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Critical eye: book reviews roundup

Nikolaus Pevsner by Susie Harries, *The Blue Book* by AL Kennedy and *The Vault* by Ruth Rendell

Few books have occasioned the contest of superlatives with which Susie Harries's *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life* has been greeted. "A perfect blend of events, ideas and personal narrative, it is a masterpiece of the biographical genre 20 years in the making," exulted **George Walden** [in the Observer](#); while **Simon Heffer**, in the *Literary Review*, acclaimed this study of the eccentric, German-born workaholic behind the 46-volume *The Buildings of England* series as "a stunningly good book, [giving] a very human picture of a rather phenomenal man . . . Susie Harries has produced one of the finest biographies I have read for years". The [Sunday Telegraph's](#) **Philippa Stockley**, though, was merely appreciative, calling the 831-page life "enormously likeable . . . often funny". Walden was the winner of the subsidiary competition for best anecdote selection, with Pevsner's remark ("really, the uses some people put these places to") when his inspection of a church was delayed by a service.