Norman Perman

Can a teenage poster artist for Navy recruiting make it big back in civilian life as a designer? It's imprudent, at best, to give a generalized answer to such a loaded question, but the one case study that I've made in this area does suggest an emphatically affirmative response, with substantial documentation and annotation to back it up.

Exhibit "A" is Norman Perman of Evanston (home) and Chicago (studio); past president of the Society of Typographic Arts, long-time member of the 27 Chicago Designers, and consistent winner of a wide range of accolades for high design achievement. What's more, he's done it all by himself—in the sense that while he has had a succession of young assistants for the past fifteen years, he has never had a partner or even an associate designer to share part of the creative responsibility involved.

To put all of this singular achievement into proper perspective, one must go pretty far back, to a point just ahead of that decade of the 50s, currently so revered by the very young. From Chicago's Senn High School, Norman Perman joined the Navy at age seventeen and, having duly impressed those with an eye out for art talent, was sent directly from boot camp to Washington as a training division illustrator. Shortly thereafter, he was moved in to fill the considerable vacancy created by the retirement of the well known John Falter from his own tour of duty as the Navy's chief recruiting poster artist. From this base, young Norman's facility in realistic illustration pushed him speedily to the top. As he puts it, "What the position really amounted to was Chief Petty Officer in Oils."

Having done his bit for Navy manpower attraction, Norm re-entered civilian life through the portals of Northwestern University, transferring later to the Art Institute of Chicago, where he received a classical art background. "At that time," Norm recalls, "there was no such thing as a design education in the United States, even though the Bauhaus example was already at least a quarter of a century old."

At graduation, the choices came down to becoming either a "layout man" or an illustrator. But since he enjoyed working in both areas, he doesn't remember it as an agonizing choice. From several opportunities, Norm chose an assistantship ("A classy way of saying apprentice.") with Everett McNear, then—as now—a highly respected designer with a penchant for being his own creative group. Having observed a lot and learned a lot in the service of a master, Norm took a break after two years for an extended tour of Europe to expand his cultural horizons and clarify his professional directions.

One aspect of his professional direction was already established: he would work alone. "After McNear, there was no way to improve on employers, and besides, the sweet taste of the free life had convinced me that, despite its built-in uncertainties, self-employment was the only way to go."

Having negotiated a space-for-occasional-work arrangement with Frederick Ryder Typographers on Chicago's near north side, Norman Perman set up his own studio with no clients and little capital, the classical un-dynamic duo that has faced so many who have chosen this route to fortune seeking. And although he had joined the STA while working for McNear, who had encouraged and sponsored the move, Norm still considered himself primarily an illustrator. Nevertheless, he was prepared to go with whatever the hoped-for demand called for. "But as brave and romantic as some version of 'starving artist' might sound at this date, I never missed a meal in those early days, except to make a deadline. Fortunately, sufficient work came in from the start to keep me going."

Starting with small pharmaceutical companies, Perman's samples were soon impressive enough to attract larger game. "I worked on several accounts which were then using such up-and-coming artists as Elsa Kula and Art Paul," Norm recalls. "They were members of a lively group of young Chicagoans trying the term 'design' on for size."

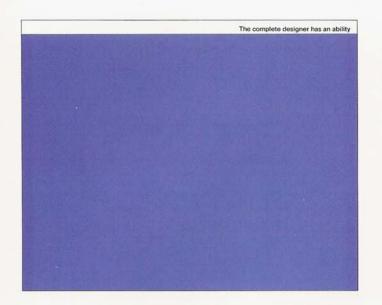
Within a couple of years, Norm started getting jobs from such stalwarts as Container Corporation of America and the American Medical Association, among others. "For the AMA, I designed what I considered to be lush spreads for *Today's Health* for the princely sum of \$75.00. But I felt I had really arrived when Abbott Laboratories started sending a regular volume of assignments my way. Abbott was a prestigious account in those days, not only in Chicago but for New York designers as well. Their *What's New* monthly magazine was a real show piece back in the 50s."

