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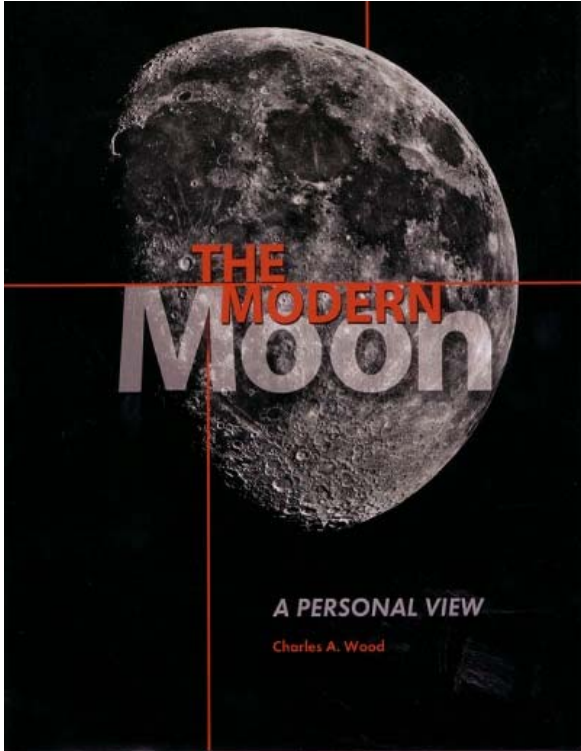


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## The Modern Moon – *A personal view*

Charles A. Wood

3/2004 Tom Trusock - [Click to e-mail author](#)



From the amateur lunar observers viewpoint, Charles Wood is considered one of the foremost experts on lunar observing, and his monthly column in *Sky and Telescope* has been one of my personal favorites since it's inception in 1999. Holding degrees in astronomy, geophysics and a Pd.D. in planetary geology, Dr. Wood has worked for multiple universities, done a stint at NASA, and published nearly 200 scientific papers on the Earth, Moon and planets.

The guy knows what he's talking about.



<b>Level</b>	Lunatics with an interest in geology – intermediate
<b>Age</b>	18 and up
<b>Pages</b>	202 pages
<b>Type / Price</b>	Hardcover / \$44.95
<b>Publisher</b>	Sky Publishing
<b>Summary</b>	While not a lunar atlas, <i>The Modern Moon</i> is a current lesson in lunar history, geology and feature formation, and will help you understand exactly what you are looking at when you study Earth's nearest neighbor as well as provide targets of interest.

In his latest book *The Modern Moon*, Dr. Wood attempts to present the reader with an authoritative guidebook that tells readers not only what to view but why they should look

I first heard about this book last summer and have been looking forward to it since then. Now that it's here, and I'm holding it in my hands I have to say: I'm a little disappointed. Let me give you a little background to help you understand why.

For years moonlight nights have sent me heading out into the backyard with a copy of the Hatfield Atlas and Cherrington's *Exploring the Moon through binoculars and small telescopes*, one of the all time classics for Moon watchers. For those of you not familiar with Cherrington's book, it's basically a moon hop that takes you from feature to feature depending on the lunar day. Written in the late 60's it's a little dated. It's been revised at least once since then, but my copy still advertises itself as having been updated as much as possible for the Apollo landings. It's still good material, but our understanding of the moon has come a long way since then. In my opinion, it's one of the best lunar resources to have at the telescope (isn't observing the moon a kick – you don't even have to worry about dark adaptation) I just wish that someone would update it. For lunar observers familiar with Cherrington, a comparison just begs to be made.

Personally, I was hoping that Dr. Wood's book would be something of an updated and expanded *Exploring...*

It's not.

Right off the bat, let me say *The Modern Moon* is an excellent book and one of the finest books currently on the market for lunar observers, but it's not remotely setup like Cherrington's work. Instead it's both more and less. Where Cherrington tours the moon day by day, making it easy for the novice to plan their moon hop (just match the age of the moon with the appropriate chapter in the book), Wood has divided the moon into 18 regions, and gives little indication when they are best observed – to be fair, he really can't as he covers a plethora of

objects – some, like domes and craters, are best observed when close to the terminator others like ray structures lend themselves to better observation when the sun is high overhead. So there isn't one best time to see them all. In reality, given the nature of his column in Sky and Telescope for the past few years, I should have expected more from Wood than a simple remake of Cherrington's work.

