

ART DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AUDIENCE
IN U.S. MAGAZINES FROM 2009-2012

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ABSTRACT

A magazine's design can visually set the overall tone of the magazine or specific story within the publication, and art directors frequently use this visual means of communication to inform their readers. Art directors also utilize design to visually define tone and add context to the magazine. This research studies how art directors use specific elements of design to engage their readers, and focuses on the ways in which art directors connect with their readers on a visual level. Art directors of many major magazines were interviewed and asked about how they communicate with their readers, as well as how they consider their audience's level of engagement with a story's visual presentation. All art directors noted that they were able to identify specific demographical information about their readers, and, more importantly, were aware of visual tastes and preferences that their audience responded well to over time. This information, art directors stated, has developed a strong platform for the exchange of information with readers. Additionally, all art directors addressed the relationships they form with their readers via visual discourse in their respective magazines, and stated that those relationships motivate them to design in the most effective way possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Magazines allow readers to be immersed into worlds that they might not be able to visit in their daily lives. A magazine's design is essential in visually defining the subject matter of the publication, and the art director is frequently charged with the responsibility of guiding the reader through the magazine by determining its visual tone. Readers build a relationship with their chosen magazines, and a magazine's character is commonly defined by the combination of text and visual elements that present the publication's overall idea.

There are infinite design choices and possibilities that designers face when creating a magazine, and the designer's ultimate goal is to create work that will appeal to a specific audience and, in turn, produce a profit for the publication. Various elements of design can add context, background information and hierarchy to help the reader understand the magazine's content. The use of an image (photography or illustration), color, and typography can also inform readers about the magazine. Successful combinations of these elements can result in increased knowledge about a magazine, and these visuals can also improve the publication's overall communication of ideas.

Visual communication and its related models of visual perception, attention and engagement have been examined in several fields. Various environments, types of media, and presentation methods can affect the way readers view and respond to the media. This research explores how art directors inform readers through different aspects of magazine design, and how readers respond to design elements such as color, photography, and overall presentation. Previous research about audiences addresses the

importance of how design influences communication, but it does not fully address why this form of communication is important or how designers use information about their readers to influence their work. This particular research is intended to fill that gap in design knowledge.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that has led previous researchers to discover new information about design, and how visual communication impacts readers. At a theoretical level, this concept explains how engagement and recognition are important tools in visual communication. In this research, symbolic interactionism is used to explain how an art director understands the reader in order to connect with design. On a practical level, this research further examines how design elements encourage consumers to read a magazine based on what they see on the cover, and this idea is important to study because it is common belief that designers can most effectively cater to their readers if they understand their audience. This research will inform media professionals and scholars in the field of journalism because it addresses how readers understand and participate in magazine journalism. Essentially, the purpose of this research is to examine how magazine art directors purposefully design for their readers, and how the language of design initiates an interactive and engaging conversation about journalism and the media.

Research Question:

How do art directors use specific design elements (such as color and use of photography) to communicate with and engage their readers?

Previous research about art directors and their audiences addresses the importance of the “language of design” and how design influences communication, but it does not fully address how designers work to engage their readers. Research in symbolic

interactionism addresses how individuals communicate with the use of symbols (Charon, 1995). By studying magazine design as a form of visual communication, this research aims to examine how designers utilize visual elements to help their readers understand magazine content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is developed around the theoretical framework that magazine design serves as a form of communication in which designers aim to engage their audiences. This literature review examines how magazine design is created for readers and will consider effectiveness in reaching and initiating responses from a designer's intended audience. This literature review also addresses background information regarding visual attention and cognition in an attempt to explain how and why readers respond to what they see. Theories such as symbolic interactionism and community engagement are both factors that have led previous researchers to discover new information about how magazine design impacts audiences. The use of various magazine design elements (such as color, photography and typography) opens new doors for research and observation on how designers engage their readers. This literature review examines art director's design choices, and how these decisions ultimately influence the way readers understand and participate in magazine journalism.

Communication through design

The use of design frequently allows information to be presented to an audience in the most effective, efficient way. Effective presentation that enables readers to understand content more clearly is known as the "language of design," where tools of design serve as crucial extensions of language devices. According to Honeywill and Carpenter (2003), the most basic purpose of design is to foster communication among specific audiences, and the smallest details in presentation often influence how a message is perceived. Honeywill and Carpenter, along with a number of other scholars,

address the idea that designers form tangible, quality pieces of information into a format where readers have the opportunity to digest and discuss various topics in a new way.

Some scholars have recognized that the use of design in the media can be a platform for reader engagement. This type of engagement can be identified as actions that are observed by readers, such as amount of interest and depth of understanding, in response to a specific design. This is a framework that is used to examine how readers interpret news and react to the presentation of that information. Fernback (2005) studies the importance of “symbolic interactionism” and “symbolic communication,” which are both descriptors of successful design, he claims. By examining these theories, Fernback (2005) found that engagement grows alongside the development of new media platforms within specific communities, and that design construction, context and interpretation are all key components in processing engagement through presentation. Fernback also found that our networks influence levels of community participation, which is an important factor in analyzing how media is presented. By presenting news in a way that encourages readers to interact with media, design ultimately enhances reader participation.

Design is a powerful tool of communication because it allows readers to examine content in innovative, original ways. Visual communication is considered a method of storytelling that serves information to readers in ways that can either enhance content or provide an alternative presentation of material. Messaris (1998) argues that “by acquiring visual literacy, people enrich their repertoires of cognitive skills and gain access to powerful new tools of creative thought...If knowing about the languages of media is an important component of media literacy, an understanding of visual language should be a major goal of media-related scholarship and education” (p.77). Visual media

forms allow storytelling to adopt new shapes and meanings, which can enhance and improve the transfer of information both inside and outside of the newsroom.

Elements of magazine design

Magazine designers are most successful when they create work that connects with their audience. There are countless design techniques, elements, and methods that are implemented in design practice, but few of these elements would matter if they did not have a substantial effect on an intended audience. In journalism, the audience is a critical factor to consider. Baldwin (2004) suggests that the media can meet our needs by perfecting how news is presented to journalists — but more importantly, it is crucial to consider how readers and viewers perceive what they see in magazines.

There are many factors that a magazine's creative staff must consider in the design process. White (2003) examines creative procedures by analyzing specific components of design such as space, columns, grids, margins, contrast, text, headlines, captions, photos, illustrations, shadows, color and originality. White determines that one of the most defining constrictions a designer must consider is space, and how it can be used to its maximum potential. Although various scholars have individual ideas about which design element is most important, there is little disagreement that many of these components must work together as a cohesive unit to provide a useful visual piece of information.

The art director of a publication is, in most cases, responsible for striking a balance between a certain level of aesthetic appearance and information presentation. King (2001) addresses the creative processes, evolutionary aspects and elements of design that develop in successful magazines. King claims that design decisions are largely influenced by competition and suggests that magazines have evolved from a very

utilitarian purpose into the highly developed book of art that we see on newsstands today. Although it might be fairly difficult for a designer to articulate a creative process, King notes that a prominent part of that creative process in design is the level of audience response and balance of information. Audience reaction to visual presentation is one way art directors and designers can begin to identify how their audiences understand their publication.

Visual cognition

It is important to examine audience engagement and reaction to design, considering how visual information is processed. In the brain, visual processing centers are highly complex, and many factors can affect how visual attention is captured and directed (Brasel 2011). Brasel (2011) explains this idea: “Perception is typically split into ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ elements, focusing on whether the aspect of vision is driven by stimulus data arriving from the eye, or by cognitive structures in the brain imposing form and function upon those data” (p.474). There has been a considerable amount of research performed in the field of psychology in regards to the experience of perception, and what kind of role aesthetics can play in this experience. Anne Marie Barry (2006) explains that bottom-up processing can help provide an explanation as to why readers have certain emotional responses to design elements such as lines or colors, while top-down processing can initiate levels of appreciation when cognitions are involved:

“The brain is a meaning-seeking mechanism, and this suggests that recognition of pattern is at the heart of the process by which we make meaning from both stimuli from the outer world and prior evidence stored in memory...Aesthetics, which might be defined as the pleasure we find in the experience of art, is based

in this reward system and represents a level of pleasure that involves all of the brain's basic systems to some degree" (p.135).

Barry views aesthetic appreciation as a relationship between conscious and unconscious processing as well as combined verbal and visual processing. She makes a compelling argument that aesthetics can be described as a path that allows readers to form new connections and confirmations that result in emotional rewards – or, something that the viewer enjoys observing.

Another key aspect of visual cognition that is important to consider is how this cognition can affect reader participation. Barnard (2005) studies the effects of the creative processes on participation and reactions from an audience. Because it is difficult to analyze and interpret specific creative processes, one way of evaluating these processes is examining readers' emotional responses. Barnard outlines suggestions to this implication by looking at methods of decoding graphic design as art, advertising and communication and looking at the construction and reproduction as important elements of design. He reiterates that design affects *everyone*, and design is one of the primary examples of our use of semiology (the uses of signs and codes in communication), which is an important angle of research that occurs more on the subconscious than conscious level. Design as semiology is a separate area of research that is filled with its own theories and ideas, but it is vital to consider how the language of design is metaphoric for expression, and how this expressionistic outlook applies to various audiences.

Designers and their audience

A widely used theory about presentation in the world of magazine design is "form is content," which is a term addressed by Middlestadt and Barnhurst (1999) that reflects the idea that design and presentation shapes how audiences see and understand a news

package. Their original research, which focuses on how layout can alter the level to which readers understand stories, concludes that design decisions *do* in fact matter in how readers interpret content. There is ongoing discussion about how design decisions are typically made in the newsroom, and Middlestadt and Barnhurst claim that publishers once were the prevailing decision-makers when it came to news content. This idea exists in common practice today, but the discussion about designers and their level of freedom and decision-making power about final presentation remains open. Middlestadt and Barnhurst also examine “motivation and cognitive context for viewers of art” from a psychological perspective and compare this perspective of research to newspaper design, finding specifically that a vertical layout could depict liveliness in hard news, and that horizontal layout can relay tranquility of human interest and art stories. These measurements are valuable, concrete examples of how future research can explain levels of engagement from the perspective of the reader.

Visual communication and presentation

Magazine design and presentation has been examined through many lenses and perspectives. Some scholars focus on how readers react to their news, while others examine why designers make specific art decisions. Meggs (2006) compiled a reference for historical documentation of design movements, and writes about the many kinds of visual systems, movements of color and type influences of modern and classical art on magazines, as well as how these periods of design correlated with various historical and social revolutions. Previous research serves as a record of the influences that our culture has had on the development of art and visual presentation to explain the depth to which graphic artists pull from history in their everyday design.

In sum, it can be concluded that the way design is presented among each news medium affects how readers understand the content. Cooke (2005) considers that “design changes are usually planned so as to maximize the functionality and aesthetic appeal of the product for consumption in a competitive marketplace,” which allows us to look at how each of these different media forms ‘evolve and adapt’ to their changing platforms. Cooke (2005) also identifies the importance of examining ‘structural and graphic trends’ in design, but also mentions that the relationship between the designer and reader that results from the use of these trends is equally important to consider.

This study on visual communication seeks to understand how visual communication engages readers through the use of specific design elements. In mass media, visual language is both the relationship between images and the concepts associated with them, as well as the connections formed through the use of visual syntax (Messaris 1998). This research addresses the presentation of visuals in the media and how art directors perceive their readers’ engagement with those visuals.

Visual communication can be explored through perception, cognition, attention and additional methods of examination. Brasel (2011) uses science as a background upon which to look at goal-driven visual attention, where he concludes that individuals focus their visual attention in both conscious and unconscious ways. Although environment can play a large role in attention and the effect of shaping visual attention, Brasel (2011) notes that readers can often recognize various types of visual communication based upon design elements they are presented with.

In this research, the term *visual communication* will be examined by discussing various magazine covers to the art directors who created the work. Each cover displays various combinations of color, shape, photography and typography. By introducing

magazines with these various design elements, the researcher will be able to consider how readers react to the visuals and compare and contrast viewpoints and opinions of what readers see. In the interview, the designers will be asked specific questions about images, colors and photographs that are used in a particular design. This resulting discussion of the presented visuals will be identified as this research's *communication* portion.

The importance of *visual communication* is twofold. First, this term addresses the relationship between the reader and the stimuli, which is very relevant to the current media sphere. An abundance of research is performed on visuals, so this study will look specifically at how the media is able to connect and communicate with readers from a visual perspective. Bal (2003) identifies *visuality* “as an object of study [which] requires that we focus on the *relationship* between the seen and the seer” (14). Second, evaluating *visual communication* can be a very helpful tool in considering how past design has been presented and to look forward in considering developments in future design.

Engagement

The term *engagement* is defined in a number of ways. First and foremost, this term encompasses psychological actions and responses such as cognition, perception and attention. Bal (2005) notes that the social construction of the visual field is a reflection of the visual construction of the social world. This concept pinpoints how interactionism is used in the visual sense and shows how magazine design can provoke specific types of reader reactions. Additionally, *engagement* can also be viewed as how art directors understand how readers respond to their designs. In this research, *engagement* will be explored through the use of interview questions, which will allow for maximum response opportunity from the designer to address any thoughts or ideas that

relate to how *engagement* is expressed. The term *engagement* encompasses a few ideas: how readers react to or interact with imagery on the cover of a magazine, whether it compels readers to pick up the magazine from a newsstand, how it influences readers to want to learn more about what they see on the cover, and how design ultimately propels readers to read the content inside the magazine.

Theory: Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theory based in sociological roots that addresses how individuals interact with various stimuli. George Herbert Mead developed the initial groundwork for symbolic interactionism, and many scholars in psychology and sociology have revisited the theory. Herbert Blumer (1969) continued to develop the theory in 1969 to identify that symbolic interactionism has three major principles: (1) the idea that individuals will act towards stimuli based on previously cultivated knowledge or meanings associated with that stimuli, (2) that these meanings are a result of interaction with other individuals, and (3) that these meanings are developed through interpretation and encounters with the stimuli.

The theory of symbolic interactionism applies to visual communication in several ways. Symbolic interactionism recognizes that social interaction helps individuals form opinions and react to interactions. More importantly, this theory recognizes that individuals use symbols to aid interpretation (Blumer 1969). In visual communication, the use of symbols allows for readers to engage with content in the form of interaction.

Symbols, as a form of visual communication, are a vital part of this theory. Charon (1995) recognizes that symbols can represent almost anything, and symbols used as a method of communication allow people to understand different meanings, representations and significance. Symbols can be photographs, the use of recognizable

logos, and color combinations, and can explain how these uses of design complement the textual content on the page. In this research, elements of design will be identified as symbols. The engagement that results from these symbols will be examined, some examples being the relationship between the designer and the reader (as observed by the designer), the reaction(s) of readers to engage with the presentation of the magazine and any other effects of the symbols.

Future Research

The breadth of research available allows journalists to examine the complete history of the construction of magazine design and its intended purposes. Magazine design fosters discussions both inside of the realm of journalism and storytelling, as well as outside media walls and into the general public. Previous research allows us to consider how we might discover a designer's visual cognitive process and introduces researchers to the idea of measuring creative processes from audience's emotional responses. The effects that magazine design has on an audience is frequently examined from the audience's perspective, so this research will take existing knowledge and explore it from the perspective of the magazine designer.

Designing news content for magazines is an exciting storytelling tool that encourages readers to interact with news, and this is a form of engagement bred by the magazine's presentation. The "language of design" continues to develop at a rapid rate, and this language encourages reader engagement, as well as cultural and social interaction. As the media adapts to new technology and platforms, it becomes increasingly important that a magazine's creative team is educated about and aware of their audience. As an art director becomes more aware of his or her readers, he or she can continue to encourage engagement between media and community.

In conclusion, the theories and ideas discussed in this literature review apply to my own research because they allow me to look at how designers understand and react to reader perception of news. I examine visual systems at work and take into consideration the cultural and historical influences of various methods of design, and how we view design trends and changes over time. As new technology challenges the media in ways that have not yet been encountered, I will make an effort to further examine how design maximizes engagement among audiences and also look at structural and graphic trends that have brought us (the media) to where we are today.

METHODOLOGY

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that is used frequently with qualitative research methods. This research utilized two qualitative methods: interview and visual analysis. In this study, using multiple methods was beneficial because it allowed me to gain a complete understanding of the design methods and choices beyond those that meet the eye. These two methods were also valuable to this research because they were each appropriate qualitative measurements that allowed me to perform a clear analysis of my research question.

In communication research, interview is a commonly used format of methodology. Qualitative methods were appropriate for this research because actions and processes were examined, rather than relying on fixed-choice questions from samples (Silverman 2009). In this research, semi-structured interviews were used at an in-depth level, and open-ended questions allowed for maximum reader response. These open-ended questions were key in understanding how readers perceive, pay attention to and consider visuals. Silverman (2009) notes that a qualitative research design can be formed by using interviews based on a small number of cases and open-ended questions.

Interview was also an appropriate inquiry system for this topic of research because it allowed designers of award-winning magazines to discuss the ways in which they use visuals to connect and communicate with their readers. This method allowed a discussion that surrounded various stimuli in visual communication to develop, and the questions provoked the designers to think about what engages their audience.

Since this research aimed to examine how art directors understand their audience, a set of art directors from acclaimed magazines were interviewed. A list of questions was formed before the interviews were conducted [Appendix A]. These interviews were semi-structured, and additional response questions, as well as follow-up questions were asked based on how respondents answered the initial set of questions. Depending upon the participant's preference, the interviews were conducted either via Google Video conference, Google Voice or phone. One participant chose to conduct the interview via email.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Specific topics that were addressed in the interviews included how photography is used on the magazine covers, elements of color and type, and how these factors help readers to understand the content of the magazine. The designers were asked questions about what elements went into the design process, why specific design choices were made, and how those decisions might affect their readers. I also asked the art directors to discuss their favorite designs, and why they suspect that their magazine covers went on to become so successful. The goal of this research portion was to gain insight into the motivations and discussions that went into the original design, and to discover what emotions and reactions the designer intended to evoke from their readers. This is valuable information because it offers insight about the designer's intentions and goals in conceptualizing the piece.