Illustration assignments also continued to come his way. "My move to design emphasis was gradual and not really the result of a conscious effort on my part. Before long, though, I realized that I had made the big cross-over. Even so, my early illustrative specialization was a help to my design efforts—and still is—not only in the process of developing visual concepts for illustrators and photographers whom I depend on for support, but in maintaining a balanced view of the various components that design must accommodate and draw strength from."

Opportunities for expansion came early and continuously on into the 60s, but Perman resisted all temptations to broaden his base of operations. "My preference was, and is, to be an artist/designer—period. I enjoy the process of refining a job through its various stages to completion. I also enjoy client contact. Those are actions that I could never delegate. And most of all, I enjoy completing a tough

Perman's insert for the annual book released by the 27 Chicago Designers.

Front and back cover of a booklet describing a new health program published by Scott, Foresman and Company.

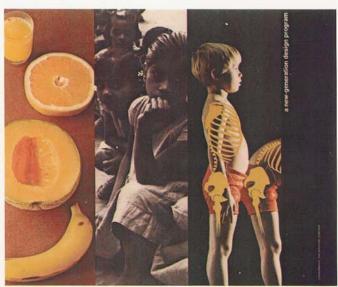












assignment successfully, knowing that I have closely monitored the whole development. By contrast, the strictly business aspects of the operation have never had the appeal of the design aspects."

Naturally enough, staying both small and successful poses its own special problems. After a quarter of a century of maintaining it, Norman Perman's credo is simple and direct: "I've remained an individual designer by being deliberately selective in the jobs I take on. An assignment must be interesting to me before I'll accept it. I don't take on corporate identity programs because I don't have the personnel to implement them. And anyway, after the symbol design (the fun part), the rest is engineering, which I consider a big bore.

"Primarily, I'm an idea designer. But I do enjoy working with technical creative problems. And while I will fight anybody—big or small—for an annual report assignment that appeals to me, I have the strength to turn down work that is either unsuited to my situation, or that I don't enjoy."

What he enjoys is not only important to Norman Perman, but is something he makes happen. For example, whatever the work pressures, he arranges his commitments to accommodate a generous family vacation period every year, including frequent trips abroad. After due notification to all concerned, he simply locks up and takes off. Minimum staff, of course, is an important contributor to this freedom of movement. But that's only part of his justification for keeping his organization lean and clean.

"With more than one or two assistants, I could no longer do all the creative work. And because I take all of that responsibility on, personally, good assistants move on when they feel they have soaked up all they can get from the somewhat inferior position I keep them in. In fairness to young egos, however, I make the permanence of that position quite clear to them from the start. That way, inherent creative frustration is limited and does only minimal and infrequent damage to our working relationships."

From all of the above, you might peg Norman Perman as a "loner." Not so; not so at all. A more accurate assessment by those who know him would be: good companion, enthusiastic participator, issue oriented, and the like; very much in the solid, concerned citizen mold that designer types tend to run to.

-Rhodes Patterson

Educational design for Scott, Foresman and Company.

Two pre-school programs, "Talk Starters: At the Zoo," and "Sounds I Can Hear."

Eight books in the "Health and Growth" series and an exhibit to promote this program at educational meetings.

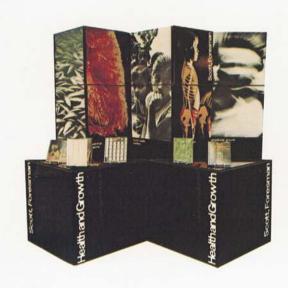
Right: spreads from the "Health and Growth" books.

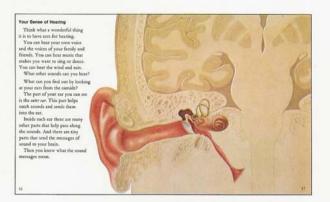
Spreads from books in a math program embodying a strong visual approach to the teaching of a complex subject.





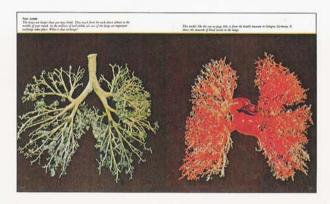






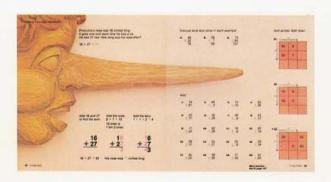














NORMAN PERMAN

Catalog for Bang & Olufsen, Danish manufacturers of electronics and stereo equipment.

