



BEFORE AND AFTER

A local designer describes his work for Canada's leading daily newspaper

WHEN local designer **TONY SUTTON** left South Africa in January 1990 to undertake a major newspaper redesign in Canada, people who had worked with him expected a few graphic fireworks at the Globe and Mail in Toronto. His design work has, for some years, been moving towards a synthesis of the best of British and trans-Atlantic newspaper design and his work in Canada has certainly left American designers with something to think about. Not only has the Globe redesign merged British and US design into a new heterodox style; it has also combined the best of the old with the best of the new. Here Tony describes the problems and the headaches as seen from his side of the designer's table. PLEASE TURN OVER ➞



IT'S not every day one gets the opportunity of travelling over 15 000km to redesign one of the world's leading newspapers, so when a fax came through to my Johannesburg office asking if I would like to move to Toronto to develop a new, more international look for Canada's 335 000-circulation national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, it didn't take long to say, "Yes!"

My design brief from editor-in-chief William Thorsall was short and clear when I arrived in Toronto three months later: "The content of *The Globe and Mail* is world-class; we want an appearance that will reflect this quality." He added that the new design should also convey a sense of authority and dignity, with better organisation and a unique styling.

Six months earlier, when a previous redesign effort was shelved, Thorsall had set out the design guidelines as follows:

- The *Globe and Mail* is a quality newspaper and all elements of design should contribute to its authority, stature and reputation.
- All newspapers face growing competition from other newspapers and media for the readers' time. Graphic design should contribute to the ease of reading *The Globe* – identifying and ranking stories; identifying bylines and datelines; providing for summaries, subheads and captions; providing for graphs, maps and charts; considering turns and sidebars; considering sequence, flows, consistency and predictability.
- Newspapers are a visual medium. Graphic design should establish principles for the effective use of photographs and graphic devices within coherent layout guidelines.

This set of values was expanded when I arrived in Toronto to include the following criteria:

- The new look should confirm *The Globe's* position as a pace-setting national newspaper through authoritative and elegant design.
- The organisation of editorial space should also express *The Globe's* editorial priorities (national and world news, business, analysis, culture).

Emphasising that this would be a journalistic, rather than an artistic restyling, Thorsall also sought a wide range of editorial innovations, to give readers better value for the time we were asking them to invest with our newspaper, flag-

DISCOVER THE GLOBE AND MAIL FOR THE 1990s.



The *Globe and Mail* flier announcing the redesign to readers and advertisers.

ship of the international Thomson publishing empire.

"We set high standards for ourselves editorially and want to make sure that the graphic standards are suitable for a paper of *The Globe and Mail's* stature in Canada and the world," he stressed.

Although these parameters gave no clear indication how the revamped *Globe* should look, its sense of direction was further defined when Thorsall added, "the newspaper will not be fashionable, in the sense that it's not going to join the bandwagon of newspapers that think they will make themselves more valuable to readers by turning news into tidbits and morsels."

With these fundamentals in mind, we knew the following:

- There would be no attempt to follow the lead of *USA Today*, whose trendy, colourful look has been adopted by several Canadian dailies. *The Globe* is closer in spirit, if not in style, to *The*

New York Times, *The Times* of London and *The Wall Street Journal*.