Magazine covers are representations of both the visual and textual content within the pages of the magazine, so the covers of the various magazines are ideal to work with. A magazine's cover is the only visual representation of the magazine's interior content, so covers are frequently created to encourage readers to pick up the magazine and read the inner content. In this research, after making the decision to study magazine covers, I

determined that it would be important to examine magazines that received recent professional recognition for having outstanding design. The American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME)'s 2011 Best Cover Contest, which was held in 2011 and awarded magazines published from June 2009 to June 2010, awarded Best Cover finalists in 12 categories. From the hundreds of magazine cover entries that were submitted, 72 were narrowed down as "Official Nominees." The nominees were chosen by ASME, from which six finalists in each of the 12 categories. These cover finalists were selected by ASME magazine editors, and the final winners were determined through an open, public vote on Amazon.com (MPA 2011):

"The finalists were chosen by 90 top magazine editors. The winners in 12 categories will be chosen in September by Amazon.com customers. This is the second year Amazon.com customers have voted on the winners in the ASME Best Cover Contest."

By studying a set of magazines that were selected by journalism industry professionals and readers who visit Amazon.com, this research considers design work that has been recognized by both individuals who create magazines, as well as those who consume magazines. In addition, I also used the results of the 2012 Best Cover Contest in my study because I could not get in touch with all of the art directors from the 2011 contest.

Of the 12 categories in the 2011 contest, this research examined two groups: the *House and Home* category and the *Science, Nature and Technology* category. These categories of magazines were interesting to examine because the design directly reflects geographic locations and interests of the audience. These two categories also encompass areas of magazine journalism that especially interests me. The selected winning magazines in the *House and Home* include *Architectural Record*, December 2009;

Coastal Living, April 2010; *GreenSource*, January/February 2010; *House Beautiful*, March 2010; *Martha Stewart Living*, May 2010; *Real Simple*, May 2010. The selected winning magazines in the *Science, Nature and Technology* category include *Columbia*, October 2009; *National Geographic*, April 2010; *New York*, December 10, 2009; *The New York Times Magazine*, June 14, 2009; *The New Yorker*, November 2, 2009; *Outside*, November 2009 [Appendix B for images].

Since I could not get in touch with every art director in these two categories, I began to contact art directors who were award winners in the 2012 Best Cover Contest in the *Science and Nature* category. The art director I interviewed in this category worked on the award-winning cover of *OnEarth* magazine from March 2011. The other two winning magazines in this category included *National Geographic* from March 2011 and *Parade* from July 31, 2011.

In addition to addressing the award-winning magazine covers with each art director, I discussed the design of some of their other magazine covers; more specifically, I questioned them about covers that did not win this specific award. By focusing attention on a series of their various cover designs, I was able to compare and contrast the cover designs with the art director. I asked which covers they ended up liking the best, and why. I also asked about any other stories or ideas that factored into the various magazine covers, in an effort to learn more about their design processes and to give them an opportunity to discuss their design style in further detail.

When I began the individual interviews, I presented the art director with a single-page PDF that had a set of seven magazine cover thumbnails. The images consisted of the three consecutive magazine covers that were published immediately before the award-winning cover, the winning cover itself, and the three following covers that were

published after the winning cover. I asked the participants to discuss their favorite and least favorite covers, and I asked them about some of their favorite design elements in the presented cover collection. By introducing a more complete series of magazine covers that the art directors designed, I was able to gain a more comprehensive look at the nature of the magazine's overall design.

The other portion of the research consisted of the visual analysis [Appendix D]. The visual analysis examined the design elements that were used in selected magazine covers, and identified how a designer communicates with the reader. Design elements such as use of photography, color and other visual elements on the magazine's cover were examined in an effort to determine how the designer communicates visually. The covers examined were based on first impressions, and then closer examination followed. Knoblauch (2008) explains the importance of using visual analysis in qualitative research:

“The photo interview, subject informant photos and other forms of collaborative research, photo elicitation, or visual ethnography broaden the category of visual methods or visual research. These terms bring together the uses of visual technologies (photography and video, but also different forms of drawing and illustration) or their outcomes—various visual data forms—within different types of research endeavours, as well as the specific procedures and means of its analysis.”

The visual analysis addressed the design elements used in each of the magazine covers, and identified the covers' specific visual characteristics. This form of analysis was an opportunity to examine these visual characteristics of the winning covers in a

comprehensive manner, and I was able to study each of the specific design elements that each art director identified as they explained their work as a result of this analysis.

Limitations

The use of multiple methods painted a complete picture of the design elements and processes that art directors use. However, this also means that from these multiple data sources, I took upon the task of perfecting both sets of data analysis skills (Silverman 2010). I made the conscious decision to complete each set of data in a very focused, careful manner so that I did not end up swimming in information. Even though I used multiple data collection methods, I made sure that the data analysis was done in a way that was thoughtful and yielded quality results.

The use of interview offered insight into the creation of the magazine design, while the visual analysis served as a formal review of the work. In using the visual analysis method in combination with interviewing, an in-depth look at the design elements of the work was examined at multiple levels. Bohnsack (2008) notes the importance of using visual analysis in qualitative research:

“It seems equally important to develop common standards or methodological devices which are relevant for the interpretation of texts, as well as for the interpretation of pictures. Examples of common standards are: to treat the text as well as the picture as a self-referential system, to differentiate between explicit and implicit (atheoretical) knowledge, to change the analytic stance from the question *What* to the question *How*, to reconstruct the formal structures of texts as well as pictures in order to integrate single elements into the over-all context, and—last but not least—to use comparative analysis.”

In sum, this research in visual communication addressed magazine cover designs and how those designs were created for a particular audience. By examining how specific cover designs were formed and taking a look at how much the designers know about their audience, this research offers insight into how art directors communicate with their audiences, and how their design decisions inform their work. This research is valuable to the field of journalism because it addresses the purpose of designing for an intended audience, which can be highly beneficial to both magazine designers and other magazine staff members.

FINDINGS

The goal of this research was to explore the use of magazine design as a form of visual communication and to examine how art directors use this form of communication to understand and connect with readers. Art directors were asked interview questions about their perceptions of their readers, how they use information about their audience to inform their design work, and why they thought specific examples of their designs connected with their readers. Art directors were also asked if they think it is important to know their audience, and why. This specific set of questions [Appendix A] allowed the participants to explain their perspectives on designing both the cover and interior of a magazine, and why they chose to make specific choices in creating their covers. This question set also gave the art directors an opportunity to explain their overall perspective on designing for a specific group of people. Additionally, it allowed the art directors to discuss what type of audience background information, reader feedback or criticism and sales knowledge offers them insight in their work. A final topic of conversation identified why the designers thought that readers responded in such a positive manner to their cover design. This additional question allowed the art directors to consider why their designs connected with their audience and if they were able to predict the audience reaction to the cover design.

Interviewing art directors at eight major magazines provided me with a wide range of responses. Each art director seemed to have an individual way of connecting with the audience of their respective publication, but all felt that they had formed a general understanding of and relationship with their readers. Across the board, art

directors felt they consistently worked to show their readers fresh, interesting visual representations of important stories within their publications every month, and they strived to portray their stories in a way that engaged their audiences.

The Art Directors

Gail Bichler is the Art Director of *The New York Times Magazine*, which is located in New York City. I interviewed Gail on Friday, June 15th over the phone.

Eson Chan is the Art Director of *Columbia Magazine*, which is also located in New York City. I conducted the interview with Eson via Google video chat on Monday, April 2nd.

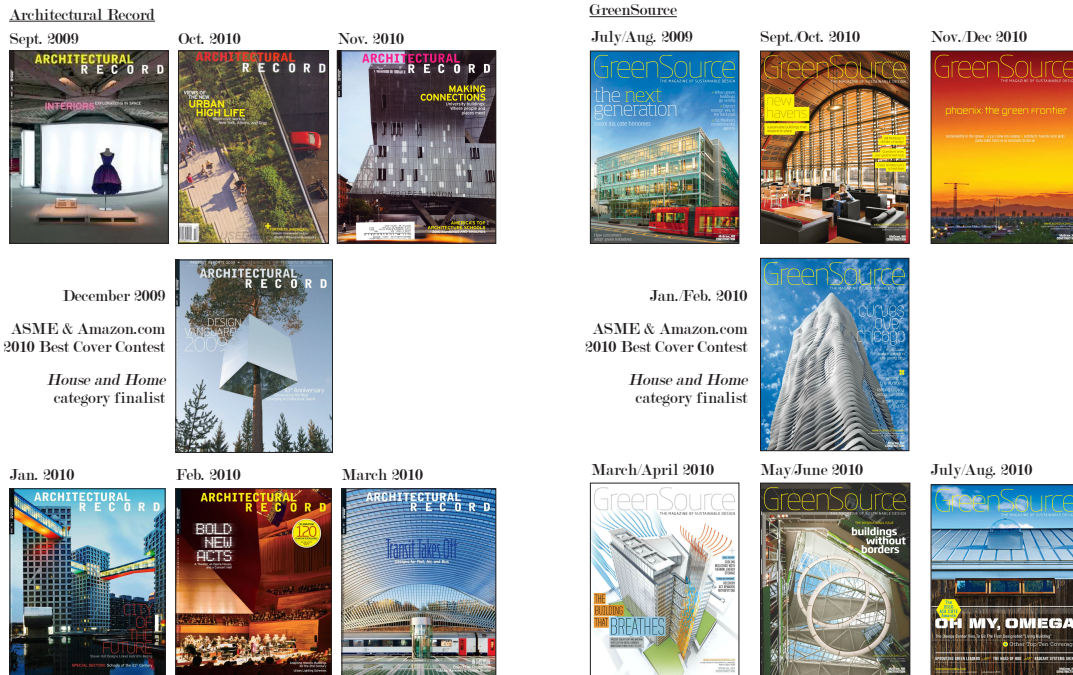
Gail Ghezzi is the Art Director of *OnEarth Magazine*, which is in New York City. She spoke with me over the phone on Friday, June 15th.

Jennifer Madara is the former Design Director of *Coastal Living*, located in Birmingham, AL. She has since moved on to other special projects within Time, Inc., but she was the creative leader of the *Coastal Living* team at the time of the April 2010 (award-winning) issue. I interviewed her over the phone on Friday, April 13th.

Bill Marr is the Creative Director of *National Geographic Magazine*, located in Washington, D.C. I conducted a phone interview with him on Monday, April 9th.

Hannah McCaughey is the Creative Director of *Outside Magazine*, located in Santa Fe, NM. I contacted her when she was very close to the due date of her child, but she was still willing to respond to my interview questions via email on Friday, March 30th.

Francesca Messina is the Senior Group Art Director of McGraw-Hill. She directs the design for both *Architectural Record* and *GreenSource*, and she spoke with me about her work with both of the magazines on Friday, April 6th.



What can you tell me about your readers and how they influence you?

All art directors were able to identify general demographical information about their readers, and were able to discuss more specifically how their readers use the magazine. When asked what they could tell me about their readers, nearly all art directors responded in a way that described their audiences' preferences and interests, rather than specific demographical information. The art directors also discussed how they obtained reader information, and the influence that this information has on them when designing.

Many of the art directors felt confident in the relationships that they consistently work to build with their readers on many different levels. Francesca Messina is confident in her connection with readers because she is constantly working with her staff to understand and develop a relationship with the audience. She explains that *Architectural Record* is a subscription-based niche publication that serves the architecture profession, so the typical reader works in the architecture field.

“We don’t invent a prototypical reader; we are actually talking to our readers all the time, and sharing that information with each other. I try to learn from the editors who are talking to the architects and other professionals and see what they’re hearing, because I have less direct contact with them.”

Throughout the day, Messina aims to connect with her readers visually on all platforms. She believes that knowing her audience allows her to give them information that they can connect with and appreciate. “We want to get a sense of how they spend their day interacting with the brand online and in print. We really have a deep, ongoing conversation with our communities, and that’s how we know what they like.” She appreciates the effort that her readers make in communicating how they use the magazine in their profession and everyday lives.

Jennifer Madara was also able to connect with her audience during her time at *Coastal Living* based on the profile and mindset of the individuals who subscribe to the magazine. While working at *Coastal Living*, she thought about her audience in terms of their mindset and how they use the magazine, and that helped her to maintain a consistent tone in the design.

“Sometimes our readers were just a little bit older, because they are the people who were doing well enough to have second homes at the beach. But our argument was that the magazine was also for people who *wished* they had a home at the beach, or liked to travel to the beach for vacation. My mindset was that anyone who likes the beach also has a fresher, younger attitude. Our reader was well-off – and if not well-off, at least had good taste – with a little bit of enjoyment of kitsch.”

She knew her readers expected to be visually taken to the coast each month, so she understood her responsibility to present new, gorgeous locations that were visual vacations on every page. When asked about how her readers influenced her design decisions while at the magazine, she said that the visibility of the cover image was most important in connecting with the audience.

“*Coastal Living* covers are a little bit different. Our readers leave them out on their coffee table. For a while, we tried the idea of ‘the fewer cover lines the better’ – because you can’t block the view! It’s a fantasy for them, and they want to be able to imagine themselves there.”

Each month, she also aimed to provide the readers with new visuals that they would genuinely enjoy. Madara said she really enjoyed designing the winning *Coastal Living* cover (below) and that she sees an approach to creating an aesthetic on the covers of the magazine that would excite readers and encourage them to open the magazine. The winning cover was just one among a set of waterfront coastal photo covers.



Hannah McCaughey, Creative Director of *Outside* Magazine, constantly considers her audience. The important method of communication for her is the conversation between the magazine and the reader, and she makes design decisions based upon that form of engagement. “As a designer, your audience/reader has to always be at the forefront of your mind for all the many decisions we make. It’s a conversation, so ‘Who are you talking to?’ has to be considered at all times.” She says she knows adequate information about her readers because of research that the company conducts.

“We learn a lot about what our readers like through surveys and letters and now a lot from our website, *Outside Online*. We can track how often a story gets read, how many comments, etc., very closely...now we know what types of things our readers respond to.”

Although she does design for *Outside* readers, she does not try to specifically cater to or please any kind of sub-set group or demographic that might pick up the magazine. McCaughey also had a great experience working with *Outside* photographer Dan Winters on the award-winning Survival issue, but of the set of covers that I presented, her favorite to design was the Photo Issue from September 2009. She connected with the “amazing eye contact” from the bird in the photograph.

Eson Chan, Art Director of *Columbia* Magazine, considers his target audience largely based on location and education level. He said that he pays special attention to the story, and aims to find visually innovative ways to connect the magazine readers to the content of the text. “Our market is New York City, and our audience is all over the country and all over the world. It’s *Columbia University*, so it’s an Ivy League School – smart school, smart readers.” Another thing that Chan considers when designing the magazine is the type of visual content his readers might like to see. He consistently aims

to connect with his audience to the new information in the magazine, and strives to present that information in a way that will excite and intrigue readers to pick up the magazine.

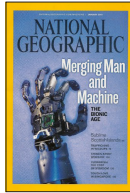
“They should be intellectually challenged; they *want* to be intellectually challenged. And therefore, every design or story has to respect them as readers and has to respect their intellect. And if we fail, why read our magazine? That’s the overarching sentiment toward them. And then to know that they’re New Yorkers...If they know so much – the combination of being and Ivy Leaguer and a New Yorker – what can we share with them that they don’t know?”

Chan feels that it is important to provide the audience with accurate and interesting visual representations of the stories that are in *Columbia Magazine* each month, because the content of the magazine is what drives most of his design decisions.

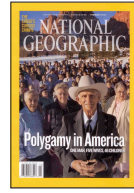


National Geographic

Jan. 2010



Feb. 2010



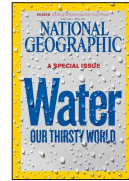
March 2010



April 2010

ASME & Amazon.com
2010 Best Cover Contest

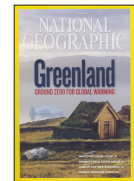
Science, Technology
& Nature
category winner



May 2010



June 2010



July 2010



National Geographic Magazine Creative Director Bill Marr sees two audiences that read the magazine. He is aware of the more specific demographical information of the magazine's subscribers. However, the newsstand buyers are not as easy to identify.

“We have two audiences. One is the newsstand. They're hard to really pin down, because we really can't get a definitive read on the typical newsstand buyer. We don't have their name; we don't have their address. What we know is what sells more copies from one month to another.”

Nevertheless, he considers his audience from another perspective – one that allows him to relate to readers based on their tastes and interests. By understanding the types of visuals that the subscribers respond well to, Marr is able to continue to provide the best possible visual content from one month to the next.

“We have a very savvy set of subscribers. They like imagery, they like visuals, they like smart topics – and they don’t want to be lectured. They like maps. They like information graphics that are easily read and understood.”

Marr appreciates knowing how the magazine’s audience interacts with the visuals and hopes to continue providing readers with graphics and images that they enjoy. His favorite cover among the set presented was the award-winning Water issue. He said that *National Geographic* prints in 28 languages, and it was the first time he had seen all partners chose to run that cover on their version of the magazine, which he said “made a very nice poster.”

Gail Bichler, Art Director at *The New York Times Magazine*, also discussed how she relates to her audience throughout the design process. She said that while her art team conceptualizes designs for the cover of the magazine, they often think about how to best serve their audience from a visual standpoint.

“We think about: What would really grab somebody? What was the tone of the story, and how can we convey that? Sometimes we think, What’s the most interesting part of this story? Is it the emotional connection? And if so, how can we convey that? Do we want an all type cover? Do we want the image of a person – would that connect more with the reader? Those kinds of things.”

