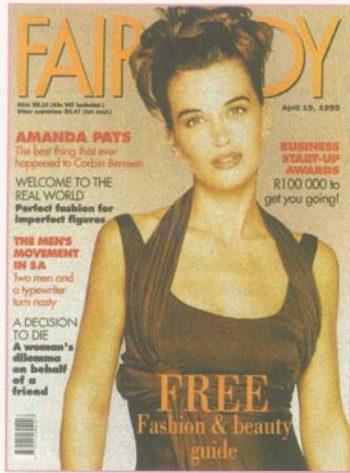


FAIR LADY PICKS



The SA consumer magazine market has never been more yeasty or dangerous. Disarray in television and radio has inclined media planners to the overtures of print. Feisty niche publications are proliferating. And – surprise, surprise – the grande dame of a high-risk category (general women's magazines) has zoomed out of soft-focus under a sharp new editor.

by CATHERINE KNOX

With the covers of her first two issues Wrottesley gave the Fair Lady persona a new edge: stereotypical bourgeois beauty, but tautly honed and shot through with adrenalin. A complex national fortnightly like Fair Lady runs on a conveyor belt which a new editor has to hop aboard - at least three issues are in production and a fourth in the planning at any one point. So in these first two issues, the contents was still in transition. By the third the transformation was at work far below the surface.

RINGING THE CHANGES:

Editor's message – meatier, topical (baby Micaela, the di Blasi scandal) with a broader, value-based context for the topic

Editorial style – faster pace, more information dense, less shopping

Contents – “My list of issues includes: health services, education, violence, the expectations of ordinary people, AIDS/HIV, unemployment, the environment and the RDP.” As leavening: “escapism is vital: sleaze, celebs, beautiful homes, fashion and beauty ... yes, and royals if the story is well-written and slavish adoration is replaced with a touch of irony. So many issues invite irony but this kind of writing is so hard to come by. “I'd like to run local stories in 70% of our feature space.”

Texts – Asked about the popular wisdom of a bite-sized two-page feature, she says: “The nearly universal complaint about Fair Lady has been ‘there's nothing substantial to read!’. Being able to supply more depth and substance is one of our strengths - and even a six-page feature is much, much shorter than a book and can be read in the bath or as a nightcap. The maximum length for us from now on will go up to around 3 000 words.”

Fiction – “No, it hasn't gone out of fashion: we simply can't find enough decent scripts. I want to get away from the British magazine stuff set in the kitchen of a semi.”

Target – “Our readership is very broad, with a weighting in the 16-24 category, and this has led to a somewhat scattered approach. We have now narrowed our editorial focus down to the 19-35 age group as a strategy to help us to produce a consistently younger, fresher and more vital book.”

A new Jody Foster cover hit the news-stands with a disturbingly aggressive glamour towards the end of April. The frank concupiscence in her eye, the contradictions of tension and abandon in her pose challenged shoppers from 10 metres down the aisles of Checkers and Pick 'n Pay. Ah, the ambiguity of that soft, long-sleeved, Sunday-grey suit all but exposing one breast and revealing a shapely leg virtually to the hip! But most of all, that pagan gaze and the bold geometry of the image and the type accompanying it!

Leaning forward out of the name-plate towards the reader, her head obscures a third of it. Her left hand points directly at the screaming pink WIN, her toe anchors the image and the word shopping like an arrow in the ground.

Last year's *Fair lady* “cover girls” look positively blobby in comparison.

This cover announced unequivocally that *Fair Lady* was off on a new trajectory. At 30-something, one of our best-loved but hitherto most easily taken for granted staples, has acquired a new editor and a new zest.

Fair Lady started publication in 1965 with Jane Raphaely as editor. She was a young mother with experience that included writing a column for the *Cape Times*. Nasionale Pers, bastion of Afrikanerdom, had seen the business sense of starting an English sister to the evergreen *Sarie Marais*, even if it meant hiring people whose religious, cultural and political affiliations were left of the company ideal at the time.

So began SA's own little one-title magazine revolution that blazed a trail through the euphoric and doomed 60s into the liberating 70s (which were also a time of unprecedented repression for most South Africans) and on towards the 80s when the founding editor left, passing the baton to Dene Smuts who dropped it after a tussle with management over editorial independence. Liz Butler picked up the title and led the retreat into conspicuous consumption. The sales graph drooped – partly a symptom of tighter markets and fiercer competition, partly through the magazine's failure to engage with the central concerns of its

readership at the time. Shopping and gossip only dull pain and lull fears temporarily.

