

# The eyes have it

*A new book marking i-D's 30th anniversary serves as a tribute to the art of the magazine cover.*

*By Ludovic Hunter-Tilney*

**T**erry Jones, founder and creative director of i-D, the cutting-edge UK style magazine launched in 1980, spends an unusual amount of time thinking about how to make people, mainly beautiful young women, wink. There was the time he was on a rooftop in west London on a chilly winter day throwing water at a model in search of that perfect moment. Or the photo session a couple of weeks ago with five models. "Coordinating five girls to wink is a feat in itself," he sighs.

The wink has been i-D's signature since its earliest days – issue five to be precise. It doesn't matter how famous the subject is – Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss are regulars – they have to wink. It denotes being in the know, suggesting to the reader they're entering a secret sect. It also symbolises the shutter of a camera. It's the common theme linking the many different styles and subjects of the magazine's cover portraits. Proof lies between the covers (no pun intended) of a handsome hardback book being published next week featuring the covers of all 308 issues of the magazine in celebration of i-D's 30th anniversary.

The resulting overview isn't just a history of i-D, however, it's also a tribute to the art of the magazine cover – and, perhaps, its eulogy. For in a world filled with tweets and blogs, it's hard not to wonder: is this a dying art? If so, what are we losing?

Obsolescence, after all, is an in-built feature of magazine covers, swept off the newsstands each month to make space for the new issue. Yet the best ones, as the new book shows, manage to capture something enduring about their era. "Each cover is a marker in time," Jones says. "If a cover works, you'll remember the date, you'll remember picking up the issue." Madonna, Sade and Björk had their first magazine covers in i-D. Kylie Minogue shed her girl-next-door image with a 1991 cover depicting her as a scary-looking dominatrix. Each cover has a theme, such as the 2004 issue illustrating the rise of the east with a close-up of a model's face made up to suggest a sunrise. It's one of Jones's favourites.

Really successful magazine covers can outlive the lifespan of the magazines to which they belong. The contents of the April 1965 issue of Harper's Bazaar are lost in the mists of time, for example, but Richard Avedon's cover portrait of Jean Shrimpton in a kitsch pink helmet survives as an emblem of the era's brash youthfulness. Then there was Annie Leibovitz's portrait of John Lennon on the last day of his life, naked, wrapped around a clothed Yoko Ono, which was used on the cover of Rolling Stone's commemorative issue a month after Lennon's death. The picture made Lennon look eerily vulnerable, and the absence of any cover lines, save the Rolling Stone logo, conveyed a sense of mourning. Even as it illustrated with uncanny power the shock of Lennon's murder, the cover made sure to stitch the magazine into the story.

Of course the modern age doesn't have a

monopoly on memorable covers. Few magazines today can hope to match Georges Lepape's graceful art deco illustrations for Vogue in the 1920s. But the 1960s marked a turning point in the artistry of magazine covers. Fashion became more innovative and colourful; art directors moved from merely laying out pictures to working collaboratively on shoots with photographers.

Jones worked at Vanity Fair and British Vogue before founding i-D. As art director at Vogue he was given space to experiment on covers, such as the close-up of a model with red lipstick and flawless white teeth eating green jelly in a 1977 issue. But he was also aware that "there were rules you were meant to abide by". He's still amazed he and his Vogue mentor, fashion editor Grace Codrington, managed to smuggle a full-length, silhouetted portrait of Anjelica Huston and Manolo Blahnik drinking champagne with the sun setting behind them on to a 1974 cover. "It was so un-Vogue. I don't think Vogue have done a full-length since."

The first i-D covers, inspired by punk's do-it-yourself ethos, were composed solely of the magazine's stencilled logo. "We wanted to make a break from faces. I wanted a universal identity," Jones remembers. But it wasn't long before portraits took over, Jones marking the royal wedding in 1981 with i-D's first winking headshot: a press photo of Lady Di that he customised with a torn-out picture of a closed eye.

Madonna was an early i-D cover star. Her appearance in 1984 is a snapshot of the era's colourful, theatrical pop music, and a foretaste of the singer's matchless gift for image-making. Indeed, the early 1980s come across as the magazine's most innovative period, with bright colours and bold design capturing the excitement of London's emerging nightclub and street fashion

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scenes. The 1990s see Britpop supply a steady stream of cover stars; then the rise of the supermodel switches the focus to high fashion. Bar occasional appearances by an i-D-ish roster of celebrities – hello, Chloë Sevigny – the magazine continues to stick with models rather than submit, as many others have, to bland celebrity culture. "We've tried to do celebrities before they were celebrities. No one knew who Madonna was when she was on the cover," says Jones.

The magazine also eschews the popular trend towards headlines that blare out the contents ("854 cool swimsuits!") in an attempt to get the reader's attention; ditto the giveaways often attached to the cover in plastic bags that invariably leave an ugly rip on removal. "I don't like bagging, I don't like stick-ons, I don't like covering an image with cover lines," says Jones.

Rather, he can envisage a time when i-D's

covers will become something for connoisseurs to collect. "Print has to become more precious, it has to have a different status to the disposable digital world," he says. The irony that a magazine devoted to cutting-edge trends should cling to old ways hangs over his words. Perhaps the wink will acquire a new meaning: membership in a club not of cool kids, but rather aesthetes who recognise that a picture, when well chosen, can be worth a thousand blogs.

*'i-D Covers 1980-2010' (Taschen £27.99), edited by Terry Jones and Edward Enninful*

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