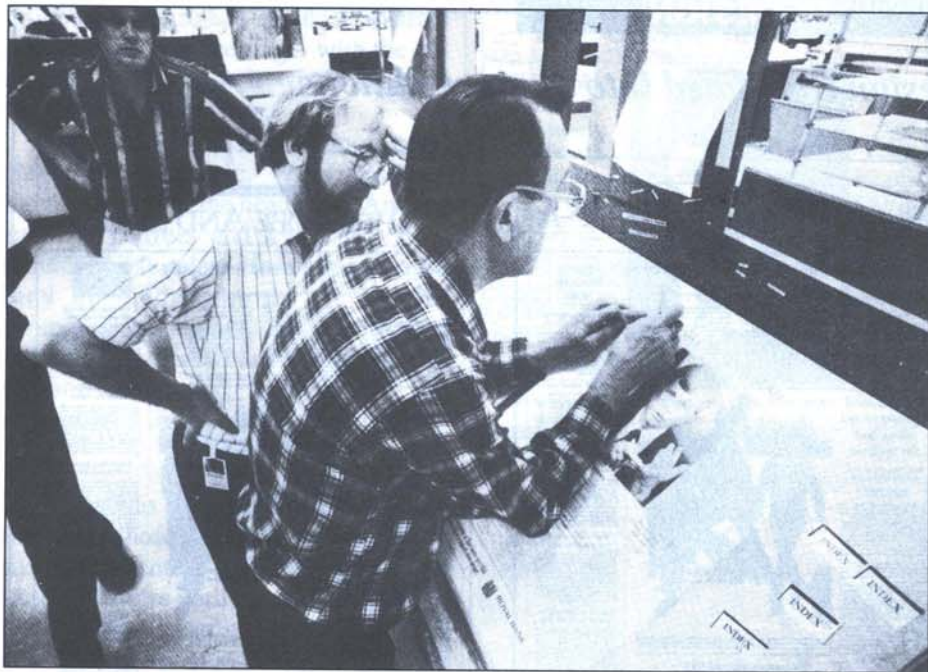
- Similarly, we would play down the most visual characteristics of the TV-inspired graphic revolution by limiting the number of graphics in the newspaper. *The Globe* caters to literate, intelligent readers who neither need nor expect huge, glitzy graphics to entice them into the text.
- And we would not be using lots of colour on our pages, if only because the Toronto letterpress plant is incapable of producing it properly, although our satellite facilities around the country have some of the most modern equipment in Canada.

Instead our commitment would be to the creation of a visual style that would enhance the image of *The Globe* as a newspaper that relied on content rather than gimmicks for attention, one that complemented television without trying to copy it. Classic goods looks were important, superfluous decoration was not.

Settling into the new routine, I took my mind off the icy Toronto winter by writing a memorandum, detailing the design problems we would have to overcome if we were to turn *The Globe's* grey and dated appearance into one that exuded up-market style and ease of reading.

The following elements were singled out for the most urgent attention:

- The typography was entirely unsuitable for a quality newspaper. *The Globe* aspired to a distinctive appearance that would bring it into line with, although not to be identical to, the world's quality English-language newspapers, but the heavy Helvetica headlines and sludgy, badly-led Imperial body text, poorly printed by letterpress in our Toronto centre, did not match that perception at all.
- Tiny news photographs often seemed to be used merely to fill the space left after the words had been placed. This was also about to change; photographs would have to become a more dominant element, in the heart of the page.
- Headline writing was occasionally so poor that you had to read the first paragraph to understand what the heads were trying to say.
- There was too little white space, an essential ingredient for a newspaper that contains lots of long, in-depth stories.
- There were too many different logo styles for columnists and regular fea-



Tony Sutton (left) supervises the mechanical work on the newly-redesigned front page of Toronto's *Globe and Mail* on production night before the big launch.

tures (35 separate pieces of artwork were later replaced by two basic formats installed in the Harris pagination system).

- We had to solve the problems created by undisciplined use of wide-measure columns that created visual anarchy, particularly on the front page.
- And, we would have to change the advertising display from the old-fashioned pyramid stacking to a more modular arrangement at the base of the page, emphasising news across the top.

I was also determined to introduce a number of small, stylistic elements which would make *The Globe's* new look unique and instantly recognisable without seeming garish or clumsy. So, as I waited for my new Mac to be installed, I began to paste 'Quick brown fox' headlines and columns of text onto layout sheets on my predecessor's drawing board.

The process was immediately rewarding, for it was one of those rough designs, with each headline set in multiple decks, that caught Thorsell's eye and provided the spark for the new look.

Our interest in decked heads was further whetted when the editor returned a week later from a trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia, excitedly brandishing a reprint of a 50-year-old newspaper.

Flicking through its pages we marvelled at the journalistic quality of the banks of headlines, which beckoned readers into columns of text so tightly packed that you'd need a magnifying

glass and unending patience to read them. The overall typography and design were messy, confusing and totally impractical for this TV-dominated age, but the quality of the information so effortlessly conveyed by those headlines confirmed that a modernised version could be ideal for the neo-classical image we wished to create.

Those twin headline decks, separated by a narrow hairline rule, stuck with us from the start of the redesign, moving from drawing board to computer; then appearing, unstressed, in our first dummy and continuing as a major design and editorial element in all subsequent updates leading to the birth of the brand new *Globe and Mail* on June 12, 1990.