The brand retained an inert power but lost impetus. Then Liz Butler decided to go home to New Zealand where she now edits a family-owned decor magazine. When she gave notice at Naspers, a replacement hadn't even been considered, let alone inducted into the post. Management had been scouting around for a deputy editor to



Roz Wrottesley on her own personal strengths:

“... a capacity for change and for risk-taking; a good visual sense, a trained eye for detail and very high standards ... I enjoy pushing things to the limit and will bring more controversy to Fair Lady, which I hope will make for a more compelling read ...”

fill the gap left by another long-term Fair Lady stalwart, Gillian Caradoc Davies, so the search was stepped up for the two top English language jobs on the sixth floor at headquarters on the Heerenracht. Roz Wrottesley, who was being lunched by Naspers about the deputy's job at the time, moved into the editor's chair with no externally visible ripples.

With a new editor in place, Di Paice, another experienced magazine jour-

UP SPEED

nalist and media trainer with an established by-line was quickly recruited as deputy. Catherine Eden, the incumbent features editor, had worked for Wrottesley previously. Long-serving sub-editor Pat Barton is another associate and friend who goes way back. Annette Kesler is the doyenne of local cookery editors; fashion editor Stephanie Wolhuter Inggs and her photographer husband Stephen have created a special signature for their pristine odes to fashion.

Syndication editor June Botha has worked the rights minefield for *Fair Lady* since before it first hit the streets. She brings to the conference table a unique global perspective as well as a piercing empathy for the ordinary reader. Sue Grant is little short of an institution at the Gauteng end of the *Fair Lady* operation and Judy Olivier in the London office provides a northern barometer and that rarest of all commodities: humour.

Roz Wrottesley inherited a strong team. But the title was a venerable hohum segment of the wallpaper on our news-stands. She transformed it into a potential hot property in six short weeks — overnight in the time-frame of a fortnightly.

If ever there was proof that a consumer magazine is a personality-based commodity this is it.

Though whether consumers will respond with equal energy and "grabbing it" as a "must-have" (Wrottesley's words), remains to be seen. Readers and advertisers alike will inevitably wait and watch awhile. Is this new promise just a flash in the pan? Or a genuine gold strike?

The Naspers circulation department confirmed in mid April that up to the minute cash sales figures indicated that circulation was holding steady with no more than a slight quiver in the upward direction.

Wrottesley has described her new job as "an enormous privilege" but has shown no sign of being awed by it. She claims that her personal strengths include lack of ego and an advanced team spirit. And she is every bit as enthusiastic as she looks, but colleagues can vouch for the adamantine will from which her energy springs.

Of *Fair Lady's* place in SA magazine

history, she says: "There's nothing wrong with a magazine being a powerful brand, as long as it isn't expected to run on its own steam. The challenge is to enjoy the traditional status and the extremely high recognition factor but to imbue it with the relevance and freshness of a new arrival. Continual re-evaluation and judicious change is essential. As someone said: 'a magazine is not a museum and a magazine that doesn't change dies'."

"Bringing depth and excitement to *Fair Lady* is my most pressing task," says new editor Roz Wrottesley. "Achieving a racially-balanced readership is the greatest challenge."

"Last year adspend increased most in radio and print. Certainly television is competition on all fronts, but we have to capitalise on our strengths which include precise targeting, a very personal relationship with readers and portable storable information to which readers can refer repeatedly,"

Too canny to fix what ain't broke, she intends playing up existing strengths which include a universally trusted advice column (Elizabeth Duncan is SA's most famous agony aunty), a legendary food section and an in-house test kitchen and laboratory permanently staffed by professionals. As a fortnightly, *Fair Lady* can offer readers twice as much advice and up to three times as many recipes as the competition.

"The Consumer Test House is a wonderful and undervalued resource. I have stepped up the frequency from alternate issues to every issue and would like it to form the core of a really strong section, running full investigations as well as the surveys and Tried and Tested pages. It is expensive to run, but it's unique and can be developed into a marvellous source of publicity and site of reader participation. And it's right in line with our drive to give the reader real, usable information as well as inspiration."

