



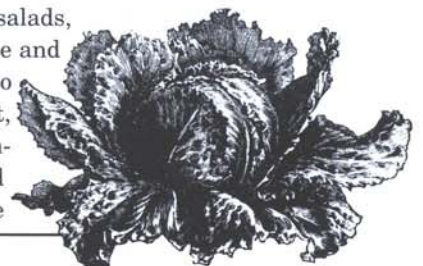
MAKING A MEAL OF IT

*Designers and art directors get to work with two types of editors. Those who sit down and share the meal with you, and those who keep confusing you with the waiter...**

Dani Malan explains the visual feast

I am a designer, but I really should have been a chef. I see food in most of what I do in graphic design. Really. The preparation of a meal is an irresistible guide to the way I structure my work. For me, a layout is not a logical act of fitting copy and visuals into a given space — it is a dish to be consumed by the eyes and then digested by the brain. The identical elements, the basic ingredients of copy and visuals, can be presented in a variety of ways. As nouvelle cuisine: very little food, a lot of plate and an 'artistic' display in neat portions. It leaves you curiously unsatisfied. Or a Cajun jambalaya: loads of spice and hot stuff; all the ingredients interacting together and served with steaming mussels and garnish on top. That aroma. That inspired mixing. . . I'd like to read this one. A graphic designer is, to me, nothing more than a sous chef of information. (That's why I'm finding writing this copy a bit like having to grow the cabbages).

In the same way as a menu is planned from the starters, soups and salads, through the main course to dessert, a magazine needs that same pace and balance. It must be a carefully judged feast. Readers should be able to wander through the various delights as they wish. Salads are the short, informative pieces that can be picked at will. Piquant snippets, compelling two-minute reads on a wide range of subjects. This section should almost represent the needs of the magazine readership profile. There



*...Thanks to HUNT LASCARIS for that line.

EXCELLENCE (below) needed a style that said you drive, at least a Porche, love Polo and riding, invest in art and antiques, appreciate all the finer things and you are as randy as a rattlesnake, or at least seriously aspire to this. A use of classic typography and a two column grid suggested a hankering for yesteryear. Mixed with contemporary and raunchy pics, and graphics, did the job!

should be a few 'fringe' bits as well, to satisfy that small segment. No matter how specialised the publication, it should attempt to spread its content to accommodate the perceived readership. Main content is difficult to spread, so this 'salad' section can easily include items for the fringe browsers. Readership figures will reflect how successful the melange is.

Writers read a lot, and they seem to assume that average magazine consumers are as avid. Watch someone reading a magazine. There is seldom a cover-to-cover compulsion. People dip into magazines, select the choicest and most tantalising parts, and put the magazine down. Then they might return and try the next-best bits. The most read parts of a magazine are usually the captions and pictures. That is why I believe in designing the editorial with a sense of pace, to appeal to the wider reading public. Include starters, side dishes, a selection of wines, and even some sorbet to cleanse the saturated information centres. Make a meal of a magazine.



GEORGY

A DESERT ISLAND
A great lake, the site of Lake Victoria, once covered much of northern Botswana. Some 2,000 years ago the waters dried up, leaving islands in the desert. Kuku is one of the most remote - and mysterious.

From: © Photocast Max/Media

GEORGY

Take your seat, you're invited. With an ornate and surrealistic style of art.

GEORGY

Reason for this difficulty lies in the fact that carbonaceous being includes an equally wide for a maximum of 10,000 years. Beyond that span of time, more extensive and sophisticated methods must be employed which are usually the province of geologists and archaeologists. There is some evidence, however, that even as recently as 10,000 years ago the lake may well have stood at an elevation level of 940 ft above sea level.

A further difficulty in determining the history of the lake is the great deal of very reliable evidence showing that a great deal of difference exists for considerable periods of time. To confirm the elevation level, there is a suggestion it may have stood at some of the higher levels, more recently than the present day. One of the problems is generally possible to see why the lake's elevation level may have been in evidence that there had a million years and the large portions of the ancient lake had been held in significant elevation of water in records as 142,000 ft.

