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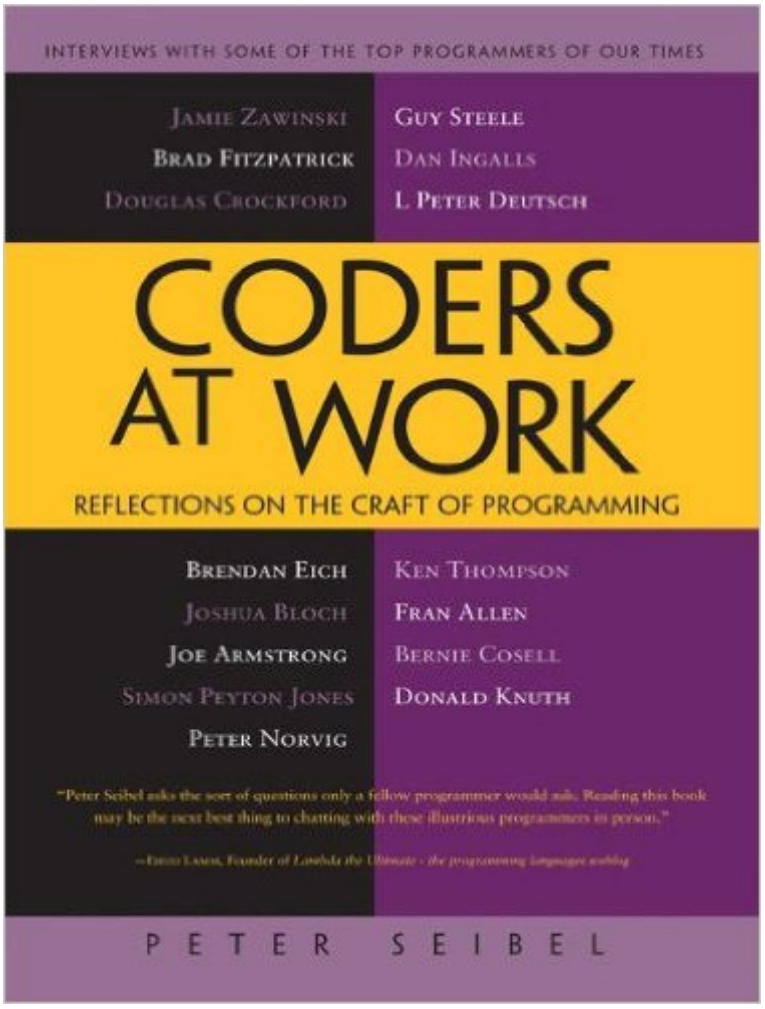
Coders At Work: Reflections On The Craft Of Programming



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Synopsis

Peter Seibel interviews 15 of the most interesting computer programmers alive today in Coders at Work, offering a companion volume to Apressâ ™s highly acclaimed best-seller Founders at Work by Jessica Livingston. As the words â œat workâ • suggest, Peter Seibel focuses on how his interviewees tackle the day-to-day work of programming, while revealing much more, like how they became great programmers, how they recognize programming talent in others, and what kinds of problems they find most interesting. Hundreds of people have suggested names of programmers to interview on the Coders at Work web site: www.codersatwork.com. The complete list was 284 names. Having digested everyoneâ ™s feedback, we selected 15 folks whoâ ™ve been kind enough to agree to be interviewed: Frances Allen: Pioneer in optimizing compilers, first woman to win the Turing Award (2006) and first female IBM fellow Joe Armstrong: Inventor of Erlang Joshua Bloch: Author of the Java collections framework, now at Google Bernie Cosell: One of the main software guys behind the original ARPANET IMPs and a master debugger Douglas Crockford: JSON founder, JavaScript architect at Yahoo! L. Peter Deutsch: Author of Ghostscript, implementer of Smalltalk-80 at Xerox PARC and Lisp 1.5 on PDP-1 Brendan Eich: Inventor of JavaScript, CTO of the Mozilla Corporation Brad Fitzpatrick: Writer of LiveJournal, OpenID, memcached, and Perlbal Dan Ingalls: Smalltalk implementor and designer Simon Peyton Jones: Coinventor of Haskell and lead designer of Glasgow Haskell Compiler Donald Knuth: Author of The Art of Computer Programming and creator of TeX Peter Norvig: Director of Research at Google and author of the standard text on AI Guy Steele: Coinventor of Scheme and part of the Common Lisp Gang of Five, currently working on Fortress Ken Thompson: Inventor of UNIX Jamie Zawinski: Author of XEmacs and early Netscape/Mozilla hacker

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Customer Reviews

If you are a person who cares at all about the art, craft, or science of software development, you will not be able to put this book down.Seibel (a hacker-turned-writer himself) talked to some big names in our field. Topics covered include: How do you learn to be a programmer? How do you perfect your skills? How important is formal education? Which programming languages are good and which are terrible? What kinds of tools do great programmers use? (Which text editors? IDEs? Debuggers?) How do you reason about a program, bottom-up or top-down? What's the best way to collaborate with other coders? etc. etc.As you might expect, the interviewees agree in some areas and wildly disagree in others, but there are insights aplenty. Some answers may surprise you, like how many of these coders shun formal debuggers and use mostly print statements, or how many of them shun IDEs for Emacs (or even pen-and-paper).Aside from the broad questions, Seibel gets the interviewees to open up about what it was like to work on the projects they are famous for. These stories are engaging and entertaining. Any coder who has stayed up till 4AM squashing bugs will find kindred spirits in these books. And the stories are somehow inspiring, as you realize that even great programmers suffer through the same frustrations and ups and downs that all of the rest of us go through.Those interviewed also share insights into what they think of our modern world of programming. Most agree that we live in complicated and troubled times as we battle layer upon layer of software complexity. This book has lessons to be learned from the very brief history of our field, and advice for the future ("Keep it simple!").

As a book, Coders at Work is in some ways not all that great. As a collection of the thoughts and opinions of a wide range of real programmers on what, how, and why they do what they do, it is a treasure.I have to say that the first thing I noticed about the book was the cheap binding. The paper and print quality are not very good, I can't say I liked the basic typesetting or sans serif typeface very much, and I found quite a few typos despite not being a person who looks for (or generally finds) typos in published material. The small Related Titles ad on the back cover is a bit annoying as well - that sort of thing used to be tucked away in the front matter and restricted to a list of the author's other work. Ah well.There is a short introduction describing the author's inspiration and a few themes he picked out after the interviews were completed, but not much else in the way of

structure; the entire content of the book is the series of fifteen transcript style interviews, prefaced by short introductions. Many of the same questions are asked of each interviewee, which is nice for comparing their answers, but I got the impression that Seibel was pushing some people harder on certain issues: Ken Thompson on the wisdom of pointers for example, or Fran Allen on why it's really necessary to have more women in computer science, or Don Knuth on why it's important to pry open black boxes. It felt a bit like prefigured puzzlement in the face of programmers who hold on to ideas that go against what passes for conventional wisdom nowadays, and I would have preferred a more thoughtful and after the fact summary of what the author thought these less common ideas might have to contribute to the mainstream.

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