

# The Secrets of Great Design

Design basics (that even nondesigners can use!) to polish publications



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Do put your best art on the cover of your magazine. Don't go crazy with fonts. Do look at other publications for inspiration. Here, award-winning creative director Kat Braz shares her best design advice.

## What are your top design pet peeves in magazines?

One thing that makes me cringe is a lack of specific choices about typefaces. I see it all the time. There'll be a chunky typeface with a '60s or '70s vibe right next to a very light, delicate script; they just don't even come from the same world. Aesthetically, the entire publication can look more cohesive, sophisticated, and elevated just by limiting the type choices.

Another pet peeve of mine is not putting the best art on the magazine cover. People will predetermine what's going to be a cover story and then they'll just go with it, even though they might have better art for another story. Your cover should be something so intriguing it compels readers to open your publication.

## What's your best design advice for nondesigners?

Templates are your friend. It is possible to build an entire magazine with only four, maybe six, different page variations. Even if you can't invest in a designer, can you invest in working with a designer to build some templates that you can then return to, issue after issue?

Another easy trick that improves the sophistication of a publication is aligning to a baseline grid. That's fancy designer talk for making sure that your copy from column to column is aligned across the bottom of each line. Honestly, it separates a professional publication from the rest of the pile.

Pay attention to visual hierarchy, particularly with images. Select one single "hero" image for the story and let that image sing.

One of the hardest things to cope with when you're editing a magazine, from a visual perspective, is that sometimes your very favorite photo just doesn't fit or it's just not right for the layout. When it comes to placing photos on a page, there are very few cases when more equals more. Usually less is more.

## Any advice for professionals new to designing for a higher ed magazine?

When it comes to layouts: beg, borrow, and steal. The great thing about college magazines is that we are all competing for different audiences. Pore over the pages of benchmark publications—either collegiate or newsstand—and let those titles inspire your creativity.

**Design isn't like dropping in pieces of a puzzle. It's a process.**

## How can advancement professionals think more like designers?

Thinking like a designer is thinking space first, and words second. Words are precious, but we've got to be willing to give them up sometimes in service to a stronger overall impact.

## What do you wish nondesigners knew about working with designers?

Nondesigners sometimes think design is like building a puzzle, where they can hand over all the pieces except for a couple, and those can be dropped in at the last minute. That's not how the best design happens.

Design is like painting. You have this whole palette. You don't just apply all the green and then not use any green anymore, right? You use green here and there, and you mix it with other colors. It's a process. Involve both sides of the house (editorial and design) from the very beginning. That collaborative flow is what's going to produce your best work. ■ MEREDITH BARNETT