This drive has also seen the itsy-bitsy upfront "Etceteras" pages change into a more authoritative "For you" information section which admonishes "Know it", "Watch it", "Read it" and so on. But the wealth of information (the word comes up frequently in Roz-speak) is presented in a bright post-modern layout that holds the browsing eye. In fact this is much closer to the original form of Etceteras which served as a bulletin board, particularly for women's issues, before declining into a pretty catalogue of pricey ephemera.

Publications like *Fair Lady* have often rightly been accused of training their readers to be good little consumers. Roz Wrottesley's response: "It's certainly true that women's magazines have become shop windows

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Dark is too gloomy; a cover with a white background sells better ... the new *Fair Lady's* vivid bridal issue turns this conventional wisdom on its head. "I certainly wouldn't change *Fair Lady's* name even if I could," says Wrottesley briskly. "It has developed associations and meanings of its own — far greater than the simple denotation of the words."



This is the cover, Roz Wrottesley's third, with which Wrottesley announced *Fair Lady's* new intentions. Aptly, it stars the most powerful woman in Hollywood.

In a media segment where packaging is vital, the May 3 issue of *Fair Lady* is a bench-mark. *How to sound intelligent at your next dinner-party and survive to shop another day*, might be a cynic's synopsis of the message. *My best, cleverest and most exciting friend*, is the wannabe's reading.

over the last decade. I think this trend was partly prompted by the perception that people didn't have time to read, so they wanted visually pleasing pages they could flip through. And partly by economics which pressurised editors to support advertisers at the expense of editorial content.

"In fact, I don't believe we can afford too much of the flip-through factor - we need to supply really authoritative information to make *Fair Lady* worth buying. Readers would continue to pick up the occasional

copy as a 10-minute diversion, but they won't buy every one unless there is some food for thought, some real information, some entertainment ... and then, only then, some ideas for things to buy."

This is not to suggest the material girl has become a blue stocking. The new values and vision do not preclude lush dreams of all the good things money can buy. The promise of those yuppy covers is not forgotten inside. There are pots and pots of creams and potions to keep you young forever;

clothes approved by the fashion police; aspirational dwelling-spaces ...

And, "Yes, competitions with big prizes still work. Readers expect them now. I suppose the advent of lotteries will spur us on to find even bigger incentives." R20 000 "to make a dream come true" was offered in the 5 April issue. A fortnight later R100 000 was up for grabs in the form of a business start-up award. On 3 May readers were offered the chance to win a R40 000 trip to Australia and a R27 000 shopping spree.

Roz Wrottesley is under no illusions about the highly commercial nature of this business and of her role. Referring to an article in *Folio* (the magazine of magazine management) which referred to the personality of the editor as a profit-centre, she says: "The editor of a woman's magazine has no choice but to get involved in marketing. My natural inclination is to be a backroom person, but that's not an option." As well as writing, she is an accomplished commissioning and re-write editor.

"In a competitive market and in a country hungry for role models and spokespeople, the editor has to offer a persona readers can identify with."

She has to get out there and court her publics - the readers and the advertisers. She has to take responsibility for her editorial policies where adspend is concerned.

"As a communicator with the privilege of being able to take a public stance on issues and of filtering and presenting information according to her own reading of events and readers' requirements, she must be prepared to account for herself.

"It's tough because not every good editor is equipped to cope with high visibility. But because of *Fair Lady's* status in the market, I cannot afford to be anonymous." The changing faces on the cover are not enough.

The metaphor of the orphan brand comes to mind. A brand apparently unconnected to a parent company or progenitor. Finite and unchanging.

Jane Raphaely left *Fair Lady* with a seemingly indelible branding. Now let's see what this new mama can do about the orphan status.

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THE MAKING OF A MAGAZINE EDITOR:

Roz Wrottesley and her husband Stephen (daily news editor of the *Argus*) have two daughters aged six and nine. Before taking over as editor of *Fair Lady*, she was managing editor of *Femina* where she used the business skills and financial savvy honed in her own independent publishing company which had produced *Via* magazine for Volkswagen. Prior to that, between 1987 and 1989, she'd served as deputy editor on *Femina*. This was immediately after Jane Raphaely bought the ailing title, gave it a new direction and re-launched it. Wrottesley had already spent four years in the burgeoning Raphaely empire as features, beauty and then assistant editor of *Cosmopolitan*. In a yo-yo movement typical of our closed magazine shop, she had moved to *Cosmopolitan* from *Fair Lady* where she'd worked as London representative and then "showbiz" editor.

Catherine Knox, who started her working life at *Fair Lady* in the '60s, is a senior lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.