

COGNitve ENERgy

April 2011

Shhhhhh!

Let the content
speak.

Featured:

Public Designer

Eye Magazine Website



USA \$ 9.95 / CAN \$ 18

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Public Designer

By Madeline Nusser
Photos provided by Madeline Nusser
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realm.

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Eye Magazine Website

By Lakshmi Bhaskam
Photos provided by Eye Magazine
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By Adele Wieber
No one has ever accused Bruce Mau, the Canadian Design
Guru, of thinking small. His latest project, however, is big
even for him.

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An Interview with Marty Neumeier
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and why stardom may not be what it used to be.

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Hours Diary/Minutes Diary

By Lakshmi Bhaskam

Designed by Struktur Design

FYI



The Hours Diary

In terms of spatial organization, he
is particularly interested in the nega-
tive space generated by the leading
and word breaks, as this forms the
organic rhythm of the typography.
"There are various rules and princi-



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Yellow Pages

Designed by Johnson Banks

FYI

Produced in 76 editions across
the UK and Ireland and with
a print run of millions, the
Yellow Pages is almost an institution
in its own right, as Johnson Banks
discovered when they were brought
in to work on the directory's rede-
sign. The design team from Johnson
Banks consisted of four people:
Michael Johnson as creative direc-
tor/designer, two account directors,
and one other designer. "Yellow
Pages are formidably complex. They
have teams of people whose job is
to agree category headings, other
teams to discuss whether ads should
be color, other teams discussing how
to put postcodes into the entries; the
level of detail is amazing," recalls
Johnson. "First we had to meet all
the teams, make friends, and gain
their trust."

Working in such detail, however,
meant that any amendments to the
internal layout of the directory had
huge consequences. "For example,
our desire to create a little more
space in the layout meant we had to
resist the temptation to add more
resistance because that would mean
reducing all those ads (and making up
all those plumbers I!)." he continues.
"Our initial work centered around
two opposite poles of the spectrum;
our view was that at a macro level
the covers were dreadful (just a big,
centered logo) and at a micro level
you couldn't read them. After working
on the two opposite ends we started
to work on the bits in between, the
grids, the internal guides, and adver-
tising, etc. In the end our main task
was the headings and getting the
body copy to work. The wayfinding
within the book was very poor, so we
spent a lot of time trying to make the
"See also" section work better and be
easier to read."

Futura (bold) was retained for most
of the headings. In different weights,
while Yellow, the new typeface, set
directed by Johnson Banks and



Sample page from the redesigned
Yellow Pages

designed by The Foundry, was used
for the body copy. Contrary to its
predecessors, the new, narrow type-
face featured truncated ascenders
and descenders, allowing the lines
of type to be set very close together.
Yellow Pages UK estimate that the
redesigned typeface makes savings
that amount to 550 short tons (500
tonnes) of paper per 75 books, or
£500,000 (US\$750,000). They also
opted to stick with the existing three

column grid as "the consequences of
change were too horrendous." Optimum legibility was achieved
by drawing the typeface specifically
for use at a very small size, and to
accommodate the low print qual-
ity synonymous with directories. "It
means that the logo, letters look
strange, with huge gouges in them,
but small, they stay sharp," ex-
plains Johnson. Johnson Banks also
introduced various graphic symbols
and internal cross-category ads
(bars), making the directory easier
and lighter to look at. What did they
learn? "That daunting and potentially
swamping projects can actually be
interesting and useful. That poten-
tially boring projects can actually be
the most rewarding: people are always
impressed if you can change some-
thing as traditional as the Yellow
Pages. It is also still one of our most
public facing projects, so I'm stuck
describing what graphic designers
do. I say we redesigned the Yellow
Pages." A

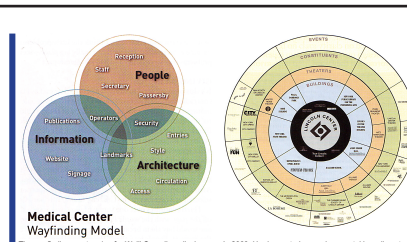
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by the nonprofit's long name. In-
stead, a sans serif font spells out the
acronym, and a stylized Liberty looks
toward the future of America.
DESIGNING CITIZENS
Harris' reach goes beyond her work
as a professional designer. In fact,
teaching at Yale inspired the census
revision. She handed the class an
assignment to redesign the census.
She took the class' results to the gov-
ernment, who immediately extended
an invitation for Harris to join as the
first graphic designer ever on the
census committee. In turn, of course,
Harris hired many of her students to
do the nuts-and-bolts design work.
She also frequently lectures to the
academic design community. In a
2002 AIGA conference, Harris em-
powered young designers about the
opportunities in the nonprofit world.
It was a call to arms for burgeoning
designers to do more work in the
public realm. "There are problems
that need to be solved in the public
sector that are not just waiting for
a client to come and ask them to
solve some of these issues, but to initiate,"
says Harris.
Her example was prescription labels
how difficult they are to read, how
confusing they are. A couple years
later, Deborah Adler went after the
problem in a well-publicized redesign
of the prescription bottle for Target as

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Magazine Spread

In this Document Production
assignment, I designed a cover page
and tag line for a fictitious magazine
about information design. The tag line,
layout, and elements have to unify and
coordinate to convey the magazine's key
message. With given text and images,
full page spreads were created.



Medical Center Wayfinding Model

The wayfinding master plan for Well Cornell medical
center is one of several hospital wayfinding plans
Harris has designed.

and the strategy going forward." With a smile that comes through in the tone of her voice, she brushes off her long explanation: "My job sounds complicated, but really it's just not a typical thing it takes more than a sentence to explain." Working on the front end of projects for the public realm is an odd niche, one she carved out by taking her experience in interface design, her job nearly 25 years ago, and bringing it over to graphic design. Now Harris has dozens of design plans under her belt, branding and wayfinding plans for several institutions, visitor experience for The Women's Museum in Dallas, and her personal favorite, Volting By Design, a research project supported by the University of Minnesota that culminated in a poster illustrating how design can increase voter turnout.

