

START THE PRESSES! Canada's *National Post*

Things move quickly at the *National Post*. Ever since the Canadian daily, based in the northern Toronto suburb of Don Mills, first hit the streets in late October 1998, it's worked to redefine the public's notion of just how cool a North American newspaper can look. Borrowing design elements from papers worldwide, the *Post's* upscale, hip, European-style broadsheet pages are each appraised and approved by design editors, as well as its vigilant, design-conscious editor-in-chief, Ken Whyte.

"The mandate was to design a paper completely different from all other Canadian papers—especially *The Globe & Mail*," Toronto's established national newspaper of record, says Lucie Lacava, a Montreal designer who handled the paper's launch. Of equal importance to upstaging its archrival, however, was avoiding the toes of *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, and 30 other Canadian cousins also published by the *Post's* media-baron owner,

Conrad Black. Creating a unique appearance meant straying from current trends, including serif headlines, which the *Post* initially intended to eschew altogether: "I assured the editors I could make sans-serif headlines look quite upscale," says Lacava, who commissioned an original face, Post Sans, for headlines. When Black bought *The Financial Post* in the summer of 1998, however, the *National Post* scoped its new sibling for inspiration. "Our design was revised to in-



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corporate all the elements that *Financial Post* readers were familiar with," says design director Gayle Grin. "We took their blue nameplate and used it for all our flags—for the Arts & Life section, for Sports, for Toronto—with the exception of the *National Post* flag."

But Leanne Shapton, who designs the paper's cultural section, Avenue, says the European influence is not coincidental: "We've got a lot of editors from England—from *The Daily Telegraph*," Conrad Black's London broadsheet. "There's a certain attention to placing trust in the reader." Other elements rarely seen in Canada or the U.S. include the Dutch



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wrap—a headline stacked over one column and aligned vertically with the others—and a narrow, six-column grid, countering the typical five. The tops of the news spreads also feature a horizontal "attic," with local briefs running from left to right, meant to evoke Canada's landscape between Prince Rupert, British Columbia, and St. John's, Newfoundland.

The details seem well-considered today,

but the staff agrees that its origins were somewhat flighty. The paper often changed its format to reach different readerships, Lacava says; the weekend section wasn't implemented until six weeks before the launch, says its designer, Friederike Gauss, now at Hamburg weekly *Die Woche*. Even today, with a growing circulation, its anti-P.C. stance sometimes rubs readers the wrong way; one critic at a Canadian online magazine in August professed bemusement at its "odd brand of anglophilia and Reform Party boosterism."

But with official circulation reaching 300,000 (including 55,000 giveaways daily), the risks seem to be paying off for readers and staffers alike.

"It's a new newspaper, so we don't have an entrenched group of people who balk at change. We all got in at the same time," says Grin. "The copy editors know they need to produce well-designed pages. We stand over their shoulders." Anyway, not surprisingly, there's literally no time to argue: The front page of the next morning's national edition ships before 9:30 p.m.—TP



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