Bichler also pays close attention to how the story is presented to her readers, because she believes that this directly affects how the audience understands the content of the magazine. “We think a lot about storytelling in terms of how we order the images. We think about the order that things are revealed in and having some kind of narrative, and even down to the smaller design details.”

The New York Times Magazine



ASME & Amazon.com
2010 Best Cover Contest
*Science, Technology
& Nature*
category finalist

OnEarth Magazine



ASME & Amazon.com
2012 Best Cover Contest
Science & Technology
category finalist

She works with her design team to ensure that the design connects the readers to the story and guides them through the magazine seamlessly. Of the set of magazine covers, Bichler really enjoyed working on the award-winning set of split-run covers.

At *OnEarth* magazine, Gail Ghezzi connects with her audience through the concepts she visually presents on the magazine pages. She aims to take the stories that the editors of the magazine create and develop them in a way that continues to challenge and excite the audience.

“The editors and I really want to challenge them creatively, and ourselves creatively. When we come up with concepts, we try to have a little bit of wit, a little bit of edge...there is a saying that says “wit is intelligence having fun,” and that is the attack that I take when designing.”

Most art directors felt that they were able to understand and connect with their readers based on the information they knew about the audience. Knowledge about readers’

tastes helped the art directors to pinpoint specific elements of design that they hoped would connect with their readers each month, and visualizing how their readers used their magazines helped the art directors create visuals that would be intriguing, informational and compelling for both subscription and newsstand readers.

Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?

Every interviewed art director said they consider their audience at some point in the design process. Many said they have a specific group of people that they visualize when designing, yet others consider how the audience might react to their design. Messina states, “It’s all about serving the audience.” She sees the importance in connecting with her audience from both a relationship standpoint, as well as a business perspective.

“We are a targeted niche publication and it goes to a specific industry, so we have to know what they want from us. Otherwise, we can’t possibly be successful. If we are a general consumer interest magazine, it’s a little bit more about saying, ‘This is what we think you want to know.’ But with a niche business-to-business magazine, it really has to be ‘we’re giving you the information you need to do your business.’ *That* inspires people.”

She knows that her audiences at both *Architectural Record* and at *GreenSource* are inspired and interested in different subject matter, and she acknowledges the importance in delivering visual information that will inspire. Similarly, Madara also considered her audience when designing based largely upon the content of *Coastal Living*. She thought about her readers in relation to the magazine’s message:

“The note we were trying to get across: that it’s about the beach, it’s about the lifestyle, it’s about relaxing and hanging out. So it could be a little more casual and fresh and friendly – it could also be informational, but I didn’t want anyone to work too hard.”

Since Madara hoped to deliver a visual retreat to her readers each month, she frequently thought about how to pair the stories in the magazine with images that best delivered a theme of a relaxing escape.

Chan focuses on *Columbia* magazine’s mission when he designs. He considers how his visual work can provide *Columbia* readers with interesting and accurate visual representations of the magazine’s stories.

“They [the audience] are always in the back of my mind. I think about – if I was a reader, would I be interested? That’s how I see it. More so, I have to give the proper respect to the story. The story defines it, and the person, the profile, the research – *that* pushes it, and propels it to be the best. This is their one moment to be on the cover, to have six pages devoted to them...and I think they deserve to have – because all of their good work – they deserve the have the story be told in the best possible way in can be told.”

Chan makes an effort to ensure that the content of the story is always presented to the reader in a way that is compelling and fair to both the reader, as well as the subject(s) of the story. Bichler also stated that she absolutely considers her audience as she designs, and that she thinks about her readers at all points of conceptualization and execution.

“I think that they [the audience] are considered in all stages, just in different ways. For example, if we are thinking about what a cover image should be for a

story, or even thinking of cover lines, we are looking at a few different routes to illustrate something. We think about if it's something that's really going to grab the reader.”

Bichler's main focus is to tell the story in a way that draws the reader in, and to provide a fresh visual perspective that allows the reader to understand the story inside the magazine. Similarly, Gail Ghezzi understands her audience because she understands the content that her readers enjoy.

“They already understand and are interested in the subject matter, and they are eager to be more educated. In a way, it's a really great relationship because I know who I am talking to and what they are interested in...the kind of pressure I feel when I'm designing the cover is that I want to challenge them emotionally or intellectually because they are educated about the topic, or they want to be educated about the topic. I have a captive audience who wants to know more about what we are trying to tell them. My challenge is to offer them that, but not in a dry way.”

All art directors said they considered their audience in one way or another when designing their magazine. Most thought about the subscription-based portion of their readers and how the magazine's cover and content connects with the individuals who receive the magazine in the mail. Many designers also thought about what their readers look for in the magazine from both content and visual perspectives, and they aimed to marry those elements in a way that is seamless and intriguing. McCaughey puts it simply: “You cannot *not* consider your audience.” Each designer had their own way of thinking about how they cater to their readers, but no matter how they thought about serving their readers, there is no doubt that readers were in some way considered.

Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is important or you to know about?

Nearly all art directors appreciate reader feedback, and many of them noted that this feedback presents new ideas and perspectives to consider. Although reader feedback can sometimes reflect an extreme opinion of few, almost all art directors mentioned that they value knowing how visual information and design helps readers to understand the magazine content. Messina considers the relationship that Architectural Record and GreenSource magazines have with their audiences when thinking about how she related to reader comments and feedback. She states that it is really important to pay close attention to the magazine readers, because they are the specific people who are reading the magazine. She wants to give her readers fresh, exciting content while still staying true to the content that she knows they appreciate.

Madara recalls specific instances when readers pointed out images in Coastal Living and wanted to know the location in the photograph. She can also remember readers writing in to the magazine mostly to ask about specific interior decoration objects or locations that images were taken in – or even a vacation trip that is presented in a story – but overall did not receive much feedback from readers in terms of the overall design of the magazine. She addressed those specific reader inquiries by looking up information about what the objects or locations that the reader asked about and responded to those requests, but she stated that the magazine rarely received negative feedback in terms of its overall visual presentation.

Chan also states that he has not received an overwhelming amount of reader feedback in his career. He puts it simply: “The best compliment is that I don’t hear anything, because I know I’ve reached them. Where I fail is when they do come and talk to me.” The few times that Chan has received negative reader responses over the course

of his career, he has welcomed the feedback. When asked if there would be specific feedback that would be beneficial to him as a designer, Chan responded by stating that there is not a lot of information that would really help him. He is most concerned with how the story is portrayed visually, and if he did an accurate job in visually representing the piece for the audience. He is always looking for the way to best craft and package the stories in the magazine, and focuses a majority of his attention on how accurately the story is being presented combined with a level of aesthetic that is appealing to the readers.

McCaughey has experienced a similar amount of feedback from *Outside* readers. “I don’t get reader criticisms about design. More often, we hear about a photograph here and there, and then it’s too late to do anything about it.” Her sentiments reflect many of the art directors’ feelings in regards to feedback about specific design choices. All of the art directors take their work and the relationships with their readers seriously, but many of them also recognize that they can expect little feedback from readers in regards to overall magazine presentation. At *OnEarth*, Ghezzi states that she faces the same challenge that all art directors much face: how to react to reader criticism.

“I don’t really see much [criticism]. Every once in a while I’ll see some, but they don’t really talk about design as much as the content and the storyline. The criticism that we get is close to home. To a certain extent – you listen to it, but you don’t. You don’t want to put a restriction on the creative process. That’s a battle that all art directors deal with. As far as the readership, I don’t hear much of what they have to say, and maybe that’s a good thing, you know?”

Ghezzi mentions that although much of the overall feedback about the magazine is directed towards the editorial portions rather than the visual, she also realizes that it’s

important to consider that feedback as well. She doesn't mind that the bulk of reader feedback focuses on the textual messages in the content, because she has come to realize that readers are mostly happy with the design – otherwise, they would speak up.

Gail Bichler also faces the challenge of responding to various types of reader feedback. She appreciates feedback from her audience, but remembers that some reader opinions may not necessarily reflect the majority opinion of the visual presentation of the magazine.

“It's good to know what people are thinking...but it's kind of the squeaky wheels, because it's not what everyone's thinking. Sometimes people do bring up good points. Often times, some people have a particular bone to pick where it might not apply to everyone else, or it's an extreme opinion. We certainly get comments from people that do affect the way we design. For example, people complained about type on black pages and said that it's not that legible, and we still do it some times but much more sparingly. We sometimes modify our designs because of it.”

A major task that most art directors interviewed face is how heavily to weigh various kinds of reader comments. All art directors appreciate knowing how their readers respond to their magazine, but they also must consider how to balance which visual aspects work well for the magazine versus elements that can be improved upon.

Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

The answer to this question was a resounding unanimous “Yes.” Each art director was able to point out more specific reasons as to why knowing the reader is important, and

each art director also mentioned that the idea of learning about the reader and building a relationship with them was central to their role as the publication's creative or art director. For example, Messina knows it is important to serve her audience because she knows who her readers are and what they expect from her.

“Architects specifically are the most visually astute audience that I’ve ever served as a publication designer. They know everything about the grid. They understand the different messages, the different typefaces. They’re very knowledgeable about fonts; they’re very knowledgeable about photography, because they take photography of their own work. It’s almost like serving a peer audience, because they’re incredibly design savvy.”

She also considers how her audience sees her designs based on their background, and she thinks about the nature of her audience's work. This helps her to present readers with the most effective design solution to each issue and story.

“Architects practice a visual craft. They are designers in three dimensions – I’m just a designer on two dimensions, most of the time. So they are thinking on an even broader sense. I think about the way they see the pages of the magazine all the time, and try to really make them clear and logical. They are very, very attuned to rationale – and logic. And why the grid is used a certain way. And consistency. And all of those things are the foundations of good editorial page design anyway, so it’s a synergistic process because of that.”

Messina considers the tasks and decisions that her readers face in their everyday lives, and that allows her to adjust the visual presentation of the magazines she designs. Likewise, Madara also thinks it is important to know her audience based on what they

appreciate in their daily lives. This allows her to provide readers with content that is presented in a way that will draw them through the magazine.

“It’s a puzzle: for whatever the article is, you want to make it interesting and suck them in – but you also have to make it come across clearly what the story is about...You want to make it friendly, approachable. You don’t want them to work too hard, you want it easily understood.”

She aims to provide the reader with content that is delivered in an accurate yet appealing way, and she mentions that this could not be done if she did not know defining information about her readers.

Chan believes it is important to know his readers when attempting to create designs for them. He believes that this is fundamental to producing effective visual work, and states that knowing the readers enables him to deliver visuals that they will understand and appreciate.

“You have to be relatable. If you design within a box, and you don’t know who your audience is, you have failed, hands-down. I like general interest magazines, because I can relate to them. If I can’t relate to [the market], then I can’t design for that market and have no passion to do so.”

Chan also mentions that having a firm grasp on the demographics and interests of the readers, he is able to then think outside of the box and visualize all the ways he can visually connect with his readers. Similarly, Marr believes it is equally important to know your audience, and he aims to connect with the audience in way that is important and meaningful to the readers. He believes that it is a good business model, and that

knowing the audience and their motivations for reading the magazine can help the designer to create work that the reader will enjoy.

“I think that it’s good advice whenever you’re in business to know your audience. They’re your customers. We like to think of the Geographic as a membership, because the magazine is still non-profit. A big chunk of the profits that we do make every year go back into mission programs, which support scientists in the field. I think the people who are members of the Society like to be a part of that. They want to improve their world a little bit. And that gives us a bit of an edge, I think. But we get to know who they are enough to be able to communicate with them.”

Marr can distinguish elements of design that the National Geographic Magazine readers might enjoy based on how they interact with their world, and he believes that their attraction to the magazine mirrors their attraction to the Society overall. That knowledge helps Marr to shape the visual content of the magazine.

Ghezzi also thinks that knowledge about who is reading the magazine is very important information. She believes that she designs for the specific reader (or group of readers), and that she cannot speak to her audience unless she knows who they are. “It’s a real basic thing that designers have to know, and a good designer will be able to design for any person or demographic,” she stated. Gail Bichler also believes it is important to know the what is going on in the design world around her, as well as knowing the audience who is observing it. She said that she takes many things into consideration, including the overall visual balance and flow throughout the pages.

“We are always striving to do something that is unexpected, something that’s bright tonally for the story. We are looking at what the other designers are doing

– so if you’re working on a piece and there’s three other people working on pieces going on around you, we want to get the balance right...There are a whole variety of things that we consider. We consider what other people around us are doing, and we’re careful to not do something similar to what they’ve done.”

All art directors that I spoke with stated that it is crucial for them to know the readers of their magazines because it allows them to better serve that particular audience. Being aware of their readers’ tastes and how they respond to the magazine’s design also helps the art directors create covers that they hope will evoke a positive reader reaction. Most art directors aimed to connect with their readers consistently and effectively from issue to issue, and all agreed that in order to foster that relationship, it is crucial to know whom they are designing for.

ANALYSIS

All art directors identified general demographical information about their respective audiences and were able to describe general tastes and visual preferences of those groups. Many of them noted throughout their interview that this combination of knowing multiple aspects of the readers' personality, lifestyle and demographical information is key to producing designs that the reader appreciates. Demographical information frequently helps the art directors to identify and envision readers, while knowledge of the audience's visual tastes helps art directors to select and execute specific elements of design for those readers.

Nearly every art director stated that the act of cultivating the relationship between themselves and their audience through visual means of communication is very important to their work and careers. They each had some level of knowledge about what elements and formats of design their respective audiences react positively to and appreciate. Many art directors were also familiar with design formats and layouts that readers did not enjoy in the magazine. Demographical details about their respective magazine readers was gathered mostly by survey research and focus groups through their publishing or communications departments, while general design preferences of the audience were gathered by online blog comments and various other methods of written, verbal and digital communication. In every interview, each art director brought to my attention that they always consider the audience that purchases and reads their magazine; they only vary on different points at which they consider those audiences throughout the design process.

Overall, most reader feedback that art directors encountered involved specific questions about locating objects or points of interest on an interior page of the magazine. Some reader questions asked where to purchase various items on display in photographs that highlighted interior design. Other questions were about the locations that specific photographs were taken. All art directors stated that they generally experience minimal reader feedback overall, and that they are fine with that. Overall, almost all of the art directors do not mind receiving minimal feedback – most of them said that small amounts of feedback is an indicator that they are reaching their intended audience without major issues.

All art directors agreed that it is fundamental to their job to know their audience. To the art directors, learning about their readers helps to develop the relationship that they have with their readers and allows them to give the audience visual stimulation that they enjoy. Each art director agreed that it is imperative to know their readers if they wish to provide intriguing, compelling and successful design. Understanding audience expectation also helps art directors when they design.

Nearly all art directors interviewed stated that they feel responsible for accurately representing the story in the magazine. Most art directors brought up a conversation about new directions that developing technology is bringing the magazine industry. They mentioned that there are endless opportunities for reaching new readers in digital platforms, and many of them said that they observe more connected reader interaction on those new digital platforms. In the end, nearly all of the design professionals agreed that there are many methods to reaching their readers, and no matter what the format might look like, they were most interested in providing visual content that continuously excites, challenges, allures and intrigues their reader base.

CONCLUSION

Magazines are able to communicate with readers in large part due to how their information is presented. Because the design of the magazine sets the tone and pacing of the publication, designers play a key role in setting the visual standard and presentation. Based on the set of interviews I conducted in regards to audience awareness and relationships, there is one piece of information that is clear: art directors understand that their readers become accustomed to expecting something specific from them each month. This could be a style of photograph on the cover that brings the reader to a tropical destination, a new and innovative structure that is creating a buzz in the architecture community, or a more general expectation of content and topics that the reader enjoys. Knowing what the audience expects ultimately determines how the art directors connect with their audience and helps them foster reader relationships.

Each art director had an understanding of who reads their magazine, and many were able to offer ideas about why they thought their audience was interested in the publication. Demographical information provided by the magazines' marketing or research teams offer the art directors with some form of knowledge about their readers, but most art directors found themselves connecting with their audiences based on content, style preferences and tastes. In nearly all of the art directors' experiences, there is typically little reader feedback about design after a publication hits newsstands – this does not seem to bother the interviewed art directors.

Greater reader interaction is being encouraged and monitored with the introduction of new communication and publication platforms. Although none of the art directors were specifically asked about how they approach emerging digital platforms, nearly all of them offered it up in conversation. Some mentioned that digital platforms allow for a new reader base that consists of a younger or more tech-savvy group of people, and other art directors noted that web and social media components allowed their current reader base to stay constantly connected with the magazine brand. Many of the art directors find that publications' new platforms are exciting and can bring a fresh or alternate presentation of their magazines to even more readers.

Examining how and why readers connect to journalism through means of visual communication is an important area of research because it allows professionals in the journalism and visual communication fields to gain a greater understanding of how readers perceive their work. Since most design professionals create pages for the education and pleasure of their readers, many art directors found that understanding their readers allowed them to create those pages in most efficient, effective ways possible. One major limitation that I faced in this study included the level of access to the design professionals. Many publication offices did not release their employees' direct contact information, so it was at times a challenge to get in touch with the art directors. Another challenge that I faced throughout the course of my study was time constraints. The design professionals were very gracious to answer all of my questions when I spoke with them. They were so informative and thorough with their responses that I would have loved to spend endless amounts of time speaking to them, and even shadowing their daily routines at work. It was difficult to end the conversations with these individuals because I wanted to know so much more about their personal and professional work.

There are many ways that future scholars could develop upon my current research. One direction of study could examine the ways in which developing technology and digital platforms influence visual communication. Evolving forms of magazine presentation are opening new avenues for the study of visual cognition, and these platforms already bring higher levels of interaction and communication among many visual-based communities. Another course of research could examine the effectiveness of various formats of design in all realms of the journalism sphere (not limited to the magazine format of communication). Further studies about how the human brain interacts with these other formats could provide the academic and professional world with valuable information regarding new, innovative, and creative ways to connect with their consumers and audiences.