But aside from a long list and an inventive use of experience, Harris' success in information design lies in her personality: a quickness to smile and a passion for abstract things, chaotic, complicated, and big.

THINKING BIG
Even at a young age, Harris had this passion. As a 20-something, she came out of Yale graduate school in 1988 and immediately launched Two Twelve Associates, an interface design company that handled Citibank among other commercial and non-profit enterprises. But for Harris, the corporate jobs always seemed small: their narrow scope focused on the bottom line. Instead, she excelled in her work with nonprofits where she saw an expanse of untapped design jobs waiting out before her. Jobs others were hesitant to take because the process of designing for people without the clear-cut objective of money seemed huge and mystifying.

"It troubled me that I would spend six months working for a corporate project," says Harris. "It was only seen by a few hundred people or something a report that only a few would read. I preferred working on projects that would affect thousands."

Altogether, in 1988, she dropped everything and hopped on a plane for a nine-month trip to Africa and Asia. Harris remains vague on her reasons for abandoning her career. "I wasn't thinking about design. I was just looking at how people were living and just experiencing the world. Although, I think the little problems I was focused on back then became even smaller. The world's a really big place-seeing that made me want to work on problems that were larger and had a bigger impact."

GOING BACK
It's this passion that made Harris a person who makes Harris seem like she's in constant contradiction. She's altruistic in her hope to help people and yet grandiose to want to influence thousands with her design. One of the first hints of her ethical slant is Harris' dedication to family. Her office space is on the top floor of a brownstone walk-up in Brooklyn that she shares with her husband, her daughter, and a rabbit, who she's quick to say are as important as her design work. An indication that she loves her own design is the office space itself: a page from a home design magazine, immaculate white walls

and white shelves with her work and ephemera hanging throughout. Her office, a tidy space of perfora-
tory design tools-large computer monitor, educational printer, and desk-is out by a wall of bold, colorful bottles from her travels in Africa, snapshots of a smiling daughter, and picture frames with postal stamps that she selected as a member of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee.

Harris effuses over one stamp of pink and orange sugar hearts that seem to pop off the page with the words "I hear!" you. "I pushed those!" she exclaims. "They said no one would buy them because they're too sophisticated. I was like, no, they're very Martha Stewart. People love them. People buy them. That really made a big case for moving stamps toward a more stylish approach versus the sentimental."

This sums up her approach to design: planning, stylish, pleasing, but more intellectual than emotional. "I'm a minimalist," Harris says. "Everything I do is based on clarity and simplicity and getting the design out of the way so people can get the information they want."

Browsers shelled throughout her office hold presentations she's made on the merits of her large-scale projects: a wayfinding system for Columbia University's five campuses and an audit of communications for the Ford Foundation that also show her pared-down aesthetic. Shapes and sans serif fonts simplify hours and months of research.

Harris had to educate the ACLU on the power of design—that a logo could reflect its history, its place among peer organizations, its mission, and what it will be in the 21st century. She gave a real-time online educational seminar on the merits of the new identity. "All but I think two affiliates switched to the new identity, which is unheard of. I think it's a record in branding large institutions," Harris brags.

Now, the ACLU's logo is gray and blue, a hip composition of the Statue of Liberty cropped to show just the crown and eyes. It's neither a cheesy

information and organizations include the general public. My background gives me that perspective—it's my way of actually giving back."

AN EDUCATION IN DESIGN
Over the years, Harris has changed the way she thinks about design. In the past, good design was creating accessible institutions: a well-designed hospital map or a more accurately branded nonprofit. But now she says, "I'm beginning to think that part of my job is educating and making shifts in the role of design in these institutions: shifting it up from just something they have to get done to the strategic part of the way they do business." This attitude was important when the American Civil Liberties Union hired Harris to change its approach to branding.

from a starchy, faceless nonprofit to a brand that communicated to a young generation. Harris started on the ACLU branding in the same way she attacks all projects: She first assesses it, then puts together a team tailored to its needs. She used four people with varied specialties from research, design, and organizational management. "The ACLU has 50 chapters—we were doing a brand identity for 50 organizations around the country," Harris' voice rises on the word "they." "We knew it would be an organizational problem." That was only one barrier. "They were very suspicious of design and branding in general," she says. "They were trying to be brand-free, they associated it with their commercial adversaries."

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The best-selling 2004 "love" stamp (designed by Michael Odoorn). Supported by Harris in the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, it indicative of Harris' aesthetic style and simplicity trump the sentimental.

use of patriotism nor is it cluttered by the nonprofit's long name. In-
stead, a sans serif font spells out the acronym, and a stylized Liberty looks toward the future of America.

DESIGNING CITIZENS
Harris' reach goes beyond her work as a professional designer. In fact, teaching at Yale inspired the census revision. She handed the class an assignment to redesign the census.

She took the class' results to the government, who immediately extended an invitation for Harris to join as the first graphic designer ever on the census committee. In turn, of course, Harris hired many of her students to do the nuts-and-bolts design work.

She also frequently lectures to the academic design community. In a 2002 AIGA conference, Harris empowered young designers about the opportunities in the nonprofit world.

It was a call to arms for burgeoning designers to do more work in the public realm. "There are problems that need to be solved in the public sector that are not just waiting for a client to come and ask them to solve some of these issues, but to initiate," says Harris.

Her example was prescription labels how difficult they are to read, how confusing they are. A couple years later, Deborah Adler went after the problem in a well-publicized redesign of the prescription bottle for Target as

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