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FEMME, a fashion magazine, has a variety of diverse visual elements, a loose style was appropriate, using a determined selection of type faces, but still keeping to a basic grid. This magazine is mainly pictorial, and exact picture editing is vital. In as much as fashion trends change, the look of the magazine shifted to keep pace.

made the copy and visuals inviting and tasty it has done its best. A layout that is a feature in itself, no matter how stunning, has exceeded its requirement. Quality of copy and visuals, and the overall design concept of the publication, is the important thing. The essential personality of a magazine should be evident beyond flash-in-the-pan brilliances. Self-indulgent layout is like the man at the sedate party with a lampshade on his head. He's a witty fellow, and the lampshade is rather splendid — but it is a lampshade, and therefore out of place. Layouts are an adventure, though. Each one is an improvisation that is

dependent on length of copy and visual material. And they usually have to be done fast, under deadline pressure. The designer has to make quick, sure decisions. Without a solid design concept for the whole publication, these decisions take longer, and might lead to the magazine having that look of uncertainty. (Wrong decisions show, too — they're there, printed and published, and endure for the shelf life of the magazine.)

Sculptors say that the sculpture already exists in the material you choose. All you're doing is liberating it. Layouts are similar: every section and feature has its predetermined variations, and one often finds that there is a certain layout that the feature calls for. There should be infinite combinations for the the given copy and pics, but if the layout person, using a sound design concept and a lucid sense of possibilities, is sensitive to the dictates of the feature, the right layout emerges almost by itself. Although, some features and articles are stubborn to begin with and won't relent until you've spent your creativity on them.

These design rules apply equally to a grey-suit business magazine, an industrial information publication or a flamboyant fashion magazine. Serious needn't mean boring. Look at the readership. Does the average banker perceive him- or herself as a really dull person on a treadmill of finance and figures? Not really. There are aspirations at work. There are beautifully-designed cars, classic clothing and office decor to knock your socks off — among other lifestyle enhancers. So why ignore the stylish aspirations and produce an information-only, very dull publication for this sector? Design for their perceived style. Many local publications lack style because the relationship between the editor and art director is not well established. Let me explain, many magazine editors come from a newspaper background, and newspapers don't need shelf-appeal or packaging to sell: newspapers need headlines. Magazines need packaging, from cover to cover, and can only partially rely on the copy content. Some magazines rely almost entirely on presentation, an idea which is not readily accepted by editors. An "art director" is not simply a layout artist: an art director plans the "look" of the magazine, directs the layouts, commissions and directs photographers and illustrators, maintains the style of the magazine and is as involved with the sales as the editor. Unlike overseas

publications, few local publications have an "art director" on their staff. Publishing houses usually have several layout artists, and one is then appointed as the head, and given the title "art director." This is partly because the advertising industry attracts the more talented people with their offers of greater creative independence, salary and status. The art director needs control over the visual elements, the same way as the editor has control over the copy content of the publication.

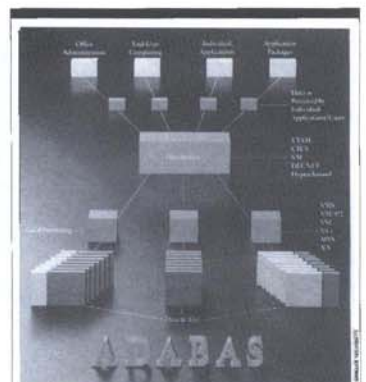
Many creative magazine people believe that their efforts in the layout department are seen as secondary in the publication but this is not the case. When the sales are up the editorial staff pat themselves on the back and pop champagne. But when sales are down, they rush into the layout department and glare at the layout artists saying "You guys have wrecked our sales!" This IS recognition!

Ease the Strain

Picking the right balls out of the air at the right time is the latest management skill. Smart business decisions need accurate and timely information — and this is only possible with the implementation of powerful, flexible tools.

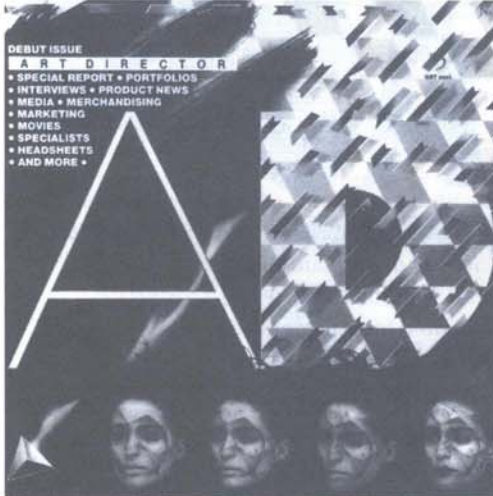


The author is a... (text continues with details about management tools and software solutions for business decision-making).



ABAS (text below the diagram)

AD was launched in mid 1985 as a full colour magazine for the creative industry, pictured below is the cover of the the launch issue, which ran cover copy. Later issues completely dispensed with that concept.