In sum, there was one idea that nearly all art directors mentioned in some way, and this is the importance of accurately representing a story for their readers in a way that compels and excites people. Messina puts it this way: “Good storytelling is good journalism, and visual journalism is the same as any other journalism focus. That is really the bottom line. Trying to be clear, accurate, correct in what you’re presenting, and the fun part is making it incredibly dynamic and compelling. It’s just like writing a good story. If you are designing a really good, smart, solution for a layout, it will be incredibly dynamic and engaging, and make you say ‘Wow’ on some level, and keep you engaged.” This idea of drawing readers into a newsstand and encouraging them to pick up the magazine to read more about the cover is something that all of the art directors addressed as being important to their work. This knowledge brings an invaluable set of tools and resources to professionals in the fields of journalism and visual communication, and allows art directors to successfully package and deliver messages for their loyal and new readers alike.

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APPENDIX A: Interview questions

1. [Set of seven covers set out for designer to see.] Of these covers, which is your favorite?
2. Which did you enjoy designing the most? Why was this your favorite cover experience from the covers presented?
3. Which of these covers is your least favorite, and why? Please rank the covers from your most favorite to least.
4. Tell me about this award winning cover. How was it designed?
5. Why do you think this cover won the award? When you finished designing it, did you anticipate that it would be award winning?
6. What can you tell me about your readers and how they influence you?
7. Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?
8. Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is most important for you to know about?
9. Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

APPENDIX B: Images.

Science, Nature & Technology

Columbia, October 2009



This provocative image pushed the boundaries of Columbia's alumni magazine: It illustrates an article about biologists who discovered that H1N1 influenza derived from the intermingling of DNA from two different types of swine flu. The illustration communicates this by showing the tail of two pigs woven together to form a Double Helix. This theme is underscored by the director of the H1N1, "Understanding Swine Flu." The illustration was done by Daniel Bieker, in collaboration with our art director, Esan Chan, and our senior editor, David Craig.

National Geographic, April 2010



To create a just-dunked effect for the cover of National Geographic's April 2010 special issue, "Water: Our Thirsty World," executive editor William Marr and staff photographer Mark Thiesen started with a shiny slab of white Formica coated with car polish. Artfully sprinkled water drops beaded up and passed through many lighting experiments and photos, then the famous yellow rectangle and the cover type took their places in the image. That's not all that happened, but the rest has something to do with magic.

• [Subscribe for \\$74.88 \\$15.00](#)

New York, December 10, 2009



At the height of the nation's swine-flu panic, New York chose a playful illustration with a literal vision of swine flu for the cover—an adorable piglet suffering from the flu, under a snug blanket with his snout on a down pillow. The image itself, by photographer Horacio Salinas, invited readers not to overreact to the threat, as the pig (who was a good sport during the shoot) calmly recuperates.

• [Subscribe for \\$488.64 \\$29.97](#)

The New York Times Magazine, June 14, 2009



The 2009 Architecture Issue was based on the theme of infrastructure. For the two covers of the sale print run, a pair of artists was commissioned to envision the future or urban framework. ICA Design offered a highly detailed, hand-drawn rendering of a bustling city, while Thomas Doyle meticulously painted and sculptured a miniature cross-section of a city. Despite the different methods and interpretations of the theme, each vision represents the beauty and complexity of contemporary architecture.

• [Find out more about The New York Times Magazine](#)

The New Yorker, November 2, 2009



Chris Ware is one of today's most respected graphic novelists, whose work has received literary prizes and been the subject of numerous museum shows. In "Unmasked," published for Halloween, Ware depicts worlds in collision with his trademark conceit: A couple of white dots on the left are the faces of children, radiating eagerness and expectation, while dots on the right are the faces of their walking parents. It's by the handholds in which they are absorbed.

• [Subscribe for \\$244.44 \\$69.99](#)

Outside, November 2009



In order to capture the life-or-death feeling of being trapped under the ice for our November "Survival" issue, photographer Dan Winters had to endure an elaborate trial-and-error process to create the perfect effect—even going so far as to spray blocks of ice with liquid nitrogen to produce cracks. The result is an arresting and gripping image that perfectly sets the tone for the theme of the issue. And the person behind the ice? That'd be Winters himself. "We needed someone who looked like a rugged mountain man," he says. "What can I say? I fit the bill."

• [Subscribe for \\$74.88 \\$24.00](#)

House & Home

Architectural Record, December 2009



For our design-oriented community, the December Vanguard Issue is a must-read, highlighting the best emerging architectural talent from around the world. The surreal "tree house"—actually a prototype for a hotel—designed by Thom & Videgard Architects, in Stockholm, got our attention by exemplifying a design approach that champions radical simplicity to create progressive contemporary forms. The cover presents a "double take" image that makes you pause. Is it real?

• [Subscribe for \\$66.00 \\$49.00](#)

Coastal Living, April 2010



Coastal Living's April 2010 cover captures the essence of our mission—an escape from everyday life and dreams of the good life by the sea. Our objective is to transport readers to a peaceful, stress-free place through excellent photography and design. This image embodies the magazine's laid-back vibe, nothing too formal or precious. Shot by freelancer Anne Schlechter at a refurbished sugar mill on St. Croix, this clean, crisp photograph has it all—a place to rest, a cool breeze and a killer view. You just want to be there.

• [Subscribe for \\$46.00 \\$10.00](#)

GreenSource, January/February 2010



We knew which green architectural project to put on the cover—the problem was selecting the definitive image. Ultimately, we decided on the surreal and awe-inspiring image you see here. The sinuous, white concrete balconies give the facade a flowing movement that is almost impossible to capture in pixels. Photographer Steven Hill recalls taking a breather in the plaza after nine consecutive hours of shooting the building. He saw the clouds approaching and, sensing it was a transient moment of perfection, snapped some shots—including this one. Ironically, the building continues to make waves, spurring a discussion of function versus beauty.

• [Subscribe for \\$29.95](#)

House Beautiful, March 2010



Not everyone loves blue, but House Beautiful always has, and we devoted our entire Spring Color Issue to it. To emphasize the theme of "All About Blue," design director Scot Schy packed a blue color-field painting with the names of 12 hues; this range is mirrored in the playful variation of the blue letters in the logo. Francesco Lagnese's photograph captured the room's Hollywood-style glamour, in the most unlikely of locations—Fayetteville, Arkansas.

• [Subscribe for \\$46.00 \\$10.00](#)

Martha Stewart Living, May 2010



At a time when everything on the newsstand feels predictable and formulaic, our May cover stands out like a spotlight. The paint swatches in bright hues and a bold, semistructured design feel fresh and fun. Even without the cover lines, the composition—buffered and balanced by the four graphic throw pillows along the bottom—makes it clear that this issue is all about color: choosing to, being with it, enjoying its ebullient effects. Arranging and rearranging the myriad paint chips into an ever-brighter, livelier color cloud, our new editor-in-chief, Vanessa Holden, conceived this cover (her first) as a way to signal a clear shift in the direction of Martha Stewart Living.

• [Subscribe for \\$66.66 \\$28.00](#)

Real Simple, May 2010



Countless readers come to Real Simple for smart advice on how to clean their homes quickly and easily. But it's a challenge to make a beguiling cover image that connects with the concept of speed cleaning. Fortunately, photographer Stephen Lewis found a way: he crafted a stunning shot that juxtaposes a spray bottle with crystalline liquid, a yellow sponge, a crisp, white dishcloth and plonies. This beautiful, unexpected image inspired legions of readers to pick up the mop and get to work.

• [Subscribe for \\$66.66 \\$10.00](#)

Winner: Science & Nature



onearth
Arctic Fever
 The editors' description of the cover: "This provocative photo illustration by Tia Magallon for our 'Arctic Fever' cover boldly addresses the environmental disruptions caused by climate change. One such consequence: melting sea ice is disrupting the natural barrier between two bear species, the polar and the grizzly, for the first time in 10,000 years. Indeed, there has been evidence of their interbreeding. So, their return, both by rising Arctic temperatures—a symptom of an unhealthy environment—as well as a trail road to these bear's amorous fever."

Finalists: Science & Nature



National Geographic, Mar 2011, "Designing the Perfect Pup" (Photograph by Greg Schwabert)



Parade, July 21, 2011, "Cute vs. Dogs" (Photograph by Brooke Jackson)

APPENDIX C: Visual Analysis Form

1. What content is represented in this cover design?
2. What kind of story does the image tell?
3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?
4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?
5. How does typography inform the context of the story?

APPENDIX D: Visual Analysis of Magazines.

Best Cover Contest 2011: House and Home contest category

Architectural Record, December 2009

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** This cover consists of a scene that combines a very natural, organic forest landscape with a modern, geometrically edgy cube set in the middle of the tree base. The cube in the tree is covered in a shimmered coating on the cover of the magazine, which gives the reflective sides a mirrored effect. The image is so striking that it is hard to know whether it is a photograph of a real scene, or if it is an illustration of some kind. The entire image was a prototype of a planned architectural project, which has since been built. The structure in the image serves as just one of many hotel rooms from this particular architectural project, located in Sweden.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** From this cover, I can see that the feature story will have to do with highlighting some of the most innovative architecture. It is clear that the architecture of the structure is innovative and literally pushes the limits of 3-dimensional structure design. There is an interesting contrast between the hard edges of the structure and the natural, unstructured form of the forest holding it in place. However, the structure uses a material that reflects and takes on the scene of the landscape surrounding it, which suggests that the specific story behind this structure is one about finding an aesthetically beautiful way of combining the natural and man-made worlds.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** At first glance, the image almost looks like a photo illustration because it is unlike anything I've ever seen in the natural world. It seems as if the architect who created this prototype hopes to convey a message about how we can use the stark beauty of modern architecture to connect us with the natural world in a way unlike we've ever experienced. The location of the building on the tree evokes an idea of a childlike tree house, but the construction of the cube is much more sharp (and a bit less welcoming) than that of a more 'traditional' tree house that might be in a backyard.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** The colors used are from a natural palette, and contrast with the shimmered paper treatment to the mirrored walls of the cube. The color scheme is very natural and organic: the blues and greens in the image are very realistic, and are true to outdoor reality. The colors used in the cube are not quite so natural, however. The silvery sheen is almost space-like, evocative of a one-way mirrored window or a bright window that reflects the colors and lights reflecting off of it. The use of color adds another dimension to the cover magazine, and brings the image to life.

- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The use of type on this cover is very light, but also very appropriate. The thin, sans serif typeface used on the sell lines complements the bold typeface used on the title of the magazine. The design of the type wrapping around the cube structure works well because it allows attention to be drawn to the image itself. On this specific issue, type was also used above the title of the magazine, which is a treatment that is not typically used on the cover of *Architectural Record*.

***Coastal Living*, April 2010**

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** The image on this magazine cover is a photograph of a coastal home in St. Croix. The tropical location is inviting and bright, where the vibrant, natural colors light up the landscape. The blues from the ocean, pool and sky are reflections of the perfect-looking locale, and the setting is very dream-like.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The scene tells a visual story of a vacation destination turned home. The owner, Twila Wilson, of the historical property preserved an 18th-century sugar mill and transformed it into her own home after visiting the location on vacation in the 1970s. The structure (and area) has since been hit with a number of devastating storms, but Wilson rebuilt each time. The most recent reconstruction included the pool overlooking the Caribbean Sea, complementing the carefree island themes in the construction and inviting readers to go on a visual vacation.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** The photograph on this cover conveys a very dreamy, fantasy-like story about this specific destination. There are no people in the image, but the beach chairs and open pool house allows the readers' imaginations take over and invite themselves in. The image conveys a message of peace and tranquility, bringing the reader to a vacation locale. The original photo that was taken for this feature story was retouched a number of times before it ended up on the cover in order to bring the theme of an island retreat to the reader and to ensure that cover lines were readable.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** The color is very important in this composition. The blues are very bright and help to distinguish a sense of dimension and location, and they contrast well with the sunshine yellow title of the magazine. Because the color scheme is so distinct, I can picture the region of the world in which this image was taken, even if I do not know the exact location.
- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The title of the magazine, *Coastal Living*, is set in a manner that expands across nearly the top third of the page. The largest cover line uses the same type, which tells me that this is a tease to the most important story inside the magazine. There are few other sell lines on the pages, which really allows the cover image to take center stage. The type complements the bright colors and cool tones on the page, and leads the reader onto the poolside and into the magazine.

GreenSource, January/February 2010

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** At first glance, the building on the cover looks like some kind of surreal architectural concept design. The image looks more like a projected image of what *will* be built, and less like a photograph of an already existing building. The angle of the photograph immediately gives scale, perspective, and significant height to the building. The content of the feature story being represented on the cover is about this architecturally green building that was built in Chicago, and is recognizable from the outside by its curved and waved design. This unique project was one that received a lot of attention not only in the city of Chicago but also in the entire green architectural and building community.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The emphasis of the cover image is on the outside features of the building, such as the size and shape of the structure – so I expect that the story will tell me more about these features. The image tells a story about a new hi-rise tower in Chicago that is being recognized for its sustainable features. It's called the Aqua Tower, and the building serves as a hotel and residence complex in downtown Chicago, and its curved shape gives the building a unique and recognizable space in the Chicago skyline.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** Photography is used to show depth, dimension, and importance. The cover image is of an ecologically friendly building that made headlines for its leading edge, groundbreaking sustainable design. The photography used on this cover immediately tells the reader that this structure is one that is groundbreaking and unique.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** The color is bright, and the composition of the building looks almost futuristic. The sky is an unedited striking blue that creates a movement with the building. The grey of the structure contrasting with the blue of the sky almost creates an illusion of texture, inviting the reader to examine the scene from his or her own perspective.
- 6. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The typography is clean, thin, and allows the image to visually take the lead. The type used in the cover line was researched and illustrated in an effort to complement the curves and shape of the building. The form of the type used was purposefully created to reflect the character and silhouette of the image itself.

Best Cover Contest 2011: Science, Nature and Technology contest category

Columbia, October 2009

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** The cover is an illustration of two pig's tails that wrap around each other in the form of a double helix DNA strand. Thinking back to 2009, I realized that this was a time when the swine flu was rampant – which is what the illustration is referring to. The illustration's most intriguing feature is the double helix unwrapping, suggesting that the feature story is about uncovering the science behind the virus.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The image tells the story of some of the background information about the swine flu - more specifically, the DNA component that somehow either makes up the flu or makes up the vaccination for this strand of the flu. The illustration addresses how a group of *Columbia* scientists studying the H1N1 flu uncovered the strain's genetic origins, and the overall effect of the illustration invites the reader to take a closer look at a visual representation of the makeup.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** This image is an illustration that was created by a freelance designer, who collaborated with Art Director Eson Chan to develop a visual representation of the science of the virus that is detailed so carefully in the story. The use of the images of the pigs combined with the DNA strand is a creative way to tell a visual story of the genetic makeup of the DNA strand.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** In this illustration, color does not seem to play as important of a role as the actual form of the illustration. The colors are a deep red and golden yellow, and are mostly used to show a little bit of contrast in the image.
- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** Very little type is used on this cover, which really draws the eye to the illustration itself. The only text says "Untangling swine flu" and is used in a small size, in order to draw the reader into the cover and then inside the magazine to the feature.

National Geographic, April 2010

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** From both a literal and conceptual perspective, the reader can see right away that the message of this issue of *National Geographic* is about water. The visual content on the cover uses water both as a typographical element as well as an illustrative element, giving the cover three-dimensional effect. Based on the cover design, it is obvious that this is a special issue that carries the 'water' theme throughout the entire issue of the magazine.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The visuals on the cover of the magazine offer the readers a tease about what will be inside the pages of the magazine, but leaves the actual content of the inside pages up to the imagination. Instead of using an image of water, which might be an obvious design option, a photograph is not

used at all - rather, droplets of water are used in order to give the reader a visual taste of the textual content.

- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** This issue is unique because it is rare that *National Geographic* does not use a photograph on the cover of the magazine. The droplets of water on the image paired with the glossiness of the cover paper gives the illusion that the cover was left out in the rain. This issue was also very successful in newsstand sales, which is an indicator of its popularity.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** Color is only used for the type, which brings attention to the text on the cover in its size, style, and color. The recognizable yellow rectangle remains in its standard place, which makes it easily identifiable as an issue of *National Geographic Magazine*.
- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The type is used in a large, colorful manner. The text "Water: Our Thirsty World" is laid out in bright blue, a color that is largely associated with water. The text gives the reader a better idea of the content by pointing out that the water will be discussed in terms of a thirsty world, which narrows down the story topics in an effective manner.

The New York Times Magazine, June 14, 2009

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** There are two covers for this specific issue. It is the 2009 Architect Issue, so both covers have images that represent architecture in some way. One cover is a brightly colored, detailed sketch of a cityscape. The other cover image is of a cross-section of one block of a city. This image is of a sculpture that was made to showcase a cross-section illustration of a city block, from the ground up.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** Both covers tell the story of architecture in some form, whether it is in the form of a rendering of a city from a bird's eye view or a close-up of a home and the land it's built upon. The theme of the issue was about infrastructure, so both covers were visual representations of framework that were either urban or future in nature. These two covers represented the information inside of the magazine, which brought attention to contemporary architecture.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** Both cover images are illustrations that show complex details on a large scale, which is a difficult balance to strike. They each offer their own interpretation of a futuristic cityscape that is made for a large population to inhabit, and they offer unique visual ideas of what this framework might look like in the future.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** Both cover images use bold colors that paint a vibrant picture of a section of a city. The use of color plays up the idea that these illustrations are bold, new, and exciting. The colors are bright

and attractive, and invite the reader to take a closer look at the intricate details in each of the renderings.

- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** Although the two covers are visually different, typography is used in a similar manner. The same typeface is used on each cover differ in size and color, but both uses allow the eye to understand the image as well as the text. On these covers, type is used as a consistent element, which allows the reader to understand that these are two covers of the same issue.