But the reintroduction of decked headlines was as far as we were prepared to delve into the past for inspiration for the look of the '90s. They were carefully balanced by contemporary newspaper design devices including modular layout, well-spaced type, descriptive page headers and bolder photographs, all of which help increase legibility and readability, thereby making the newspaper easily accessible and more enjoyable.

As the process gathered impetus, we decided to avoid a formal design committee structure, sticking instead to a three-man design team with ad-hoc input from other staff when required.

Our first steps in the redesign were simple. In creating our neo-classical look, we would discard the heavy head-

line type and replace it with a more elegant serif face; we would scrap the muddy body type and introduce a crisper, easier-to-read face; and pictures would become a more important part of our editorial package.

But the first dummy, printed at the beginning of February, was quickly rejected. It was too much like other North American newspapers with Garamond headlines and an overall structure that did not have the unique and distinctive character we were seeking, a failure that was partly due to our reticence in adopting the full-blooded use of decked headlines. This test firmly convinced us that those second, information-heavy subheads would become a more significant part of the design.

If the initial effort was too mainstream, the second strayed too far in the opposite direction. The enlarged, boxed blackletter nameplate and heads in Bodoni Medium didn't quite give the front page the character we expected – instead of looking dignified and modern, it looked as if it had been lying on my desk for 25 years!

Back in my office I made rapid changes; the nameplate was replaced by a succession of open-face and inline types, and the Bodoni was succeeded by a procession of other faces.

Each version was photocopied and our favourite – with heads in Goudy Old Style and a nameplate in Goudy Handtooled – became Prototype 3. We printed it, gazed at it for a few minutes and commented favourable on its grace, elegance and dignity. Yes, the four-column front page certainly looked different, but we knew its design, which accentuated just four stories and one picture, was too fragile to work on a day-to-day basis. So Prototype 3 followed its predecessors into the reject basket.

Our efforts hadn't been a waste of energy, however, for the basis of our new style was rapidly unfolding.

This time we liked the presentation of the second decks; Goudy Old Style seemed an ideal weight for headlines; and we knew that the old *Globe* Gothic nameplate would have to be replaced.

Back at my computer, I searched for a distinctive combination of elements that would give *The Globe* a unique styling with a format flexible enough to handle fast changes without losing those precious qualities of authority, dignity and style. And I hit the jackpot with a six-

PLEASE TURN OVER

How the redesign translated into dummy editions



PROTOTYPE 1: Too much like other North American newspapers with Garamond headlines and an overall structure that failed to meet our needs.



PROTOTYPE 2: The enlarged, boxed blackletter nameplate and heads in Bodoni Medium didn't quite give the front page the character we wanted.



PROTOTYPE 3: Heads in Goudy Old Style and a nameplate in Goudy Handtooled was close, but the 4-column front page format was too fragile.



PROTOTYPE 4: The market research sample with its elegant 6-column front page had all the qualities the design team was looking for.



PROTOTYPE 5: One of two test editions in which the nameplate typography was changed while in Toronto and London experts 'tweaked' Goudy Handtooled.



PROTOTYPE 6: The final test edition, printed one week before the launch. The redesign is now complete except for small fine tuning.

column page that had all those abstract qualities we were seeking – with the additional benefit that it would respond easily to changing news.

Now the decisions became more complex, more esoteric. What typeface should we use for the headlines? And the text, the cutlines and overlines? How should we use rules? How heavy should they be? How should we handle photographs and graphics? And the most vexing decision of all: what should replace the blackletter type in the nameplate at the head of the front page?

There was only one way to find the answer to those questions. We tinkered and experimented, producing pages in a variety of styles until we found a formula that worked perfectly. Then, a couple of weeks later, we went through the whole exercise again, just to make sure.

Our tests culminated in the printing of a 12-page dummy, consisting of two pages printed six times with headlines in Goudy, Cheltenham, Century Old Style, Bookman, Janson and Clearface. The unanimous choice was Goudy, whose weight again proved to be precisely right for the image we were seeking to project.

While we were coming to grips with the graphic complexities of the new look, Editor Thorsell was seeking new ways of presenting and enhancing the content of the *Globe*, so that the newspaper would move forward on a broad front.

Although our instincts told us we were heading in the right direction, we still had to sell the new look to management, staff and readers.

The first hurdle came when we arranged to show our plans to *The Globe's* publisher, A. Roy Megarry, who had deliberately kept away from the redesign project. He had no idea what was in store as we gathered in the editor's boardroom, where Thorsell unveiled before-and-after versions of some of the pages we had restyled.

