

Book review: Mid-Century Ads

Our fascination with the slick, sexy and at times seedy world of advertising in the 50s and 60s has been noticeably heightened with the compulsive US television series *Mad Men*. Watching the handsome Don Draper oozing slickness on a film set – that has most of us mid-century design lovers oozing envy – is addictive viewing.

A new book has set out to celebrate the creative work of real life Don Drapers – ad men of the age of the ‘big idea’ who set out in selling us the American Dream. They succeeded in not only repackaging this seemingly perfect world for the optimistic post-war generation, but fundamentally alter how advertising communicates with the consumer.



Magazines of the period were flooded with clever campaigns selling everything from girdles to guns – images that paint a fascinating picture of not just patterns of consumption but society as a whole, giving insight into the zeitgeist of the period. They capture the spirit of the 50s and 60s, as concerns about the Cold War gave way to the carefree booze-and-cigarettes *Mad Men* era.

‘Mid-Century Ads: Advertising from the *Mad Men* Era’ by TASCHEN is as slick and handsome as the content it carries. With thousands of images, including a wide range of significant advertising campaigns from both eras, the two-volume book is visually a treat.

One of the ads featured is a seemingly innocent one that paved the way for modern advertising. This was ‘Think Small’, an ad campaign by agency Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) in the US for the Volkswagen Beetle. The German carmaker was finding the Beetle a tough sell across the Atlantic for the US consumers’ passion for larger, perhaps brasher cars.

Instead of bombarding their target audience with endless literature about the car, DDB built a campaign that focused entirely on the Beetle’s form – a tiny image of the Beetle appeared on an empty white space to emphasise the car’s size, simplicity and minimalism and it was a huge success.

For *Mid-Century Ads*, the original images have been digitally enhanced to bring back the vivid colours and crisp fonts used at the time. Editor Jim Heimann, himself a cultural anthropologist and graphic design historian, has added words to enhance this rich journey back in time when slick suited ad men sold us a wallet full of coloured dreams.

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