

Revamp rewarded



By Ebbe Domnisse

ONE of the most comprehensive exercises in re-designing a South African newspaper was recently rewarded when Die Burger received the top prize in this year's Frewin competition.

The Cape Town-based newspaper, the oldest Afrikaans daily extant in South Africa, won the Frewin trophy for typographic excellence.

Two of its sister papers in the Nasionale Pers stable also performed exceptionally well, thus focussing attention on notable redesigns lately undertaken by Afrikaans dailies. Beeld (Johannesburg) was placed third in

the Frewin competition (for newspapers above 50 000 circulation), while Volksblad (Bloemfontein) came in hot on the heels of the Natal Witness in the McCall competition (less than 50 000 circulation).

The revamp which earned Die Burger the top South African accolade for newspaper design was initiated almost three years ago in January, 1990.

It was an exercise planned as part of the 75th anniversary of the flagship paper of the Nasionale Pers group, owner of the only Afrikaans newspaper chain in the country.



The first issue of the "new" Burger appeared on 3 January 1991.



The former 10 columns of Die Burger's broadsheet layout.

In 1958, Die Burger had become the first Afrikaans paper to win the Frewin trophy and wanted to regain its former pride of place. It had already pioneered important editorial changes in South African newspapers, including replacing advertising on its front page with news.

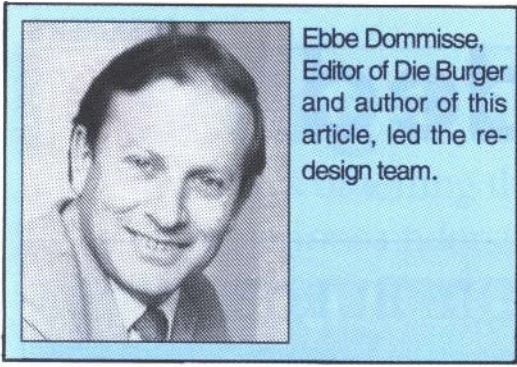
A younger generation at the paper was keen to keep abreast with new developments in the fields of layout, colour and graphics.

The first issue of the "new" Burger appeared on the third of January 1991 - the first publication day after New Year of the last decade of the twentieth century. Die

Burger thus celebrated its 75th anniversary with a new look, specifically designed to make it more competitive and relevant in the electronic era.

I led the redesign team. As we were unable to find anyone suitable in South Africa to assist us, we contacted Rolf F. Rehe, director of Design Research International based in Indianapolis, USA.

He is the author of several authoritative books on typography and design and had undertaken the redesign of several newspapers around the world, including the Miami Herald, La Nacion in Argentine, Hoy



Ebbe Dommissie, Editor of Die Burger and author of this article, led the re-design team.

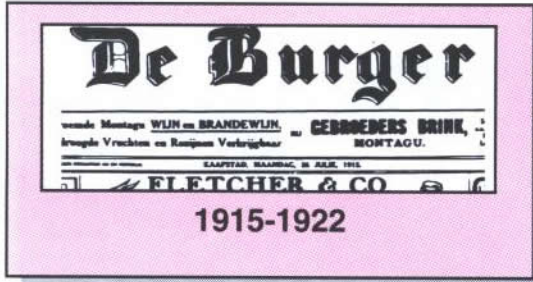
DIE B

Wenner van Frewin-trofee



Agt-en-sewentigste Jaargang

Heerengracht 40 Kaapstad



1915-1922



1922-1963



1963

in Ecuador, Handelsblatt in Germany, Berlingske Tidende in Denmark and Het Laatste Nieuws in Belgium.

Rehe, who had never visited Africa, arrived in Cape Town early in January 1990, just in time to share the tumultuous political developments which followed President F.W. de Klerk's headline-grabbing and far-reaching initiatives. He made several subsequent visits, also advising Beeld in Johannesburg, who joined in the project.

Rehe immediately struck up a solid working relationship with Die Burger's editorial staff, as well as with all other departments, including our computer boffins. His command of German enabled him to develop a working knowledge of Afrikaans, which he used to great advantage in developing the redesign of a major Afrikaans daily in the complex South African situation.

Jonathan Crowther was appointed from Die Burger's senior editorial

staff as Design Editor to coordinate developments among all departments of the newspaper, drawing especially on the talents of chief sub-editor Marie-Louise van Heerden. Enthusiasm for the new developments was evident all-round.

The objective we set, was a thorough redesign of all aspects of the newspaper, gradually phasing these in over a period of 9 to 12 months in order not to alienate loyal readers (we average about 75 000 buyers). We also hoped to attract a new, younger readership by virtue of a more modern and exciting layout, which included the extensive use of colour, screens and graphics to achieve a reader-friendly look.

The first change we introduced was an immediate switch quickly to a modular layout, the most pleasing and efficient design for a modern newspaper. The broadsheet layout which consisted of 10 columns was reduced to 7. The

NAMEPLATE

The nameplate was redesigned to incorporate colour.

USE OF COLOUR

Extensive use of colour, screens and photos.

GRAPHICS

Extensive use of news-graphics for more visual impact.

MODULAR

A modular layout, the most pleasing and efficient design.



Rugbyspelers en politici braai vleis in my...
 Die agt-en-sewentigste jaargang van die nuut ontworpen Die Burger is nou beskikbaar. Die nuwe ontwerp is meer leesbaar en aantrekliker. Die nuwe naamplate is ook in kleur. Die nuwe ontwerp is ook meer modulêr en makliker om te lees. Die nuwe ontwerp is ook meer visueel en aantrekliker. Die nuwe ontwerp is ook meer leesbaar en aantrekliker. Die nuwe naamplate is ook in kleur. Die nuwe ontwerp is ook meer modulêr en makliker om te lees. Die nuwe ontwerp is ook meer visueel en aantrekliker.

