



The Newspaper Designer's Handbook

By Tim Harrower

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\$40

By Neil Holdway

Here's a concept: a book on newspaper design that is well-designed.

That is, a book that looks as slick as we'd like our newspaper pages to be. A book that uses color effectively not simply to catch our eye but to guide us. A book that doesn't require us to read a lot of text when we need to quickly find advice. A book that not only encourages us to think graphically but whose author thinks graphically himself.

The first design book I was assigned in college in the early '90s wasn't so well-designed. It wasn't awful, and certainly I learned a lot from all its text and the illustrations it did provide. But when I started working at a newspaper and I needed to quickly look up a fundamental design point, or when I needed advice on an advanced layout, or when I became a supervisor and needed to teach my staff the fundamentals of design, I turned to Tim Harrower's "The Newspaper Designer's Handbook."

Back then it was the book's second edition. Good as it was, its fifth edition, released in 2002, is so much better. Harrower now is using color throughout. He has added a lot of discussion in the beginning of the book on current trends, showcasing some of the country's best design work on news front pages, feature front pages, inside sports pages, even editorial pages. And each of his chapters is followed by a Q&A to cover common concerns.

Meanwhile, the hallmarks of his book remain. It has countless real-life examples of good and bad design. It has educational exercises at the end of each chapter. And it still contains my favorite device: miniature dummies showing various layouts labeled "Good," "Fair," "Weak," "Dull," "OK" and "Risky."

It's those miniature dummies I have consulted time and again to refresh myself and colleagues of layout basics, particularly in Chapter 2, Story Design. The chapter starts from the very basic level — stories without art — and proceeds gradually by adding art elements: mug shots, one horizontal photo, one vertical photo, multiple-photo packages, one horizontal photo and one vertical, and on and on.

With each scenario Harrower presents the ways you should arrange the headlines, cutlines and copy. Is your headline touching the start of the copy? Are you making sure one photo dominates in a package? Are you keeping the readers from having to jump over art to follow the text? Are faces big enough in the photos you're running? Harrower has thought of all the common layout mistakes and shows you how to do it better.

Indeed, it's the design fundamentals that Harrower has sought to convey in his book. When I spoke to him at the ACES conference in Louisville after he led his "Maestropolooza" session with Buck Ryan, he talked about putting design on a 10-point scale, where the higher points are reserved for advanced designers. "I can't get you from 7 to 10, but I can help you get from 1 to 7," Harrower said.

The next chapter moves on to the design of whole pages, starting with pages without art. Horrible as it is, some copy editors have to work with wide-open pages without any art, and Harrower actually supplies advice — six of his book's pages' worth — on how to make them look good. Then he begins adding art, and quickly you get the idea of what's good and what isn't. He even briefly covers double trucks.

Although he supplies some impressive examples, his advice on double trucks is not as helpful as it is on, say, full-page photo spreads later in Chapter 4. Anyone who must lay out a full-page photo package ought to review the examples in Chapter 4.

Harrower spends a lot of time on the fundamentals of photos themselves. He has new examples of good photos and old samples of the bad ones: the dreaded grip-and-grin, the guy sitting at his desk, and so on. He takes a bad photo and analyzes it piece by piece. Then he shows how to crop them properly. And he covers photo illustrations. If you've used previous editions of the book, you'll see a lot of the examples have been updated to correspond with the times: It was the old President Bush in my second edition, for instance, and in this fifth edition Britney Spears gets a lot of play (you've been warned).

All this is only scratching the surface. Harrower's book gets still more basic earlier and significantly more advanced later. Identify the parts of a newspaper page and the tools of the trade in Chapter 1, and continue to learn basic typography, headline types and sizing, and text formatting. Later in the book, get advice on scanning and color-

correcting photos, on logos and signs, on fact boxes and lists, on charts and graphs, and on diagrams and maps. Proceed even further to the Special Effects chapter, where serious designers can learn how to bend the rules just right, playing with feature headline typography, altering photography and illustrations for effect, using cutouts, and creating new colors. Harrower even has a redesign gallery and enters into the new age by discussing Web page design.

And Harrower's advice is not based on his opinion, he said. The foundation of his book is composed of the information culled from various reader surveys conducted for the redesign of the Portland Oregonian years ago, before his first edition came out in 1989. "It gave me more of an intuitive feel, rather than just what I like and don't like," he said.

No matter what you're looking for, you'll find the book easy to navigate. Every page is labeled with the chapter name in small type and the topic at hand in larger, thick, sans-serif type. Even subtopics are well-labeled, and a lot of the text is boldfaced or colored, so it's easy to flip through the book and scan around for what you need. If that's not the way you prefer to go, the table of contents and the index will get you to your topic.

Certainly there will be bits of advice some designers will disagree with. Perhaps they might put a "Fair" label on something he's called "Good." But I don't think there's any questioning Harrower's sound lessons on the fundamentals, and anybody on a newspaper staff who lays out and/or designs pages of any kind should make this book required reading. After all, he makes it easy enough to read, as any good designer would.

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