***Outside*, November 2009**

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** The cover image is cold, icy and still. From first glance, I cannot tell if it is a photo that was set up or arranged in a studio, or if it is an actual photograph that was captured in a cold, icy location. The issue is their “Survival” issue, and is filled with stories all relating to survival in the outdoors. To illustrate this idea, *Outside's* photographer Dan Winters explored profile-style of photography combined with the effects of ice and liquid nitrogen and combined the two elements to create the image on the cover.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The broken ice almost looks like broken glass, and the visual story tells me that I’m going to be told a story that is bitter, or even life threatening. The cover represents a series of stories inside the issue, which are all related to the theme portrayed on the cover.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** The photograph is composed in a way that tells the stories on the interior of the magazine. The style in which the photograph was taken
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** The color palate is very cold, and is a stark contrast to *Outside's* warm logo on the top of the cover. The image is very captivating and arresting, and makes the reader stop to think about what might be on the inside. The color palate sets the visual tone for the content of the stories inside the magazine.
- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The type is used in a way that complements the image well. The type uses the same cool color palate, and the slate blue and wintry white is great tools that place me in a very cold location. The size of the type is large and bold, and tells me that this is a story that I don’t want to miss – it almost makes me feel as if I am risking my own life if I don’t read it!

Best Cover Contest 2012: Science & Nature contest category

OnEarth, March 2011

- 1. What content is represented in this cover design?** The cover story is a photo illustration that visually tells the main feature story inside the magazine. It consists of an outdoor landscape where two bears are interacting in what seems to be their natural habitat. The bears seem friendly and playful, although their natural surroundings seem very cold and potentially uninhabitable by humans.
- 2. What kind of story does the image tell?** The story is about how climate change is beginning to merge the geographical habitat barriers of the grizzly bear and polar bear. For the first time, the two species are now interbreeding in a less-than-ideal environment. The art director and illustrator wanted to find a way to display these two species in a way that was both natural but also intriguing, so they created this illustration to place both species of bears in the same setting.
- 3. In the composition of this cover design, how is photography (or illustration) used to convey a message?** Photography is used to portray a specific tone for the issue and cover story. The bears appear to be comfortable and content, yet at the same time the photo is a visual play on a very serious issue. The photograph brings the reader to the natural habitat of the bears, and gives a perspective of their life that many readers might not be able to see in person.
- 4. How does the use of color influence the cover design?** The use of cool colors brings the readers to an arctic location, which is where the story is taking place. Another important aspect of color on this cover is the color of the bears, because I can immediately see that there is a grizzly bear interacting with a polar bear. Setting these two animals together in the same place is surprising, and is a visual foreshadowing about the content in the story.
- 5. How does typography inform the context of the stories presented on the cover?** The text “Arctic Fever” on the cover of the magazine is evocative of the famous Spike Lee film “Jungle Fever.” This is another element of design that can evoke specific emotional reactions or memories from specific readers who may be familiar with the film, and allows readers to connect with the cover design in that way. Readers who do not immediately recognize the reference can still understand the tone of the story based on the other, non-type elements of design on the cover of this issue.

APPENDIX E: Interview Transcripts.

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD & GREENSOURCE

Francesca Messina, Senior Group Art Director, McGraw-Hill

Could you begin by telling me about your role at McGraw-Hill?

I am the Editorial Creative Director of McGraw-Hill's group of business-to-business magazines that serve the architecture and construction professions. My role is a broad editorial role that really is a partnering role with the editors and the business side as well to form and shape editorial content visually, with words and images. In this stage of the magazine industry, there is great overlap in the creation of editorial and visual elements. My role is to guide and shape the visual identities of each magazine and the brand, and to make sure that a consistent set of standards is set for the best practices, in terms of the design both in print and also in digital formats. I consider myself a word person as well as a visual person. My basic philosophy is that the design solution is driven by the content and the words, always. One of the guiding principles that I always use is that I have to understand the story is before I try to tell the story with design, information graphic, or visual images. I'm a storyteller, basically! And my staff is made up of word journalists and storytellers first.

My greatest joy is the collaborative process of working with editors who are authoritative in their field. Also, my equal greatest joy is to partner with really fantastic artists and photographers to create singular new images. Those are the things that I really love most about my work.

Of these covers, which is your personal favorite?

I'd like to say that my favorite covers are the ones that I have done more recently, because there are always reasons for improvement. If I had to choose, which I really hate to do – and not because of any process or thinking reason – but the January 2010 cover of *Record* happened to be a spectacular image. That Stephen Hall project, which is called Linked Hybrid, is a really significant architectural project, so I would have to say that, of this bunch, that is the cover that I like. I also really enjoyed working on the Design Vanguard cover, but if you really want to know, I think that we have done better covers since these. But, since I am covering this particular group and have to choose, I would choose that.

I've been working with a different Art Director since the time I worked on these covers, and I think that we have really taken the covers to a whole other level. We did a really incredible issue that was the 10th anniversary of 9/11; it was an assessment of where New York is today, 10 years later, and that was a really seminal cover and issue for us...so there are several issues that really stand out. We have changed the cover design, and we've changed the typography. We are trying to improve with every issue.

Could you choose a least favorite?

Sure, but I never would put out a cover that I didn't think was a good cover, and the cover is the most important page of the magazine – no question. Most favorite to least favorite for *Record* – but again, just for this group, because I think we've done better covers since. The Stephen Hall City of the Future would be the best, and I was not really happy about the cover Transit Takes off – I just didn't feel that that was a really focused cover. I also didn't feel that Urban High Life was our best cover, either. I guess Urban High Life would be my least favorite.

In terms of *GreenSource*, obviously the Curves of the Chicago cover was just a perfect cover image. It said it all. I really want to emphasize that covers are about composition, and words, and the image coming together – and the headline and the image need to really work together and both be as smart as possible. The Curves over Chicago was one of our best *GreenSource* covers, but again I think we have done better ones since. My least favorite is the one that's called Oh My Omega. We were really struggling with that cover, and just kind of ran out of time.

The Vanguard Issue is really a great issue because we highlight what we call “emerging architects.” They are not always young architects, but they're architects whose practices are coming to some kind of place of recognition, so we are basically telling our audience that these are people to watch. The Design Vanguard issue traditionally is an overview of portfolios of 9 or 10 architectural firm's projects, so it's a portfolio of the firm's work. Not all of this work has necessarily been produced – some of these are just designs that have never been executed. This [cover design] actually has been executed. It was a design for a hotel room in the Netherlands, and it was just so surreal. A lot of the thinking behind the Vanguard projects is exactly that - thinking *outside* of the box. It's stuff that's astonishing and inventive. This was literally a room built in the tree. What we did on this cover that you can't see: the Art Director that I was working with at the time knew a fair amount about the printing process. He worked with the printer to do a photographic, metallic effect on the box itself so it shimmered in print. So that was an extra touch we did on the cover. That cover – in terms of its design - the image was obviously so arresting that it caught your attention. Would I do the type touching to the box again? Probably not. But it seemed to make sense at the time. It was one of the few covers we've ever done where we put type above the logo – partly as a design conceit to really deal with the cover composition, but also because we were using a consumer magazine mindset, and on the newsstand, that real estate is considered very prime, and it's a way to highlight extra content. We used the silver on the logo, to – so it was a really shimmery cover.

Did you anticipate that these covers would win the ASME & Amazon.com award?

For the ASME Cover Contest – it's a fun contest to enter, but it's a member's choice contest. So it's not entirely voted on by a jury of design professionals; it's voted on by people who log onto Amazon. So I think of it in a populist term: it's not necessarily a juried design competition, but it's sort of fun to see what people like – and of course, I try to get all of my friends to vote! – But I think we knew that it was really an arresting image. And obviously, the whole point of the cover is to stop you in your tracks and to say, “Whoa, what is that?” But it has to be something that would have that reaction for an architect. So we are always very aware of, “What would our readership – our community, as we like to call them – what is going to make them say, Whoa?” In this case, it's just a

very singular and arresting image. It's very surreal, and the design makes you wonder, "What is this?" Even the reflection of the tree in the bottom of the cube gives it a very otherworldly feel. I guess we knew that it was a little whack, and astonishing in a good way.

Could you tell me about how *GreenSource* was designed, as well?

There is actually a story behind that! We are always very careful to not use images that have been manipulated or distorted that don't really show the architecture as it really is. In other words, if we are using an architectural shoot that has been sent to us or given to us by an architectural firm, sometimes an image may have been manipulated for marketing purposes to make it look pretty – a car that was driving by that has been retouched out, or a lamp, or something. We are very careful to really want to know how close this is to the reality of the project, because we feel that we have a journalistic obligation to our community, to architects, to show projects as they really exist. We can't strip out detail; we don't accept wide-angle lens images that distort the shape of the design of the architecture. In this case, we got the image and it looked way too perfect to us! The sky looked like it was completely retouched. We almost rejected it. We went back to the photographer and we said, you have to tell us if this was really how that building looked at that moment. Have you severely retouched or stripped-in the sky? Have you changed the lighting in the image? He swore up and down that that was really the moment – it was a perfect lighted moment, and that was the really sky behind the image, and we decided to run it.

This is one of those covers that came together. Sometimes we get a little lucky. Every cover has its own agony. In this case, the thing about *GreenSource* that is not really apparent to most people is that it is printed on uncoated paper. It was at this time – we just changed the paper stock. The printing process for uncoated stock, which is very highly environmentally rated, is really difficult. The ink absorbs into the paper in a way that makes the printing process a little more unknown. We really didn't know how the cover would look in print until we got it – it could have really kind of been a lot muddier – though our pressmen do an admirable job, it's a very difficult printing process. So we were very happy that it looked good – and, obviously, the digital file can always look good. But the cover itself printed really well and we were happy about that. So, we had a feeling it would get some attention. Also, just in our community, this is a major project – this project in Chicago by an up-and-coming architect at the time, named Jeanie Gang, was something that was really noted. So we knew editorially it was sort of a significant cover – it had a lot of good things editorially going for it, and it was just one of those perfect synergies. However, the Art Director worked hard to get that font. He did a lot of font research to find a font that was curvy, in just the right way. Even the little dingbat was carefully chosen, because it had certain curves that he hand-drew. So everything about this was something that was considered, but it the image was a perfect cover image, so that helped a lot.

What do you know about your audiences for each of the two magazines?

They are not an overlapping audience at all – *Architectural Record* right now is a subscriber-based magazine that goes to members of the architectural profession. Basically, most of them are registered architects – I don't know the exact percentage who are and aren't – but I would say that a majority of our subscribers are registered architects that go through a certification process that has to be constantly updated by the

American Institute of Architects. We have about 90,000 subscribers at the moment, and we are a targeted niche publication that goes to architects. Architecture Record is 120 years old, and has always served the architecture profession.

GreenSource is an association publication. It's not a subscriber-based publication. You can subscribe, but the bulk of the readership is members of the US Green Building Council, the USGBC. So they get this magazine as part of their membership fee, so it's automatically sent to them, so it's a very different business model. That goes to about 45,000 readers. And we also have the websites for both magazines, to extend our reach – there is overlap: there are many architects who subscribe to *GreenSource*, but the US Green Building Council also has contractors and other professionals who are members who are not architects, so there is a broader base of readership.

Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?

It's all about serving the audience. Our editors have an incredible base of experience and long-term relationship with our audience. The managing editor of *GreenSource* really knew her audience – she recently left, but she had been at the helm of the magazine for years. We know our audience because we're out there talking to them every day. The editors have very deep, long, close relationships with the architects and the green building professionals on every level. So the reason why we know our audience is because we're talking to them. We also do editorial surveys every year that our publisher conducts to really see what sections of the magazine and what presences (in terms of digital and print) they are looking at the most. We want to get a sense of how they spend their day interacting with the brand online and in print. We really have a deep, ongoing conversation with our communities, and that's how we know what they like. We don't invent a prototypical reader; we are actually talking to our readers all the time, and sharing that information with each other. I try to learn from the editors who are talking to the architects and other professionals what they're hearing, because I have less direct contact with them.

If you are not serving your audience – especially in a business-to-business – we are not serving a generalist audience...we are a targeted niche publication and it goes to a specific industry, so we have to know what they want from us. Otherwise, we can't possibly be successful. If we are a general consumer interest magazine, it's a little bit more about saying "this is what we think you want to know." But with a niche business-to-business magazine, it really has to be "we're giving you the information you need to do your business." ...That inspires people.

So it's safe to say that you are always thinking about your audience?

Always, always.

Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is most important for you to know about?

In general, just as any real strong editor's editor has a strong instinct about what their audience wants. In other words, they don't always just take it as face value – the answers to surveys, or from focus groups – they take all of that information, but in their gut, they know what their audience wants almost before their audience know it themselves. The best editors I've worked with are like that, and as an editorial design director, you have

to do the same. You have to trust your gut about what is the best way to present the story and know that, if you think you've done your job, then you will guide someone through the pages of the magazine and they will be engaged and pleased by the way you've presented the content. As this point, I do trust my instincts – as much as the information I get. I think that the best work is done when you allow yourself to do both, not to just strictly design or edit by survey. People say things when they are asked – you know, if asked “Do you like this section of the magazine?” and they'll say, “Oh yes, I love that section of the magazine!” – there's a lot of variation. You can lead people to say certain things. So you have to have a mix of a really strong vision yourself of what you think the magazine should be to best serve its audience and to listen very carefully to what they do say about what they like and don't like. And we get feedback – if we are doing something that is unclear to the readers, they will tell us. And that I take very seriously. Could our drawings be done better? Is an image the best presentation of an architectural project? If we get feedback about that, I do take it very seriously. And we adjust, all the time.

Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

Architects specifically are the most visually astute audience that I've ever served as a publication designer. They know everything about the grid. They understand the different messages, the different typefaces. They're very knowledgeable about fonts; they're very knowledgeable about photography, because they take photography of their own work. It's almost like serving a peer audience, because they're incredibly design savvy. When I worked for Business magazine, that wasn't the case – the average CEO couldn't tell you a font that's other than Arial, Georgiana, or Verdana. They're not very astute. Now, that's not the case all the time, but that's not their main focus. Architects practice a visual craft. They are designers in 3 dimensions – I'm just a designer on 2 dimensions, most of the time. So they are thinking on an even broader sense. I think about the way they see the pages of the magazine all the time, and try to really make them clear and logical. They are very, very attuned to rationale – and logic. And why the grid is used a certain way. And consistency. And all of those things are the foundations of good editorial page design anyway, so it's a synergistic process because of that. Always – good storytelling is good journalism, and visual journalism is the same as any other journalism focus. That is really the bottom line. Trying to be clear, accurate, correct in what you're presenting, and the fun part is making it incredibly dynamic and compelling. It's just like writing a good story. If you are designing a really good, smart, solution for a layout, it will be incredibly dynamic and engaging, and make you say “Wow” on some level, and keep you engaged. Especially now - this applies to keeping someone's attention in multiple formats, not just print, because there's a lot of ways to get information. In the end, I call *Architectural Record* the “glass of wine” moment, because there is that aspect to print still that I believe in. At the end of a long day, our audience has interacted with us on the web, they've gotten e-newsletters from us, they've gotten blasts of other kinds, and they have engaged in terms of our social media components, they have probably read a blog or commented or done something online during the day that relates to their work. At the end of the day, they want to sit down with the print magazine because it's inspiring and informative – but most of all, it's inspiring. And that's why I call it the “glass of wine” moment. They want to kick back and be entertained and informed and inspired by the print magazine.

COASTAL LIVING

Jennifer Madara, Design Director

That one was a little bizarre in how much it was a Frankenstein cover. We rarely do that much retouching. Usually, I might change the sky simply because I want more dramatic, prettier clouds, or something like that – but for that one, I was moving trees, and chairs, and adding flowers...so there was a little bit more going on.

I worked at House and Garden from 2000 to when it closed [in Nov 2007]. That folded, and that was the first decorator's magazine that closed at the beginning of the problematic economy. From there, they fell like dominoes. A whole bunch of them folded.

It's funny because right now I'm doing a special project for Southern Accents, which also folded also. I work for Time Inc., and there is a technicality that if you produce about twice per year (or whatever) per year with that name on the cover, you still own the rights to that name, so if you ever want to start up that magazine again, you can. So I am working on what's called a special issue for Southern Accents, where we basically use old content but I redesign it and it gets put on the newsstand.

And your role as Design Director of *Coastal Living*?

It's hard to make the jump. When I was at House and Garden, I worked with a wonderful team. It was wonderful because it was an opportunity for me to be promoted to be top gun, and I also loved the content. It's a casual mix of casual, laid-back, friendly but also some real taste and elegance. It's wonderful subject matter – a mix of travel, and food, and decorating, and it could be a lot of fun.

The difference in being a designer versus a design director is 1) you're helping create content. You're throwing out ideas because an idea can come from the visual – it doesn't always have to come from the Editor. 2) How you'll present the idea. You bounce around ideas and suggestions, but it's really the design director's responsibility to figure out about how they want to present it, because then they have to go about creating the visuals. So you're taking a photographer and a stylist and a location, you're deciding whether you want something illustrated, or however it should be done. And then, you see it through to the final production. Sometimes you wouldn't be actually doing the layout yourself, but all layouts are shown to you. I created the core fonts and the aesthetic, and little elements that we would use – and also the framework – certain things like columns, whether it's a five-column grid. Sometimes I'm a little looser – as long as it feels consistent throughout the well in the big stories – as long as it's consistent throughout the treatment of that story, I don't feel that every single story has to have the same grid.

I think that the hardest adjustment when moving from a designer to a design director is that you're used to doing things yourself. I'm used to being hands-on, I'm used to being the one to design it. As designers at House and Garden, we would use talk to each other and throw out suggestions and ideas and little comments. It's different when you're the design director because there's a whole management element of it – you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. But at the same time, at the end of the day, you are the one that is being judged for the quality of the work. Sometimes it goes smoothly, and sometimes things need to be re-vamped. Overall, I was happy with the team I had and what we came up with. I think we came up with some fun pages that I am proud to say I worked on.