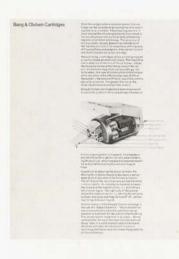
Right: redesign of the leading tennis publication included new logotype, standardization of typography, increase in the number of color pages and adoption of new editorial features. *Tennis Magazine* is a publication of the *New York Times*.

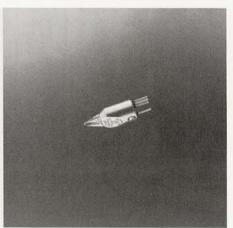
Neon displays promote auto loans for Continental Bank.

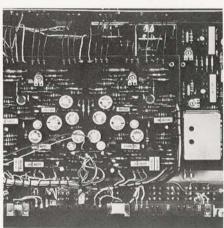
Packaging for household vinyl gloves, Faultless Division, Abbott Laboratories.

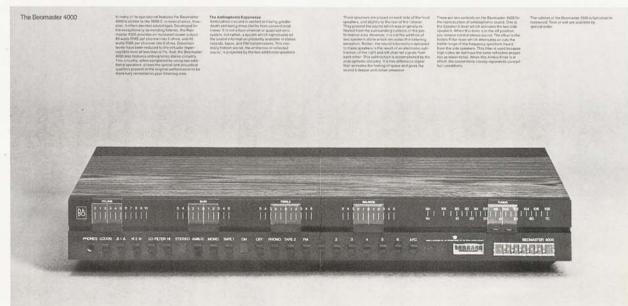
Packaging for power tool accessories, Skil Corporation.











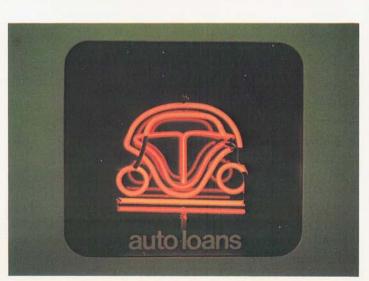
Magazine of the Racquet Sports PORTS Magazine of the Racquet Sports PORTS Magazine of the Racquet Sports











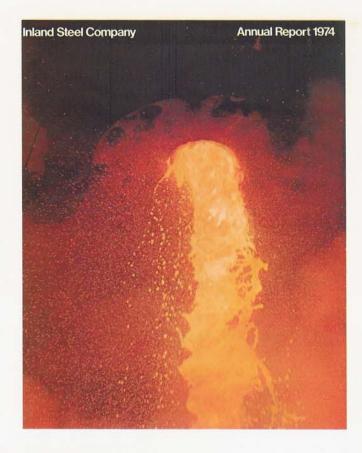


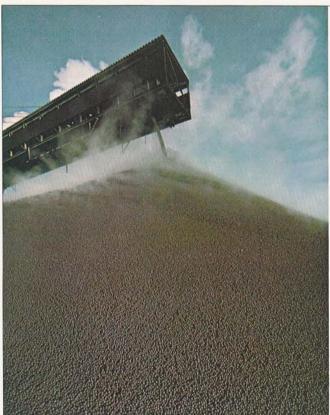


Inland Steel annual report. Major photography by Burt Glinn/Magnum.

Right: annual report for International Minerals & Chemical Corporation.

Booklet on techniques of intra-articular injection, The Upjohn Company.





More Steel for Mid-America

More Steel for Mid-America
Two noteworthy events marked inland's last year. First, the Company achieved record sales and earnings, as reported details beginning on page 16. Secondly, Inland began the largest capital program in its history, whose major elements are summarized below.

The underlying objective of this expansion is to secure long-range benefits of the control of the

Timetable
At its Splember meeting, the Board
Directors approved a major expansi
program and authorized the expendix
of lands required for the construction
a new blast furnace, coke oven bath
and associated facilities, which will large Inland's basic steelmaking capu
ity, it also directed the preparation
engineering plans for a new plate in
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