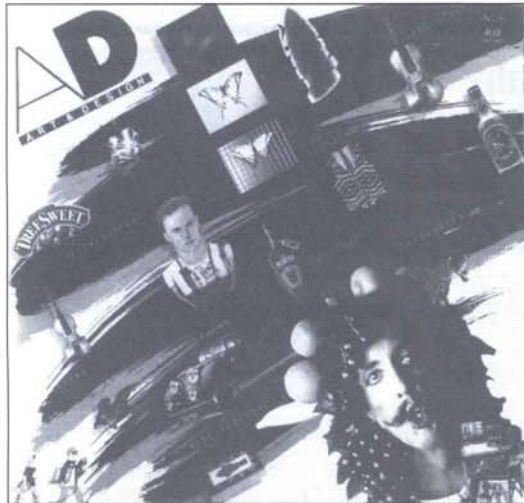


A double page from GBS REVIEW a publication for a computer company. This was a quarterly PR exercise to clients and prospective clients.

Based on a three column grid, laid out on very formal lines to appeal to the corporate sector.

Cover of AD No 10 published in 1989.





Cover of AD No 8, with a picture of the 'man with the fruit-salad head' that featured in our TV commercial.

AD magazine was designed in 1985. Understanding something of the basic priorities of the design and creative fraternity I realised that my first task was to find an alternate size to set the magazine apart from any other. The problem in changing size was twofold. Firstly, odd sizes that may be common to international magazines are not compatible with our paper sizes. This would lead to paper wastage, and as paper comprised almost half the cost of print, that would be an extravagance. More important was the potential problem of trying to sell advertising space to the agencies. Nearly all ads are made up to A4, and forcing agencies to remake ads would jeopardise our selling efforts.

For years I had an idea to produce a square music magazine that would be approximately the size of an LP cover, to be merchandised in record stores with the LPs. It then seemed like the right time to use that idea. The logical square was A4 in height and width. This size would accommodate all existing ad sizes, was different from other mags, and also fitted our paper sizes.

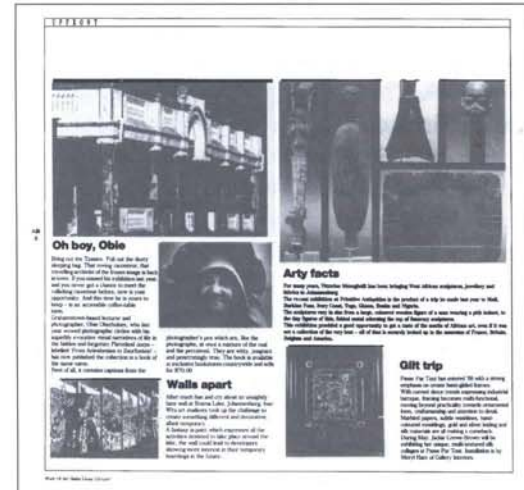
To establish the style parameters that finally amalgamate to form the individual identity of any publication, fundamental decisions must be taken from the beginning. These root decisions can be altered at a later stage, but not without running the risk of constructing a leaning tower of Pisa. Because the editorial content relied heavily on visual material, and the readers would expect a magazine with a strong pictorial content, a copy/pictorial content percentage had to be established. A 50 percent mix best suited the planned 'look' for the market, giving the visuals priority to encroach.

Treatment of the typography was next. This entailed a choice of fonts and sizes, and the treatment of these elements. Given the exciting and colourful visuals that we would be featuring, I needed a very laid-back neutral layout and typographic style that wouldn't impose on the content but would still have balls. I opted for a mix of the old and new — Helvetica Extra Bold for headings, Helvetica Bold Italic for intro's, and Century Schoolbook for body text, with all type set left. This was the type-style with minor variations for certain sections. Some had a size change, but these were few and had their own very rigid rules. Simplicity was a primary consideration. The layout concept of combining copy and visuals was squares and rectangles. Pics occupied their given space, separated from copy, and always looking to keep clean shapes with both elements.

As I would not be executing the layouts myself and the magazine would be assembled by studio assistants with limited layout experience, it was important to establish uncomplicated, rigid style parameters. Deviating from these rules would stand out like FW with a toupee. This would assure that all the issues would retain the initial identity, irrespective of staff turn-around. Pictorial treatment was the final base decision, and keeping the magazine looking busy was important. We seldom ran big pics to fill space. All the pics were kept smallish, and we'd rather cram pics in to give more visual information. Or if the feature couldn't fill it's allocated space, we would give it less space and use a filler to utilise the remaining space. Simple layouts are best with this system.



A lead page of a two or three-page article.



A typical AD bits page, with a variety of information snippets.



A bits page featuring a cross-section of design.