In terms of typefaces, everyone is different. I knew I wanted a serif font that would work. I like full families; I like the ones that have the whole range of weights. I think Chronicle is a typeface that Jonathan Hoefler had designed, from Typography.com. It actually used to be used at InStyle, which is how I came across it – I had never seen it before. It's quite friendly, but yet the serifs have an extra light face that can be used real big, and the serifs are still and nice and pretty and elegant; it's not too heavy or horsey. Requiem was a little bit more feminine than I wanted to go, and Dido a little harsh. I thought Chronicle was a nice middle-of-the-road.

Sometimes, budget goes into it too! We were using Myriad Pro, just because Time Inc. owned it already. I wanted to switch over to Interstate, but the problem with Interstate is that you have to pay for every single weight, and there's 5 million weights, so it would have been quite expensive. When you use fonts for a magazine, you have to pay for every single person who might be using that font – that ranges through advertising, marketing, production, designers – that could be 50 people that you have to pay for using that font. So you have to be quite sure you're going to use it before you pay for a big family. In the end, Myriad, in my mindset, was working fine and wasn't that bad, so why spend the money to switch? We kind of had them as our base fonts and every once in a while I would throw in something quirky. For a while there, we were using a handwriting font called Screwgoo (?), which now has been used all over the place like Panera bread, and now it just hurts me too look at it. But at the time, I liked it! We bought Screwgoo, but if we used a little quirky font we would just convert it to outlines so we wouldn't have to get into the technical aspect. I actually had this wonderful guy who would help me illustrate distressed fonts, so they looked like they had been letterpressed or woodblocked, so we used that element a lot too for certain things. So that had a nice casual thrown bit thrown in.

Some art directors have very set color palates that they will use throughout the whole magazine. I know that InStyle for a while was just using red and black, they had no other color. My mindset was – we had colors that we used, and we had some that were fallbacks, but basically it matched up with the art that was used in the story so it looked fresh, bright, and friendly. Sometimes you don't need much color – black used against the colors in the photography is a nice way, also. There's always that line there: you still want it to be fresh and friendly, or casually elegant – you try to balance where to use energy and where it's a little more restrained.

That's another thing as design director – you're worrying about pacing of the whole magazine, you're worrying about the flow of the magazine, the order of the pages so that you don't have pages next to each other that look too similar. For us, in the well, we wanted some people in there with energy, some quiet prettiness, you wanted to make sure that you had stories where the decorating didn't look the same for each one. We always tried to make sure we had fantasy beaches in there. So there's an awful lot going on, and you're pulled in all different directions. It's hard, but you have to make sure you just get all of your work done and don't snap at people because it's not their fault. But in the end, if you have a really good team, everyone is proud of what they've done and it looks really good.

Another interesting aspect is the transition between the print magazine and the digital app. We design the whole magazine for print, and then we turn around and design the whole thing for iPad, which is one format and one size. Then, we redesign it again for the Nook, which is a longer, narrower vertical format. Print is not dead, but more and more,

the skill set needs to be in digital. There's way more elements that can be worked in with that, and it's really interesting and fun. I've been working on that, too.

In a more general sense, what can you tell me about your readers and how they influence you?

Coastal Living covers are a little bit different. Our readers leave them out on their coffee table. For a while, we tried the idea of 'the fewer cover lines the better' – because you can't block the view! It's a fantasy for them, and they want to be able to imagine themselves there. Our covers at the time always had a sweep of water and blue sky. We rarely, if ever, did interior covers. So that made it quite hard sometimes. Most of the time, the photo had to link up with the story inside the magazine. Rarely could you just pick a beautiful stock photo of the water; the subject matter had to be linked inside. There are times where I'll go through hundreds of images to try to pick the cover image. That is the hardest part for me. But once we get the image, the cover lines get worked over. They want a big cover line that draws your attention and sucks you in, but tells you something that's happening in the magazine. You also need texture. You want to have a little bit of energy. I'm not a fan of, for example, all cover lines in the upper left, flushed left, all the same point size, stacked. I try to add in a little bit of texture with the italics, or mix in some black serif with a bolder, all-caps font. It can't feel too heavy, and it can't feel like too much work; read at a glance, bright and friendly. There is definitely an approach and an aesthetic to the covers that they would be excited to get it and look at the inside of it.

Why do you think this specific cover won the award?

I don't remember the other covers that we were running against, but I think that the little touches on that photo – like the curtain blowing in the wind, and the little hint of the interior...you could just visualize yourself sitting in one of those lounge chairs. I think there's a fantasy element to that. And yet there's a casualness to it – it didn't look like some high-end resort. I think that there is also a comfiness to it. And the bright yellow logo against the blue sky...it was a nice cover.

Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?

I think we hit the right note. Sometimes our readers were just a little bit older, because it was people that were doing well enough to have second homes at the beach. But our argument was that the magazine was also for people who wished they had a home at the beach, or liked to travel to the beach for vacation. My mindset was that anyone that likes the beach also has a fresher, younger attitude. Our reader was well off, and if not well off, at least had good taste...with a little bit of enjoyment of kitsch. And, honestly part of it was my own aesthetic and mindset – and I created the aesthetic, but I still had to get it approved. So if they didn't agree with me, we had to go back to the drawing board. That was the note we were trying to get across: that it's about the beach, it's about the lifestyle, it's about relaxing and hanging out. So it could be a little more casual and fresh and friendly – it could also be information, but I didn't want anyone to work too hard. I tried to not make everything too dense and heavy. We had our list of things that I tried give a little bit of energy, where I tried to throw in a photo of a pretty girl or a cute boy or that kind of thing. I felt we were really lucky – we really hit the approach of the magazine, and that it really matched the aesthetic.

Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is most important for you to know about?

Well, do you remember me saying that we tried really, really hard to use a photo that was within the magazine, and liked up with the story? Well, there was one issue – July or August 2009 – where we had the hardest time finding an image. There was a snorkeling story that listed the best places to snorkel. The places that we were talking about were mainly in the Caribbean. But I found this image of a woman in a red and white polka dot bathing suit with yellow flippers, and she's swimming along with her snorkel...and there's a little bit of an island with this read roof on it, and it was just perfect. Well, it turns out it was in the Maldives, or something like that! So basically, we ran a photo that illustrated snorkeling, but we got several readers writing in, wanting to know about where that location was and more information about it. Because obviously, it was a beautiful place – but we gave no information about it inside. So things like that...sometimes there would be some little object in a home that readers loved, and they wanted to know where to get it. It would be something that was just the homeowner's! So we would have to track it down, try to find out where they got it. Readers also would rip out the pages and say that they did that same trip, or that they were inspired to do a trip...that kind of thing. We rarely got grumpy, complaining feedback.

Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

Definitely! It's a puzzle: for whatever the article is, you want to make it interesting and suck them in – but you also have to make it come across clearly what the story is about. So, it's a puzzle on several different levels. In magazines, it's different from graphic design in the sense that, in graphic design, you can come out a different aesthetic and printer and paper for every project you work on. When you're in magazines, you have a set size, set paper, set CMYK, set ink, you have a set aesthetic that's defined as type treatment that you want to feel consistent throughout the whole magazine – so you've already determined that. And then, you're working as a puzzle for that specific piece. You want to make it friendly, approachable. You don't want them to work too hard, you want it easily understood. Sometimes that's a fight with the designers who want to do something big and dramatic, but you only have three spreads, and so you'll have to cram more copy in. Sometimes it's a compromise and sometimes they'll let you do those big fantasy layouts. But overall, it's something that would be interesting for the reader, where they get information or some sort of satisfaction out of it. It's different [for different magazines] – a Harper's Bazaar reader is just looking for something cool, so the photos can have more attitude. But we were more trying to always go friendly.

COLUMBIA

Interview with Eson Chan, Art Director

Can you start out by telling me a little bit about your role at *Columbia* and some of the duties that you take on?

I am a consultant, a freelancer. I technically have my own company, and I introduce myself as a designer, first and foremost before an editorial designer. I do love magazines, and at *Columbia* I have been working here for over 7 years, maybe 8 years...primarily as their magazine designer, as their freelancer. I like that component because...each

magazine has their own personality, and *Columbia* has, obviously, a very intellectual personality – great stories, great profiles, great people – compared to my other clients, it’s a different type of work, which is a lot of fun. I know that you found me through ASME, and our magazine was one of the (for a long time) one of the only non-profit and higher education magazines that was up against for-profit and private-sector magazines (retail magazines). When I talk about retail magazines, who I was up against, I mean *National Geographic*, *New York Times Magazine*, and so on. So it’s a different beast – it allows me to be a little bit more intellectual in terms of approach with subject matter, but without the fortune of having certain subjects. Meaning: it’s one thing if you have *Rolling Stone*, and you have Lady Gaga, and immediately that photo shoot is going to be contrived and marketed – and overly marketed – for a certain audience – and I have worked in the private sector, too – when you work in the private sector, a lot of it is predetermined by marketing and predetermined by focus groups – and because of that, you are limited in so many ways about how creative you can be per story. I think that in higher education, or in general interest magazines, our readership is aimed 22 - 80, 90, 100+ years old, being an alumni magazine, and so hopefully we can give a little bit of everything to someone. So that becomes my job – to take these wonderful stories, that might not have brand recognition, but to take them and to do them best we can possibly we can do with a) a limited budget (not a retail budget) and to give these personalities somewhat of a “rock star” approach. They deserve, because they are so interesting and good, they deserve to still have their story told in a high-end caliber, in a high way. Outside of that, I’m just a designer.

Do you enjoy this type of work more than private sector work, or is it more of just a different type of work?

It’s a different type of work. A little background: I started in non-profit higher education market – and by starting there, I understood that there was an area that wasn’t fully recognized.

At *Columbia*, we really do focus on rich storytelling that’s not development-based. Obviously, they want to be careful about the message – it’s still propaganda – but the reality is, they want to tell a good story. And I am really jazzed by that.

[Set of seven covers set out for designer to see.] Of these covers, which is your favorite? Which did you enjoy designing the most? Why was this your favorite cover experience from the covers presented?

The material that we generate, the material that I generate here, is sent to our readership no matter what. *Columbia* magazine has 280,000 readers. That’s a quarter of a million people we are hitting – times that by a household of 2.5 or just 2 people – that’s 500,000 people we are reaching out to. That’s pretty good for a college magazine! So, what I am trying to say is, that doesn’t mean we’re laid-back. That doesn’t mean we know we’re doing a good enough job. We don’t know! We just hope that readers are interested in opening up the magazine and reading it. We have no clue – they get the magazine regardless. They don’t need to subscribe, they don’t need to pay a penny, they don’t have to do anything. And so, if we don’t have anyone to push us, we have to be passionate and driven to do it ourselves.

So some of the magazines on the PDF are in our old design format. The 08/09 magazines and some of 2010 – some of these are in the old design. You can’t tell that here – but our

winner, Fall 09, and beyond was the old magazine. Winter 2009/2010 was our new design, and we moved forward. I was here since 2006/2005, and it took me forever to convince them to redesign the magazine. So looking at those old issues actually bothers me! But I get why – it makes sense. What was the question?

Of those covers, is there one that you liked the most, or one that you enjoyed designing the most?

It's amazing, because you focus on your ones that are your least favorite. Least favorite is Summer 2009. Sometimes, you don't know what your cover story is going to be until the very end of production. And then, you have to work with what you've got. If you don't go into it with – and every page with me has to be articulated, it's never ever thrown in – just because you find a good cover image doesn't mean that you can just pace it in and it just becomes a cover image. I think it has to be conceptually part of a system – not arbitrary, and not just because it's pretty – it's all part of a system. Here, our cover image fell off, and that was put in because she was attractive, she was an alum, and she was younger. It wasn't taken to be a cover image, which is why it looked bad. You can't even read the masthead, you can't read *Columbia*, type was bad, photo was bad, everything was bad, so it made me cringe a little. The next one to me that was sad, because execution wasn't good – even though people raved about it – was Winter 08/09, the Obama cover. I think we could have had a better cover, even though people liked it. I wanted it to look better.

Spring 10 was next, because it was a provided photo by the subject of the story. I like to create my covers. Winter 09/10 was next because she (Katherine Bigelow, the director of the *Hurt Locker*) couldn't do a photo shoot with me. But – we still found a way to illustrate her – we took found photos, and we had a stunning image that was conceptually interesting, but at the same time it's visual candy versus high in concept.

Next cover is Summer 10. He's a PBS guy, on *NOVA*, he's a really good guy, and he is the director of the Museum of Natural History and of the Planetarium here in NYC. It was trying to become working type, type and image together. We had the headline and moved it up into that space – he's always looking up into the stars. We had him a moonlit feel to his face.

The next one was Spring 2009, because the story was so strong. It is a story that needs to be told – unfortunately, it's a story about women in the military being sexually abused by their mates, colleagues, comrades, fellow soldiers, It's a horrible story, but we try to bring emotion to the story rather than taking a profile of somebody and making them the “face of great” – we tried to illustrate that lonely feeling, that ‘lesser of a person’ felling, whatever that may be. So having all of these men illustrated around her, her looking vulnerable, was a very strong conceptual approach.

Lastly, Fall 2009 because the swine flu epidemic was big – it captured the fear of the world. When you think of any plague, disease that can spread and kill – absolutely dangerous. We had, at *Columbia* University, some researchers who said – Hold on, this isn't as scary as one might take it. This is the science behind the swine flu, and this is going into and explaining why swine flu existed, why it can mutate into something dangerous, but right now it is not dangerous and it's based on the DNA and based on understanding swine flu at a very scientific level. Breaking it down all the way to the DNA strand. From there, hiring an illustrator to understand that concept, to try to get

that idea of how swine and DNA match and emerge, instead of showing scientists doing something boring we decided to do something interesting. As you can see, those tails form the DNA strand. A lot of it is conceptual back and forth, it was largely my push to say, we need to conceptually find a way to dramatically show the DNA with pigs, and somehow use the tails in the cover – he was the one who created the helix DNA strand. It is just a collaboration back and forth. I typically give him a long leash, to see what he could come up with, because as an artist, we want to be creative. We want to be able to present and communicate, and create, conceptually. It was a good combination of the two. Largely it starts with finding the right audience for it – very conceptual, clean, simple designs, witty. What drives the headline writing is the illustration, the image. We do want to marry the two, but illustration is king to me.

Did you anticipate this cover winning?

This was the only cover I entered! I am my own worst critic. I haven't entered ASME since. There are just certain things that you feel will work and could possibly win, but a lot of the designs, to me, well – no one on those covers, outside of Obama, is polarizing. We don't know, and I don't know, who any of those people are. So whenever you do find an image that you feel like can grab attention, you seize it. I don't feel like I have as many covers that can seize the moment as much as that one. And that was the only time I entered it.

What do you know about your audience and how do you consider them when you design?

Our market is New York City, and our audience is all over the country and all over the world. It's Columbia University, so it's an Ivy League School – smart school, smart readers. They should be intellectually challenged; they want to be intellectually challenged. And therefore, every design or story has to respect them as readers and has to respect their intellect and if we fail, why read our magazine? That's the overarching sentiment toward them, and then to know that they're New Yorkers. I'm a native New Yorker, and I think there's a cockiness to us, and we do have an attitude. We want to be challenged. If we are not trending, or if we are 2, 3, 4 years behind, then we've lost something, because New Yorkers are ahead of their time. If they know so much – the combination of being an Ivy Leaguer and a New Yorker, what can we share with them that they don't know? And to be fair, I truly believe that New Yorkers are probably the most sympathetic and most endearing people in the world – New York being a cosmopolitan city, coupled with intelligence, is my defining push.

Do you consider that group of people, that audience when you design? Or do you more consider those thoughts and feelings – the attitudes and that intellect level that you're trying to challenge?

They are always in the back of my mind. I think about – if I was a reader, would I be interested? That's how I see it. More so, I have to give the proper respect to the story. The story defines it, and the person, the profile, the research – that pushes it, and propels it to be the best. This is their one moment to be on the cover, to have 6 pages devoted to them – and I think they deserve to have – because all of their good work – they deserve to have the story be told in the best possible way in can be told.

Do you ever see reader comments or critique?

What I have found is that people don't really tell you that you've done a good job, that they are happy, that they love your work. The best compliment is that I don't hear anything, because I know I've reached them. Where I fail is when they do come and talk to me. I've received 2 hate mails in my entire life, and I think that's great, that's fine. I don't take it to heart.

Is there a certain kind of feedback that it would help for you to have, as a designer?

No, not really! I think people over think it. Design is over thought. I am a designer, and I love design, but it doesn't rule me, overcome me, become me. I think I have aesthetic taste, but that doesn't mean that everything needs to be aesthetically done. I think it should look pretty, I gravitate towards things that look pretty – but the reality is, lots of designers design for design's sake. They create these things not necessarily for the story, but just to be visually interesting. In editorial design, more importantly – my ego isn't big enough where I need them to care about my design. I think they need to care about the profile! That's more important. So if a story is told with a lesser image, I'll do that. Will it be my fault we use a lesser image? Yes. Can I come up with a better image to use? Absolutely. It's my job to make sure we have less bad images in the magazine and hopefully craft and conceptually create the magazine that I want to create for my subjects. If the subject provides a story and image that has to be used, I'm not going to argue with it because it may be pertinent for the story to be told. I just have to find a way to repackage it to make it better.

Do you think it's important to know about your audience? If so, what kind of information is it important to know about them?