Much had changed in the restyling:

- We had abandoned the old nameplate after nearly 150 years.
- We had removed the ads that fit in the ears beside it.
- We had removed the dominant summary panel from the front page and placed it on Page 2.
- We had changed the headline type.
- We had changed the body type.

In fact, we had changed everything, and we were feeling very nervous, for these was no back-up plan if the publisher disliked what he was about to see.

The final product as the Toronto public saw it on June 12. Note how even at the final stage, the titlepiece has changed.

But our fears were unfounded. Megarry was so convinced of the quality of the changes that he wanted to move ahead as fast as possible, before the more striking elements of our design could be diluted by corporate cowardice.

A couple of hectic weeks followed as we prepared a special 36-page edition for focus groups of readers and potential readers. Then it was time to bite our fingernails again as we watched anxiously through one-way mirrors while readers scanned the day's paper and compared it to our effort.

We winced as they criticised our new nameplate, cringed when they bemoaned the loss of the front-page news summary, smiled when they praised the structure of our pages and sighed with relief when, finally, they gave the restyling a vote of confidence.

That same evening, without waiting for the final report from our New York marketing consultants, we moved into the next phase of the operation which meant setting off to gauge professional and international reaction to our new product, calling on consultants and designers in London, New York and Boston to discover what they disliked about our new look. Mercifully, there was little criticism

and the design emerged intact from yet another ordeal.

Back in Toronto just five weeks before launch date, the sparks really began to fly. Thorsell decided we should go back to scratch, questioning every decision made, re-testing typefaces; redrawing logotypes and reshooting pictures of columnists. And, in the midst of the ensuing chaos, these was still a major headache – we had still not found a satisfactory replacement for *The Globe's* nameplate. This important little detail had been causing mounting concern since we had decided at the time of the first dummy that the blackletter *Globe* Gothic typeface, which had headed the newspaper's front page for 147 years, would not survive after June 12.

At first it seemed easy – when we chose Goudy Old Style for our headlines, it seemed that Goudy Handtooled would make an ideal logo type. We liked the feel of the type, in caps and small caps, and we loved the classic qualities of its inline style. But its frothy, curvaceous lines didn't fit *The Globe's* image as a serious newspaper. No problem, we decided to redraw it. But that was easier said than done!

Three sets of typographers in Toronto and London spent weeks working on the nameplate while we experimented with dozens of other variants, but nothing seemed to work and the final version eluded us until a couple of weeks before we finally went to press.

Those last weeks also called for a different kind of action, for we still had to train the staff in the application of new layout techniques necessary to produce the revamped *Globe*; and dozens of complicated new formats had to be programmed into the Atex and Harris editing and pagination systems.

As we moved relentlessly towards deadline day, tension mounted and, at its peak, some of us doubted whether we would hit our target. Newsroom staff valiantly produced pages with incomplete or inoperable formats, battling to cope with constantly changing fine detail of the new design structure.

The prototypes printed each Friday evening were so secret that only a few people were able to analyse the mistakes they had made. The situation was further confused by the fact that we were still making last-minute tests on headline fonts, installing Bembo on our three LaserComps and printing just one sample



Editor-in-chief William Thorsell (left) and publisher A. Roy Megarry look pleased enough with the redesign.

page before deciding, finally, that Goudy was absolutely perfect for the new *Globe*.

The lowest point arrived on a Saturday just 10 days before the big day, when a whole shift of journalists assembled to produce a two-edition dry run, an exercise that turned into a nightmare as they were almost beaten into submission by a combination of system breakdowns and unfamiliar formats. Instead of two editions, we barely completed one.

A week later we had overcome most of the problems but there was still no certainty that we would hit four very tight edition deadlines in three days' time. Perhaps we had been too ambitious in trying to change every element of a major newspaper in one day; perhaps we had tried to do everything too quickly?

But, again, our fears were unfounded.

On production day, June 11, the adrenalin flow was strong enough to carry the launch to a triumphant conclusion, although the loading of an incorrect Harris format that fouled up many of the column rules destroyed our new overlines and saw the hasty reintroduction of X-acto knives to the production area.

But we knew we had won our biggest battle as we scanned the pages of our first edition and then glanced across to the newsroom TV set, where we saw ourselves making the headlines on the late news, beating the Meech Lake constitutional crisis into second spot. ●

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