So why else am I disappointed? I'll get there. First, let me give you a rundown of what to expect. His introduction (unlike most books) is mandatory reading. In it, Wood discusses equipment, techniques, and the cast of characters that have been there done that before. If you are a lunar observer with some books under your belt, you will probably recognize some of them – however – the emphasis is not on the distant past – rather it's on professionals who are currently active in the field, ones that the reader would expect Dr Wood to be quite familiar with.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the Moon itself. If you are a beginner, haul up a chair, sit down and settle in because Dr. Wood is going to get you two acquainted. Intermediate observers can skip this chapter and head to Chapter Two (unless you are a lunar and planetary geologist in which case you, can proceed directly to Chapter Three). In Chapter Two, the reader is given a crash course in lunar geology. This was one of the chapters that I, personally, found the most useful. Wood introduces you to the terminology the pro's (read people who get paid to do this) use when talking about different crater types and structures. Impact Basin Formation, Simple Craters, Complex Craters,

glacis, ejecta curtain's, melt sheets, lunar volcanism, classification of lunar basalts, KREEP and topographic basins are just some of the topics covered.

Chapter 3 introduces us to the bulk of the book Here Wood begins to discuss geology and features of the 18 different regions he's divided the moon into; the Imbrium Basin, Mare Imbrium: The Great Lava Plain, Copernicus, Imbrium South, The North Polar Region, Serenity, Tranquility, Crisium, the Southeast Limb, Nectaris, and more. Each chapter is rich in up to date information about the geology, history and features of the area. Much of this material can be used at the telescope. And indeed, one gets the idea that is exactly where you are supposed to use it. But – it's not organized in as easy to use fashion as Cherrington's work. On the other hand, the data Wood provides is much richer and certainly more current.

One of my favorite things to see in any lunar book is pictures, and this one has them in droves. *The Modern Moon* features images from NASA, Lick Observatory, and the University of Arizona Lunar and Planetary Laboratory (UA/LPL) as well as many institutions and individuals. Every image is beautiful, and there are several I've never seen before. Although a casual glance may have you thinking otherwise, *Modern Moon* will not replace your atlas. It's a good introduction to lunar geology, replete with photos representing structures of interest, but plan on bringing some roadmaps. Undoubtedly one of the reasons the book was published in coffee table size was to provide a better format for the plethora of excellent pictures.

So why do I find myself disappointed?

A few very small reasons.

First, I was hoping for a rewrite of Charrington's classic work – a day by day tour of the terminator with updated, in-depth information and a modern viewpoint. Obviously, this isn't it. Where Charrington's is designed to be used at the telescope *The Modern Moon* does not seem to be designed that way. You could use it at the scope, but it's not nearly as easy to do.

Second, it would have been nice to see a little more organization to the plethora of photos in this book. While Dr. Wood states that it's not designed to replace your current books, but supplement them, I get the feeling that it would not have taken much work to add a very basic lunar atlas.

Third, the other nit I'm going to pick will undoubtedly sound somewhat odd. This book is absolutely wonderful, lavishly illustrated, and so well written it's hard to put down. Yes, it's hard to put down until you take the large form factor into account. I've always had a difficult time reading coffee table books, and this one just begs to be read from cover to cover. In all fairness, the only way to really bring it down to easy to read size – say trade paperback - would result in either a loss or a downgrade of the quality of the images. And, honestly, that would be a tragedy. Ideally, I guess I'd like to see this book in two forms – one to take with me and read wherever, and another to sit on the coffee table and home which I can peruse at my leisure. I'll acknowledge that's somewhat absurd, but this book just begs to be read all the way through. I do wonder how

many people won't read this book because of it's physically large format. I hope not many, as it would be a shame, if this book were to sit on a coffee table and just be perused on occasion, as this is one of the best lunar books to come along in years.

Although as a stand alone guidebook I feel it leaves something to be desired, it's still highly recommended for intermediate lunatics who wish to know more (and see examples of) of the why's and how's involved with the formation and geology of the moon.

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### **Additional Resources:**

Digital Lunar Orbiter Photographic Atlas of the Moon -  
[http://www.lpi.usra.edu/research/lunar\\_orbiter/](http://www.lpi.usra.edu/research/lunar_orbiter/)

Clementine Lunar Image Browser 1.5 –  
<http://www.cmf.nrl.navy.mil/clementine/clib/>

JSC Digital Image Collection –  
<http://images.jsc.nasa.gov/>

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