It does, yes. You have to! You have to be relatable. If you design within a box, and you don't know who your audience is, you have failed, hands-down. I like general interest magazines, because I can relate to them. If I can't relate to [the market], then I can't design for that market and have no passion to do so. For me, why I like college and general interest magazine magazines, is that these stories are about politics one day, one sports one day, and economics another – you're focusing on X amount of stories that are so wide-ranging. My personal interests are so wide ranging – for example, I feel like I can go to a Yankees game one day, and go to the Met the next, so if I am able to do that, I believe I can relate to my audience in the same way. That's where the ego side comes in to say – if I pick up this magazine, is it visually challenging to me? Is it visually interesting to me? Is the headline interesting? Is it interesting enough to make me want to open it? On that level alone, it's egocentric, but that's how I understand my audience, in a very general way.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
Bill Marr, Creative Director

Can you begin by telling me a little bit about your role as Creative Director? I know you probably wear a lot of hats, but I'm curious about what your day looks like.

This department consists of a design group under Design Director David Whitmore, and we have 3 designers. We have an art group under Art Director Jaun Vilasco, who is in

charge of all information graphics and mapping. There are 8 people working in his department. The goal is to have them work together as much as possible, and to coordinate and visualize so that when we get a story and photography in, that the maps and graphics are not forgotten about, and that they are part of the story.

The other major part of the group is the production group, which includes assistance for all designers, graphic artists, and cartographers. Since the beginning of 2011, the iPad group has also moved into this department. When we are conceiving the ideas of maps and graphics and when photographers go out into the field, we think about what kind of videos they can be bringing back. As far as maps and graphics go, it's really helpful to be able to think about visualizing what's going to happen on the iPad with something that's going to be static. In some ways, it's almost better to start with thinking about what we can do in a motion world, and to start with that rather than print, because there are so many possibilities. It's sort of turning our head around in terms of how we approach things.

So that is basically this group – it's the production group, it's the people who design hands-on, coming up with creative content to help illustrate stories. The photography group is entirely separate – it's down the hall. Of course, that's the other big element of our magazine, is the photojournalism that goes on. But this department puts everything together.

One of the things that I've held onto is I'm still doing the cover - with Victoria Pope, who is the Deputy Editor, and the Director of Photography Kurt Munschler. We try to get together once a week, but a lot of times it's every other week, and we look down the line and see what stories are coming up, and work with picture editors and art directors and try to come up with good ideas for what could go on the cover.

What is your favorite part of your role? What do you look forward to?

This is a place where I learn something new every day. There are so many different kinds of stories we do here – we are a general interest magazine for earth sciences, environment...we have cultural work, documentary work – I love photography, I started in photography. I got my degree at Missouri in photography, in photojournalism. The visual world is something that I love very much. Coming to work here is always something new.

This last year, the iPad has really been, to me, a huge influence in how we start to approach things. Especially since it's coming to my department – we really have to think differently about what this magazine is, because the iPad is just another fresh part of the magazine, we're no longer just print. So, how do we stay true to what we are as a magazine, and our core topics – and the definition of what the *National Geographic Magazine* is? In print, it really shouldn't be any different when we get to the iPad, except in the iPad (or any other tablet device, since we'll be out in Kindle interactive pretty soon), you have the possibility of bringing so many different things – you can expand still photography with video. We did a piece with photographer Lynn Johnson, who shot a story on the apostles, and we just recorded her thoughts, and what was going through her head while she was working on the story. Not so much specific scenes, but about the whole concept of what faith is. Lynn is one of those photographers who not only can compose and bring beautiful pictures to life, but she can also speak so well – so it gave us another opportunity for another outlet.

[Set of seven covers set out for designer to see.] Of these covers, which is your favorite?

Oh, the Water! Because it was a special issue on water, it was one that we spent a lot of time coming up with a concept. This is one of those rare covers that really doesn't have a picture on it – it has the feeling of a picture. I think the last time we did that was maybe 4 years before, when we did a special issue on Africa, and had a small map of Africa. The goal of any of these things is to get people to pick up the magazine. For anybody who is doing covers of commercial publications/commercial magazines like ours, there is only one goal: it's to get people to pick it up, open it up, invite them in, read it, and in this case, buy it. The best feedback we get is from our newsstand sales. People vote with their money. People vote by picking it up and deciding "That's an interesting topic – I'm going to take it home and read it." We distribute the same number of issues to the same places every month, and we can have a swing of 50,000 copies from month to month – actually sometimes more, even - and it becomes really clear that there are some topics that people just love, and there are other topics that people don't like at all. For instance, on this sheet, Water sold really well. We did have some publicity around it, but mostly it's a topic that people can really relate to. The other topics on here: Wolf Wars did OK, and the Skull was average. The others were low sellers. Merging Man and Machine, Polygamy, Mt. St. Helen's, and Greenland were all pretty low. This is where we get into some navel-gazing, because no one can really tell us why they didn't sell as well. We can guess – we can guess that Polygamy in America is not really our core topic - people don't really expect *National Geographic* to be doing a current event topic on the cover. That's why we try to stay away from news. Even though we have a very long lead time, if we try to make it very topical – like something is happening now, that you need to know - people don't come to us for that. That's not our core. When we do something out of our core, people don't respond that well. They would rather pick up TIME Magazine to read about Polygamy – that's my two-cents about where that's coming from.

In Mt. St. Helen's, we didn't really say anything new about Mt. St. Helen's! We said new life, in a (blastoff??) – that's old news. And, it's a black and white picture. People didn't respond well to that. Greenland: Same thing. Two things there: One, Greenland is a nice destination, but we're not telling people to go there...we're going to talk about global warming. Even our readers, not just our newsstand buyers, are sick and tired of hearing about global warming. They want to know about how the world is going to change, not just beat the drum about global warming. They want to know what they can do, or what to expect because the change is coming. Again, that's my two-cents, not science talking. Merging Man and Machine: In hindsight, it may have been just a little bit cold, and impersonal. Maybe we should have put a human face on it.

Rank them for me, from favorites to least?

Most covers from 2011, I like a lot better – and from this year! This is from a period where I don't think we were doing our best covers.

Last year, for instance, we did a story on Cleopatra in the July issue – it actually was artwork. The art itself won a gold medal from the American Society of Illustrators. Usually, we don't do a lot of art on the cover, so it's a bit rare. But this one worked great! We did another piece of art in the November issue of 2011 called Medieval Mysteries. That one actually did well on newsstands. It's a topic that people love – medieval, history, ancient civilizations – our readers and people who buy us at the newsstand, are

attracted to. And it's a nice piece of art – it worked well. I liked our January issue, Twins. That issue was one where we brought the photographer back in, we did another cover shoot because we didn't have the pictures we needed, and we decided to do something a little bit different than what was inside. We wanted them standing side by side; we didn't want to take two separate pictures. We made the conscious decision that it needed to be a studio photograph, rather than a documentary photograph from the field. The current Titanic issue that's out right now is probably the best seller we've had in 3 years. Don't ask me why! People love the Titanic – it's just one of those topics – sometimes topics just really sell.

A while ago – it was either Men's Health or Men's Journal – we were talking to the guy who set that magazine up a number of years ago, and he swears that they go through a rhythm or routine of cover lines – you cannot say “6-pack abs” often enough! People never get tired of it, and it's always a selling point. It says something about magazine buyers, and even magazine readers: they come to expect certain things. We may do science stories like Twins, and even the science of the Titanic, and archaeology, and some of the earlier earth science topics – they are all very much *us*. They help define us. I think when you look back to 2010 – when you look at these covers, they are flat compared to what we are doing now. We made some adjustments about 9 months ago, where we just decided to be a little more fun.

Tell me about this award winning cover. How was it designed? I read about how you worked with a slab of Formica coated with car polish, and water was carefully added...tell me more?

We worked together to find different spray patterns – we used a lot of water, less water, different colors of Formica. Formica naturally has a bit of a bite to it, a texture to it. We found that when we tried something completely smooth like glass, it reflected too much. So, we kept going back to a grey Formica. Essentially, we were looking for a nice pattern of drops that was spread evenly over the whole area of cover at the right size. One he took that, I basically took the file into Photoshop and built them and multiplied them into all the layers of the cover to create the feeling that the type was also under the water. And THAT is Photoshop.

We are printed in about 28 languages, and this is the first time (that I've ever seen) where every partner chose the Water cover. It's very impressive to see the display of all of them together of Water in different languages. It made a very nice poster.

Why do you think this cover won the award?

Don't know. I think there's a simplicity to it. It's not ambiguous. It's not asking the readers – or, the judge in this case – to make any choice, except curiosity. The idea of the droplets gives it a very nice tactile feel. Especially when you have the newsstand edition, which has a bit more of a gloss to it than the home editions do. We put a laminate on the newsstand edition, so it's much glossier than what you'd get at home. And, it's just a nice, simple thing.

The other thing that I should say about covers, if there's anything I have learned over the last 6 years doing covers, is that 95% of the time, it's not the image that sells cover; it's the words. I hate that idea – coming from my background, I feel that that should not be the proper attitude. If I told that to the picture editors down the hall, they would think

I'm crazy. But especially working with some of our marketing guys, Terry Day in particular, who is head of out circulation – so much of this resides in the message that you give people. And most of that message is in the words, not in the image. You can have images that are incredibly gorgeous and thought provoking, but if you don't have the right words with them it's not going to sell. Or, it's not going to relate to people in the same way. Likewise, you can have really fantastic words and a crummy background image, and it really won't matter. I have seen that in action – where we have had good cover lines but didn't have a great picture, so we did what we could, and it sold fine.

When you finished designing it, did you anticipate that it would be award winning?

We hoped. There is no way of knowing. I think that I have learned not to expect anything to do well – I hold my breath every month. I never would have expected Titanic to sell like it did, but people are just interested in that thing.

But likewise, going out the door with something like Twins, it was a big gamble. If you look at the number of stories we've done, we have done 3 religion stories in the last year, and usually religion does well for us. Certain topics that we know – certainly science, and space usually does well – with Twins, it's a bit of a funny story. It's right up our alley, because it is a science story, but it's a bit hard to describe. So we have to find ways of giving a hint of what the story might be without making it seem too ominous or too much like a long dirge into a lecture. But this is actually a fun story.

What can you tell me about your readers and how they influence you?

Well, we have 2 audiences. One is the newsstand, which I've been talking about. They're hard to really pin down, because we really can't get a definitive read on the typical newsstand buyer. We don't have their name; we don't have their address. What we know is what sells more copies from one month to another.

Our readers generally mid to upper 50s, are middle-class to upper-middle-class, mostly male (probably 55-60%). They like conservative things. They don't like some of our best sellers at the newsstand. Once you buy the magazine, you could almost make a separate cover that is just for our subscribers. But we figured, if it's worth doing for the newsstand, it's worth doing to get people at home to pick the magazine up. So we don't vary the cover. Actually, we did it a number of times about 5 years ago, and it just confused the heck out of people. We would send one cover to subscribers at home and another cover to newsstand and people would say, "Where is that issue?" They didn't realize it was the same issue, even though the topic was the same. So we stopped that.

But, we have a very savvy set of subscribers. They like imagery, they like visuals, they like smart topics, they don't want to be lectured. They like maps. They like information graphics that are easily read and understood.

Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?

In terms of catering to any of the groups, I don't think anybody here tries to change the content of the magazine for any particular group. Of course, on the newsstand we are going to try to do things that we know work. For the newsstand buyer, I am going to keep the size of the title large, and we're going to try not to ask stupid questions. What Terry Day says, one of our marketing guys, about asking questions in cover lines, is: You don't

want to ask a question, because it could be that the buyer won't be able to answer it, so it will put them off from the beginning and they won't pick it up. In some ways, you can do things that will intimidate a buyer and scare them away without even thinking about it. But I don't think of them as a different group of people. I think they are also an engaged set of people who will pick up the magazine and enjoy reading about their world. That's all the same group.

Actually, we are finding the biggest difference in our iPad app, where that is a younger crowd. Most of the people who get the iPad app do not have a subscription to the magazine. We are at about 180,000 page subscriptions right now, and we are fairly heartened by that! It's really good. We are a lot further along than we thought we'd be. But as soon as you start thinking, "Well, I'm going to do this to get new, young readers," or "I'll do that to cater to my old readers," it's not going to be the right message. Whatever you do for the young ones, you're going to piss off the old ones. And vice versa. We have to be who we are. And be the best experience we can be, be the best presentation we can be, and present the best photography and the best stories and the best impact that we can.

Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is most important for you to know about?

We get comments every month, good and bad. And we look at them. Most of the people who write in are complaining about something. If someone writes in about a particular design, it's pretty off the wall. I don't mean to say I don't listen to people, but most of our readers will comment about factual errors or different points of view. So if we have the skull on the cover from July 2010, we will get a raft of letters saying "We did not descend from this ape!" or trying to debunk this scientist's (Tim White's) studies about his trail of evolution in some way.

Most of the [design] comments we've had was commenting about the dog that we had on the cover in February 2012 where we had William Whiteman dress a dog up on the cover, and we talked about dog DNA – how easy it is to genetically create new breeds of dogs. A number people of thought that it was silly, or that we shouldn't be messing with dogs, because a dog doesn't want to wear a wig. But you have to take that in hindsight.

We still print 5 million copies per month, and that doesn't include our foreign partners. We only get a couple hundred letters every month. So when you look at the percentages, it's not that huge of a number of people that's commenting to us.

Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

Absolutely! We want to know who they are, and what their tastes and preferences are. But you can't confuse preferences on the cover with who the audience is and what they like in the magazine. People buy a subscription to the magazine because we dependably bring something to them every month that they enjoy. It's hard, being a general interest magazine, to find 6 or 7 topics for stories in every issue plus all of the departments up front. We have to be interesting enough every issue, so that at the end of the year, they'll re-subscribe. We have an 80-82% renewal rate, which is one of the highest in the world. But, we still are losing people, nonetheless, because there are fewer people around every year who enjoy magazine like ours.

But those people – the people who are our core subscribers – don't make their decisions about becoming a subscriber based on the cover. That's not content; that's basically the wrapping we put on it. We use it as a marketing tool when it comes to selling it on the newsstand and having a presence in the home. It is a marketing tool.

I think that it's good advice whenever you're in business to know your audience! They're your customers. We like to think of the Geographic as a membership, because the magazine is still non-profit. A big chunk of the profits that we do make every year go back into mission programs, which support scientists in the field. I think the people who are members of the Society like to be a part of that. They want to improve their world a little bit. And that gives us a bit of an edge, I think. But we get to know who they are enough to be able to communicate with them.

If our audience does change tastes, it changes slowly – it doesn't change overnight. I think that the worst thing we can do is make a knee-jerk reaction and change huge sections of the magazine, because somehow we have perceived that our audience has changes and want something else. I thought that would take a lot of study, and you'd have to be very careful before we change the inner workings of what we are and the kinds of stories we do.

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
Interview with Gail Bichler, Art Director

Could you begin by telling me a little bit about your role at the magazine?

There is a Design Director, who is above our magazine group. We actually have two magazines – *T*, our style magazine, and our Sunday magazine, which is the magazine that I work at. The Design Director oversees the magazine group, and he works primarily with me on the Sunday magazine. Then there's me, and also someone below me. That's the Deputy Art Director. We also have three designers and usually a couple freelancers as well.

I design pages every week, just like everybody else. We divide up the front of book, the well, and the back of book. I don't design any of the front of book pages; the younger designers design them and the Deputy Art Director designs them. I design feature stories and covers and I direct one of the younger designers on the back of book pages.

I also concept a lot of the artwork for the stories. Often times, we have stories that have an obvious visual association with them because it might be something that is documentary photography. But very often, also have stories that don't have obvious visuals, or things that require some kind of concept. I often do a lot of concepting of those, whether they're using photography or illustration, and I do a lot of art directing with illustrators to come up with art for the magazine. I also do other management things in terms of scheduling, and I'm in charge of everyone's vacation days, and things like that.

What is your favorite role or responsibility at the magazine?

I actually really enjoy art directing other designers. The younger designers on our staff are really talented, and it's great to look at what they've got and help them push it a little further or get it to a better place. I really enjoy that. It's nice to mentor them.

Do you consider your designers as you're working on the magazine? Is the audience something that's on the forefront of your mind, or are there other ways you think about your readers?

I definitely consider my readers and my audience. I think that they are considered in all stages, just in different ways. For example, if we are thinking about what a cover image should be for a story, or even thinking of cover lines, we are looking at a few different routes to illustrate something. We think about if it's something that's really going to grab the reader. Or, if we put this on the cover, is there one option that's quieter?

We ran a story a while back, in February, about whether or not Iran would bomb Israel. One of the editors said, "Let's make a map." The idea was to make a war map so you could see what the plan of attack would be. I thought that it was a really quiet way to show an explosive story. Another editor suggested doing something with an explosion, and then eventually the art department suggested making something with the idea of the aftermath of an explosion. We basically had an illustrator make something that said "Iran vs. Israel" out of ashes and fire.

We thought about: What would really grab somebody? What was the tone of the story, how can we convey that? Sometimes we think, "What's the most interesting part of this story? Is it the emotional connection? And if so, how can we convey that? Do we want an all type cover? Do we want the image of a person – would that connect more with the reader?" we often think about those kinds of things. We think a lot about storytelling in terms of how we order the images. We think about the order that things are revealed in and having some kind of narrative, and even down to the smaller design details. For example, is this type going to be too small?

Our readers often complain about our designs! Our median age for our readers is about 41, and we consider that when we design that when we design for them in terms of how small we make caption type or whether or not a certain line length is too long, and how hard it might be to read. We consider those things at all points.

What kind of reader comments or criticisms do you receive in the art department?

We actually receive a lot of reader comments and criticisms! When you work at a magazine like the Times, people have very strong opinions about it and very strong associations with it. A lot of people remember reading it growing up! Whenever we change something we get a lot of criticism. If we change a columnist – for example, we changed our ethicist recently, and got a lot of criticism on that.

We have our blog, the *6th Floor* blog, and I recently put up a post about why we redesign our table of contents for special issues. The reason is because we really want to set the issue apart, signify what's coming, and have the issue feel special and different. The first

comment a reader wrote in said, “you wonder why you guys are losing readership – maybe it’s your rotating table of contents designs!” Another reader said, “if you are losing readers because they don’t like the table of contents design, then I don’t think you even need to worry – it’s more important to keep things fresh and interesting.”

