When the Oscar ceremonies present a Lifetime Achievement Award, I naturally think of Justin Sweet. His lifetime compendium, Justin Sweet: An Anthology of Construction Law Writings, has just been published by the ABA Forum on the Construction Industry for your spring reading pleasure and for your most profound education. There are only three types of readers who should buy this book and keep it close: young construction lawyers, middle-aged ones, and old timers like me. It is a pleasure to recommend—strongly—this anthology to Forum members, and to all attorneys wanting to understand the most fundamental principles, as well as cutting-edge issues, in our discipline.

Justin Sweet’s anthology contains six parts, and each division starts with an insightful and appreciative introduction by one of a half-dozen former Forum chairs. Such recognition by Forum leadership signals to the reader that this assembly of articles, columns, and other collected writings deserves our attention. The five decades of Professor Sweet’s scholarship could have been an unwieldy and overwhelming data dump. It is not. The Forum has painstakingly assembled and carefully selected these pieces; then it has organized them into distinct and sensible subjects. This commendable organization makes the collection accessible to all readers, regardless of experience, and for all purposes. Professor Sweet’s compendium will assist everyone, from the lawyer looking to understand construction law, standardized contracts, or applicable procurement principles, to the harried attorney researching arguments for a brief (or even one casting about for inspiration or a new point of analysis).

Fortunately, the book starts with the chapter “Writings on Construction Law and Process.” Here, we see some of Professor Sweet’s most comprehensive analyses; he examines delay and disruption claims, summarizes the case law on defects, makes design-build sensible, and then analyzes some common contract questions and drafting solutions—all of this in just one portion of the anthology! Obviously, the many writings of Justin Sweet have been assiduously reviewed so that only the most informative and insightful pieces are utilized. This distillation is truly impressive.

His “Writings on Standard Contracts and Language in Construction Contracts” should be read by everyone drafting an agreement to appreciate the work that has gone on before any of our current efforts. Verily, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Professor Sweet spread his gaze at a variety of legal systems and influences, and I commend “Writings on Professional Issues” to anyone wanting to better understand familiar principles of construction law. How “our” law has been shaped by federal procurement policies, for instance, is something we may not appreciate enough. Likewise, international forms of agreement help put our common law and our standard clauses into better focus. Similarly, “Writings on Professional Issues” sharpens our appreciation of construction relationships and controversies. Missing from legal opinions and statutes touching on construction law is the evolution of the modern construction business, with changes to the duties and prerogatives of architects, owners, and contractors. Many means of doing such work have gone the way of the steam shovel.

“Provocative Essays” needs no explanation of its context, but lest you think it contains merely academic “what if’s,” think again. Take “A Legal Quest for an End to Mechanics’ Liens.” You might find that you actually agree with Justin Sweet’s reasoning, and you can be sure to start a meaningful conversation at the next construction luncheon or dinner with this point of view. My contracts professor would frequently announce that “the law sharpens the mind by narrowing it.” Professor Sweet would reply, perhaps, that a sharp mind must think broadly and critically, as he does.

Last, but not least to veteran readers of The Construction Lawyer, is the final section: “The Tower Articles.” This chapter republishes all of Justin Sweet’s columns in the Forum’s quarterly in which he spoke his mind directly to members of the Forum. We are lucky to have a second chance to read these pieces set forth in one place. Indeed, construction lawyers are lucky to have a chance to get to know this outstanding scholar, lawyer, and creative teacher who has shaped our body of law. I would be remiss, too, in not acknowledging the Forum’s key role in creating a unique anthology and putting in countless hours bringing the very best of a huge body of work to be read by lawyers of all backgrounds and experience levels. Quite simply, you deserve to own this wonderful collection; you will not be sorry, nor will you see anything like it again.