning with an introduction to the *SketchUp* program. It's copiously illustrated with full color examples as well as screen shots. The instruction moves quickly and you're working with components (duplicated objects) almost immediately. At the end of the first part, RubyScripts are introduced. It's recommended they be downloaded. These are scripts that extend the functionality of *SketchUp* and the author uses them extensively in the book.

The book's second section is all about modeling and architecture, emphasizing exterior appearances: Windows, doors, balconies, ramps, walls, vegetation, etc. You work from a 2D plan, setting out what becomes your 3D presentation.

Section Three deals with the Sandbox. Here you learn how to create terrain, pushing and shoving "land" into shapes, then laying out the components such as roads, sidewalks, parks and so on. This is where RubyScripts come into play, and their power really shows.

As I'm not an AutoCad owner/user, I had to skip the last section. Since it runs only a little over 60 pages, I don't feel I missed much.



## Recommendation

Get both books. Perhaps there's a better overall guide to *SketchUp* than the *Missing Manual*, but I doubt it. This is a solid book, with good start-to-finish instructions in creating 3D objects, whether a bench or a cathedral.

Once you've completed a building, it needs to be somewhere, right? That's where this second book is invaluable. Because the *Missing Manual* concentrates on buildings, the *Sandbox* tools and *RubyScripts* were nowhere to be found there. But you need to know about them to create a setting. This is a great book for creating and building your terrain.

**About:** *Google SketchUp: The Missing Manual*

**Author:** Chris Grover  
**Publisher:** Pogue Press/O'Reilly  
[www.missingmanuals.com](http://www.missingmanuals.com)

**ISBN-10:** 0596521464

**ISBN-13:** 978-0596521462

**Price:** \$\$35; \$23.10 @ Amazon

**About:** *Google SketchUp for Site Design: A Guide to Modeling Site Plans, Terrain and Architecture*

**Author:** Daniel Ta  
**Publisher:** Wiley  
[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

**ISBN-10:** 047034525X

**ISBN-13:** 978-0470345252

**Price:** \$49.95; \$32.97 @ Amazon



Seen along the north side of West Valencia Road, 3300 block.