Geen einde in sig vir SA resessie



BURGER

Bes versorgde koerant 1992

LAAT

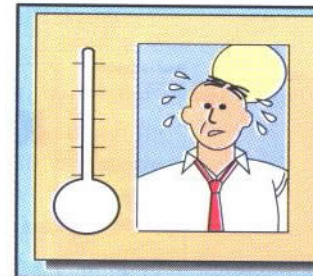
Die Burger's new nameplate (left), in blue with a black shadow. Formerly all mastheads were black.

The progression of mastheads since 1915 is shown below



Vrydag 18 September 1992

80c (BTW Ingesluit)



The weather guide at the top of page one is graphically displayed



NEWS
Instant news, announcements, competitions and references.

HEADLINES
Headlines were replaced with Franklin Gothic Condensed.

HEADINGS
A modern typeface Rotieren is used for all headlines.

TEXT TYPE
Nimrod a modern and more legible typeface is used.

resulting 12 pica columns were considered more fitting for a serious newspaper. The old Bodoni headlines were discarded and replaced with Franklin Gothic Cond., for lead stories and Rotieren for all other headlines. The new text type is Nimrod, a modern typeface specifically designed for newspapers and much more legible than the New Times bodytype previously used.

A major change - the new nameplate in blue with a black shadow - was received with virtually no adverse comment. Blue was chosen for the stylish typeface because it embodies trust, credibility and optimism. The black shadow gives a feeling of depth. The coloured nameplate replaced an equally elegant black one introduced in 1965 for the paper's fiftieth anniversary. The new nameplate is the fifth in the history of the paper, which started out on 26 July 1915 with an old-fashioned Gothic

design, popular at the time.

The heart of the revamped newspaper is the leader page with its exceptionally pleasing classic design. The leaders, under Die Burger's masthead, are set in a bigger type to express authority. Next to Fred Mouton's widely acclaimed cartoons is a column entitled "Ander Sê" (Others Say), which mostly reflects other editorial opinions, from both here and abroad. The regular political columns by Dawie or by foreign correspondents appear below the cartoon. The bottom half of the page is taken up every day by readers' letters, with Die Burger affording more space to readers' views than any other daily in the country.

While these changes were made, new sections were developed. "Sport-Burger" (sports pages) and "Sake-Burger" (financial pages) were given more prominent display. "Joernaal" caters for arts, entertainment and the environ-



One of Die Burger's colourful sports pages.

ment, while "Forum" on the op-ed page is reserved for in-depth contributions.

Other sections are "Jong Burger" (youth section), "Woon-gids" (living supplement), "Vroue-Burger" (women's section) and "Nuus-Oorsig", an overview of the week's news published on Saturdays. All these sections adopted a new, uniform style which stressed interconnectedness even in their diversity.

Advertising was better placed, preferably using the modular layout. This was received without any adverse comment from advertisers, who welcomed being able to promote their products in a visually more pleasing environment.

On launch day, January 3 1991, the newspaper published a 16-page supplement, "Die Burger on its way to 2000", in which our new design was fully

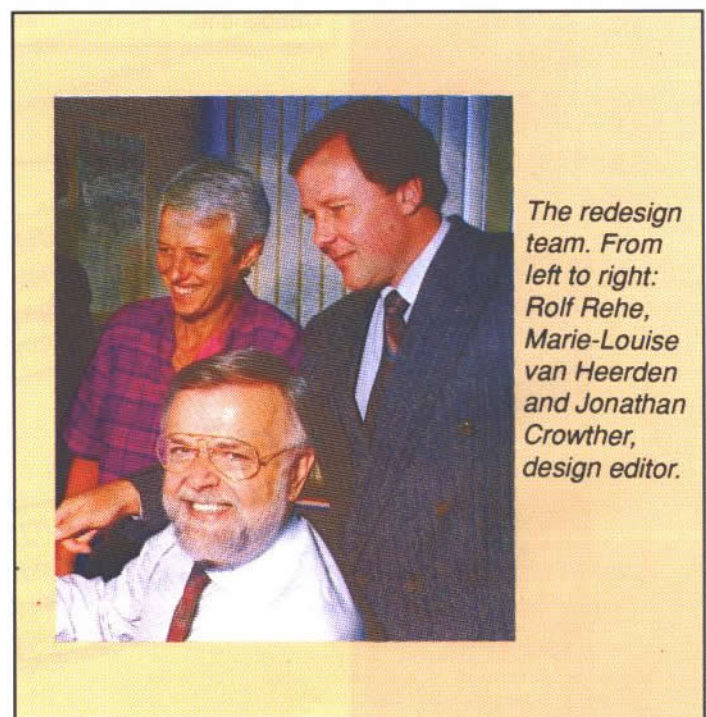
explained. Reader reaction was strongly positive, with a number of community leaders expressing their pleasure about the new look. Die Burger also published letters from satisfied readers, several of whom were impressed by our innovative use of graphics.

Circulation, which at first increased slightly (the ABC figures for January-June 1990 was 77901 on weekdays, 86515 on Saturdays) has fallen back lately (for the same period in 1992 it was 74178 on weekdays, 82177 on Saturdays). This was indicative of the severe economic depression which is affecting all newspapers throughout the country, as well as a price hike in April 1992.

Nevertheless, the redesign has made Die Burger a newspaper which we think is superbly geared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.



The leader page with its pleasing classic design.



The redesign team. From left to right: Rolf Rehe, Marie-Louise van Heerden and Jonathan Crowther, design editor.