I think that we get people that extremely comment on things! We’ll get comments on typeface choices on special issue. People will write in and say, “I hated that! It’s not legible.” We’ll get comments when we change the design of anything. The biggest complaint is about type size and legibility. We get a lot of complaints about our one-page opening to the magazine – it’s really controversial, in terms of the illustration and that kind of thing.

Are those comments or criticisms helpful to you as a designer? Or, would there be certain comments that would be helpful to you?

It’s hard to say. We read them. It’s good to know what people are thinking...but it’s kind of the squeaky wheels, because it’s not what everyone’s thinking. Sometimes people do bring up good points. Often times, some people have a particular bone to pick where it might not apply to everyone else, or it’s an extreme opinion.

We certainly get comments from people that do affect the way we design. For example, people complained about type on black pages and said that it’s not that legible, and we still do it some times but much more sparingly. We sometimes modify our designs because of it.

Tell me about this award winning cover. How was it designed?

What you don’t see is that we decided to do a split-run cover. Initially we were shooting to do five different covers. So we hired five different artists. In the end, we felt like these two covers were the strongest – so we only ended up doing two.

We contacted different people who we thought would look at the idea of infrastructure in a way that was interesting. Often, we keep binders or tags online of artists that are doing interesting work, so when we do stories like this we look through the stuff that we’ve tagged to see if there’s someone who’s doing something that seems like it relates and can make something interesting for us. Those two illustrators were a perfect fit for that idea.

For that issue, we hired illustrator Christoph Niemann, who made illustrations that ran through the front of book about infrastructure and infringed on the pages in these small ways. There are designs near the drop caps and throughout, and it was a little touch that helped to unify the whole magazine.

Which did you enjoy designing the most? Why was this your favorite cover experience from the covers presented?

Yeah, the Infrastructure issue actually is my favorite! Especially the one that is more of a cross-section. There’s something about that one that’s really great. It was executed really well, and crafted really well. I think it’s a really memorable cover. It’s definitely my favorite of the grouping.

And did you receive reader feedback from this specific issue?

That's a hard one, because that was the first issue of the redesign of our magazine. It was actually really tough to do a special issue on the week that we did a redesign of the magazine. We did get a lot of comments, but the entire format of the magazine was different (including the size). People weren't so happy that it was smaller! But we did get a ton of comments, both good and bad.

When was the last time you had done a redesign to the magazine?

It had been a long time. We had done some modifications to the front of book pages, but it had really been about ten years. We were also told that we needed to reduce the size of the magazine for cost-cutting reasons, so we designed it since we had to anyway. We wanted to try some different fonts and things. We concluded that the redesign wasn't as successful as we would have liked, and we might have pulled some of the typefaces that were very much associated with the brand of the magazine.

We got a new editor about two years ago, and redesigned it again. People were also upset about it – they said, “you just redesigned it!” I think they were still missing the original design. They still hadn't quite gotten over that – and here we were, redesigning it again. So we've done two redesigns in recent years.

I think that was actually a pretty big blow to the magazine. I think that the vibe we used to have was actually something that made the magazine special, and that was a tough one. I wish I could go back on that. The smaller size is hard.

When you finished designing this issue, did you anticipate that it would be award winning?

Yeah, I thought it was a great cover! I did think it would win some awards. You can kind of tell. You don't know if you're right until it happens. But yes, this one stood out to me for sure.

What else do you consider, as a designer? You've talked about content, your audience, etc. – is there anything else that crosses your mind as you produce and send the magazine?

Yeah, there are lots of things to take into consideration. I think we are always trying to make something fresh, and we make sure we have the same fonts and format. We are always striving to do something that is unexpected, something that's bright tonally for the story. We are looking at what the other designers are doing – so if you're working on a piece and there's three other people working on pieces going on around you, we want to get the balance right. We don't want everyone using the same fonts in the same way – or maybe we do, but that's the case of a special issue where we want them to all feel linked. We are considering the order of things – so if we have two pieces of illustration, we probably don't want them right next to each other. There are a whole variety of things that we consider. We consider what other people around us are doing, and we're careful to not do something similar to what they've done.

How do you consider new media and new technology as you design versus how you design for print?

It is pretty different. We have this process where we sometimes commission things for online - we'll commission a video or something. Or, we'll commission an artist to make something. Sometimes we'll actually have them film themselves making it. So there are things that we commission that are for online.

More generally, though – and this isn't necessarily ideal – we'll make something for the magazine and then figure out how it should go online afterwards. That is usually a process of going back throughout our layouts and looking at our charts, and adjusting the type specs to make sure it reads well online, and making things bigger. The experience of looking at our magazine online is very different than what you get from looking at the actual magazine.

There are a lot of things that aren't great about looking at our magazine online, and I think that some of it has to do with the fact that we are part of the newspaper. We have tried to get something that is more our own in terms of our website, because our pages basically look like pages in the newspaper – and it's a completely different experience in print. It's a much more designed, richer experience that does not get translated onto the web. That's kind of a pet peeve for us – we want something more that mimics that experience, and eventually we would like to have an iPad app that's much more similar to what you get when you're looking at in the print version. It hasn't happened for us yet, but it's something that we've been pushing for a while. Because the Times is a little bit of a bureaucracy, where every section wants their own app, it hasn't been a priority to get our content into a form like that for the New York Times. I think it's something that would do well, and is something that people would want. I think it's perfect for a format like that.

We did a special website for our Innovations issue. There are certain special packages that we do, and we do things that take an idea we have in the magazine and takes it a little further. For the actual Innovation issue in print, the pages changed color from page to page, and it was supposed to give you the feeling of moving through a day. It started with dawn colors that that you might see in the sky at dawn, and led through the day until night. The last page was a dark blue. Online, we had this package where you could scroll down and the background color would change. We could have done something where it was almost like pages, where there were colored segments would change. But, because we used multimedia to have the color change as you scroll down. It was more like you would experience the color in the sky during a day. Sometimes we can do things like that which make it feel more considered for that medium. It's nice to be able to do some things like that.

ONEARTH

Interview with Gail Ghezzi, Art Director

Can you begin by telling me about your role as Art Director of OnEarth, and some of your main responsibilities?

I wanted to work for on OnEarth because I thought it was ahead of its decade. It's been such a great magazine to work for as far as visual coverage, so I get to work with such

wonderful different talents. We look at different consumer behaviors and try to draw information from them. That's where we do a lot of conceptualizing, which is really fun for me – instead of just taking images from photo shoots, which we used to do. If you look at the covers in 2010, I put a lot of pressure on our photographers.

How do you consider your readers as you design? What role does this play in your work?

Sure, we consider them! It's a little unique for us because the majority of our readers are members. That's how the magazine works – we offer subscriptions to memberships. So not all of our memberships get the magazine, but I would say the magazine goes to mainly members. There's some percentage of newsstand distribution, but primarily it's in the mail going to members. So – the audience is a very attentive audience! They already understand and are interested in the subject matter, and they are eager to be more educated. In a way, it's a really great relationship because I know who I am talking to and what they are interested in. The challenge is less so to get their attention – it's not like a typical newsstand publication where you really have to fight for people's attention on a newsstand, and you really have to pop off the newsstand to get someone's attention – we don't have that kind of pressure. But, the kind of pressure I feel when I'm designing the cover is that I want to challenge them emotionally or intellectually because they are educated about the topic, or they want to be educated about the topic. I have a captive audience who wants to know more about what we are trying to tell them. My challenge is to offer them that, but not in a dry way. The editors and I really want to challenge them creatively, and ourselves creatively. When we come up with concepts, we try to have a little bit of wit, a little bit of edge...there is a saying that says "wit is intelligence having fun," and that is the attack that I take when designing. Since our subject matter can often be too preachy, or kind of "doomsday" topics – for example, we can be talking about the portion of the world that is dealing with drought to such an extent that it's threatening communities, you have to be careful about turning off your readers and making them depressed. We try to take a different angle and make it a little bit more positive and interesting or unexpected, and that's my main drive when I design.

Do you ever receive or rely on reader comments or criticism?

I don't really see much. Every once in a while I'll see some, but they don't really talk about design as much as the content and the storyline. The criticism that we get is close to home. To a certain extent – you listen to it, but you don't. You don't want to put a restriction on the creative process. That's a battle that all art directors deal with. As far as the readership, I don't hear much of what they have to say, and maybe that's a good thing, you know?

Sometimes we get surveys. Last year we all say down and heard the results of the surveys, and there was some interesting information regarding that. We learned a lot about who the readers are and what they want and what they expect...and what they like about the magazine. We got some information that I can't really talk too much about, but it was really enlightening.

Is there any of that information that you can tell me about – possibly a little bit more about who your readers are?

I can say that a lot of what we are trying to find out is how print plays a part in magazine reading, of course with all of the new technology. It was a discussion about how to move further with the website, which has really evolved over the past years or so. The website, OnEarth.org, has really taken off and just grown immensely – it's a really a very good website. I'm really impressed by it, and I think it's really easy to navigate. So of course, the question is, *what is the print magazine for? What do we do with the print magazine?* That question was on the table. The information that we got back from our membership was really positive. They want to have the magazine! They want it to come in the mail, they want to have it on their table, they like holding the magazine, and most of them prefer reading the print version to going online. Primarily, the reason is that they're an older audience. They haven't really embraced the idea of reading magazines online, or even on the iPad yet. We have a really devoted audience and they want us to keep printing the magazine.

It's just a different experience. I think that the brain reacts differently to reading a magazine on paper and reading a screen. I think that with all of the hype surrounding technology acceleration, I think that people are realizing that we're not ready to throw out our paper yet. I much prefer designing for this format – it showcases photography in a much different way, and it's a more intimate experience.

Are there any other reasons why you think it's important to know your audience when you are designing your magazine?

I think it's a fundamental, very important piece of information. You are designing to get the attention of a person or a group of people. That basically is a model of advertising: know your audience. Otherwise, you're not going to be able to speak to them! It's the same principle. I've worked at agencies, I've worked for record labels, I've worked for a hip-hop label – I had to know who my audience was. I wasn't going to design for a 40-year-old man if I was putting out a hip-hop record. It's a real basic thing that designers have to know, and a good designer will be able to design for any person or demographic. You're trying to lure a reader into your material.

Can you tell me about how this award winning cover was designed?

Yeah – that's a fun cover. Basically, we have a small staff here. The art department consists of myself, a photo editor, and we have a consulting creative director, and my editor-in-chief. We sit down for our quarterly meetings and we go over the story. What was really fascinating about this story is that the climate change is making the species of these bears cross lines they never have. They are pushing them to different parts of where they live. As a result, they are crossbreeding. So that, to me, was what you work with.

Often, it's really hard to get something tangible out of these topics because they're so broad. If you're given a topic like "climate change," what do we want to say? It's such a broad concept! So here's this story that has something really tangible: brown bears and polar bears are crossbreeding. I think, "Wow – now that's something we can really use for a cover concept!" The first thing that came to my mind was the idea of "Jungle Fever" which is a famous Spike Lee film about interracial relationships. This is a hot topic, so

you may or may not want to go there...but I think if it's presented in a whimsical way, then I don't see what you have to lose. If it ruffles a few feathers, then why not? That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to get attention to a topic that's really important.

So, that was the basis of this! It was fun to work with the cover image, and we didn't want to hit too harsh. It also plays to animal lovers: it's an irresistible image of two adorable bears. So that is why I believe it got the attention that it did from ASME. Because they are a group of creative professionals, they understand the idea of taking a popular culture reference and using it in this manner. And I think it's just a fun idea. Whether people in our organization thought it was a good idea or not, I'm not going to say. But when you're a creative individual, you sort of have to do that. You have to push the envelope and stir things up a little bit! And I don't think this is such a big risk – I think this is a really strong cover. I was really happy that they acknowledged it.

I was going to ask you why you thought that this cover received the recognition that it did. Did you anticipate that it would be an award winning design?

Sure! I've been on judging panels for publications, so I know what people are looking for. As a designer, you want to have an impression and also be impressed when you're looking at things. If you look at this and you have a laugh, or think that it's funny, then you made a great connection. That's a success. Then visually or aesthetically it has impact, that's what makes it a winner. It's about the concept.

Some people didn't even make the connection to the movie, which is another reason why it's strong – it doesn't even need that. Some people are going to look at that and just see it for what it is, and they will look at the composition and will have some connection without the reference. That, again, makes it successful.

Of the set of covers, do you have a favorite?

I liked the Pure Chemistry cover a lot. I just liked the starkness of it, the crispness, and just the color in the center. That color in the center is a living creature, and whenever I can get a living thing on the cover I'm happy. It's a hard subject matter that we deal with, and I don't have a bunch of covers with faces. It's important to have eye contact! I always think, "Oh gosh, if I can get eye contact with an animal, yay!" So this is one of my favorites.

It's also a very broad topic that was hard to get something out of. You're talking about the idea of educators being aware of household products and the chemistry dangers. It's about how we have gone through decades of scientists creating chemicals without understanding or caring about or even considering the toxic effects on our communities. This guy is basically about the educators getting on board so that when kids are going to college studying chemistry and science, they now understand the negative effects. And that now makes a big difference on their products. And that's a big idea. Can we make that playful or fun, and not quite wonky or boring?

And the idea was to get a basic animal in there to show that it's safe. Goldfish are basic pets. And it's a beautiful cover, so I was happy.

Is there a cover in the set that was your least favorite?

When I do have an idea that is not my favorite, I have to rely on the photographer to help make it visually appealing. For example, Coal on a Roll was hard to get that looking good. It's about an express train and coal, and I didn't want to see pictures of trains on the cover. This was a way to take that and make it very graphic and central looking – I relied on the composition. It was a toy train that was photographed, which gave it a surreal effect. I think she did well with what she had. It's not my favorite cover but I think it's exceptional in being strong and central, and the composition is strong.

As art director of the magazine, are there any other thoughts that you consider when designing the magazine?

We've decided to work with our photographer regularly. She is in California, so we're on the phone quite a bit since she works remotely. That's another challenge we have – we don't have her coming in to the meetings and talking with us. Having her as part of the team and knowing what she can do and possible limitations makes it easier. When it was a broader thing, it was hard because you could start anywhere! Of course, budget is a concern, so we keep a lid on that. We can't go beyond a number, so she keeps it nice and neatly packaged for us.

As far as changing ideas in mid-course: it doesn't really happen for us once we've decided. I put pressure on editors to make their decision because once we get going, we won't have the luxury of changing for budgetary reasons or time restrictions. Although it's a quarterly magazine, we are always under the gun. I don't know how it works out that way, but there's never enough time! I think we have it down as far as our system goes, but then again there is no guarantee. I don't know if my editor-in-chief is going to me say one day, "Let's try something completely different now" and just has me work with stock images from then on. You never know.

OUTSIDE

Interview with Hannah McCaughey, Creative Director

Could you please begin by telling me a little bit about your duties and responsibilities as Creative Director?

I am responsible for editing/selecting/assigning all the artwork that goes into each issue. I design or oversee the design of every page. I art direct all our original/commissioned art.

Are there specific sections or portions of the magazine that you design each issue?

Generally the features and the covers and the style/essentials sections and I oversee the front of book, bodywork & packages, which are designed by John McCauley.

What is your favorite part of your role at *Outside*?

I really enjoy working with the members of art and photo depts. And I love working with the contributors (both photographers and illustrators) whom I have worked with some

for over 20 years.

Of the set of seven covers displayed in the PDF attachment, which one is your favorite? Why?

The bird (Photo Issue, Sept. 2009); amazing eye contact!

Which did you enjoy designing the most? Why was this specific experience the best from all of the covers displayed?

All about the same.

Which of these covers is your least favorite, and why? Please rank the covers from your most favorite to least.

Sept 09, Nov 09, Feb 10, Dec 09, Aug 09, Oct 09, March 10

Tell me about this award winning cover, in the center of the PDF. How was it designed? (I read about how the photo shoot was largely a trial-and-error process at the hands of Dan Winters, and that he is actually behind the ice in the image. Can you tell me more about how this process developed?)

We asked Dan to shoot a man's face frozen in ice; he suggested that we cast him for it and we thought he was perfect for it so it turned into a self-portrait. The only back and forth was how much we'd see his face through the ice...too little and he wouldn't seem to be in danger, too much and he was hard to make out his face so he shot variations on that (more and less frozen). He also shot a version of it without white makeup on his face, which at first I preferred, but the white face made him seem more integrated with the ice. Just hiring Dan we knew it was going to be amazing, it always is with him.

Why do you think this cover won the award? When you finished designing it, did you anticipate that it would be award winning?

Awards are very very random. I have no idea why things win and other things never get noticed...it never makes any sense to me...

What can you tell me about your readers and how they influence you?

As a designer your audience/readers has to always be at the forefront of your mind for all the many decisions we make...it's a conversation and so "who are you talking to?" has to be considered at all times. We learn a lot about what our readers like through surveys and letters and now a lot from our website, *Outside Online*. We can track how often a story gets read, how many comments, etc., very closely...now so we know what types of things our readers respond to.

We know generally how old our readers are, how much money they make, how much education they have had, where they live, what they like to do. We know a lot because our advertisers want to have this information as well so every year we get a new bunch of information about our readers...which only changes very slightly from year to year.

Sometimes we do things that are going to appeal to some readers and be reviled by others. That's OK once in a while.

It's not such a good idea to just try to please everyone all the time...then we'd be just a magazine filled with oatmeal – no surprises and nothing new.

Do you consider your audience when you design the magazine?

You cannot *not* consider your audience.

Do you rely on previous reader comments or criticism when designing? If so, what kind of feedback is most important for you to know about?

I don't get reader criticisms about design. More often, we hear about a photograph here and there, and then it's too late to do anything about it.

Do you think it is important to know about your audience when designing the magazine? If so, why?

Answered above.