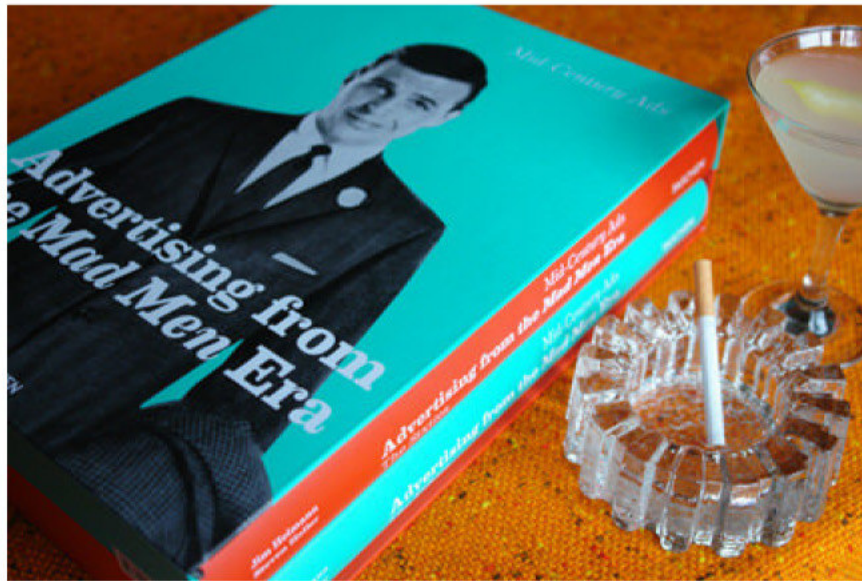


Bookmarks



In this week's [Bookmarks](#) post we've been taking a look at [Mid-century Ads: Advertising from the Mad Men Era](#) by [Steven Heller](#) & [Jim Heimann](#) ... and it certainly has been a long look – this book's a leviathan!

It's a twin volume, magnum opus of mid 20th century American ads covering many of the well known, not so well known, long extinct and still going strong corporations and brands. It takes us on a journey from quite literal ads heavy on copy & pictorialism to the modernist approaches incorporating abstraction, satire and visual simplicity.

The volumes are divided into decades – the 1950s and the 1960s.

The inside covers have an illustrated time line of advertising landmarks, followed by an introductory overview of the decade – then page after page after page of fabulous examples of advertising from the era. Advertising in the mid-century modern era was all about feeding the populace ideas of success and affluence...

...how to achieve it, how to achieve the outward appearance of having it and, most of all, how to go about spending the fruits of it!



The United States' national GDP rose from £100 billion in 1940 to a staggering £500 billion in 1960. The advertising industry grew rapidly in direct correlation to this ever-increasing disposable income. As well as mass expansion in air travel, the 1950s were also a period of big, fast cars – affordable to more people than ever before. Cinema was at its height, new electrical goods were being invented or improved, convenience food products being developed and new fashions appearing.

With the ongoing prosperity and conspicuous consumption, interior decoration was a popular pastime and useful way of expressing one's taste, showing off and “keeping up with the Joneses”. Weren't we all transfixed by the interior design of the sets of the [Stirling Cooper office](#), [Don & Megan's Manhattan love nest](#)?

Coca-Cola was a staple of the US troops and its popularity soared post-war. Lots more women were going out to work – and every secretary needed her Olivetti typewriter! The development & growth of such products into huge brands led to the possibility of a distinct form of promotion – the snappy picture & tag-line creations often referred to “Big Idea” advertising – the “Marlboro Man” series being a classic example.

The Mad Men era was an innocent, in some ways more uncomplicated time – pre-Post-Feminism and political correctness.



Most 21st century Americans would wince at using babies to flog cigarettes!



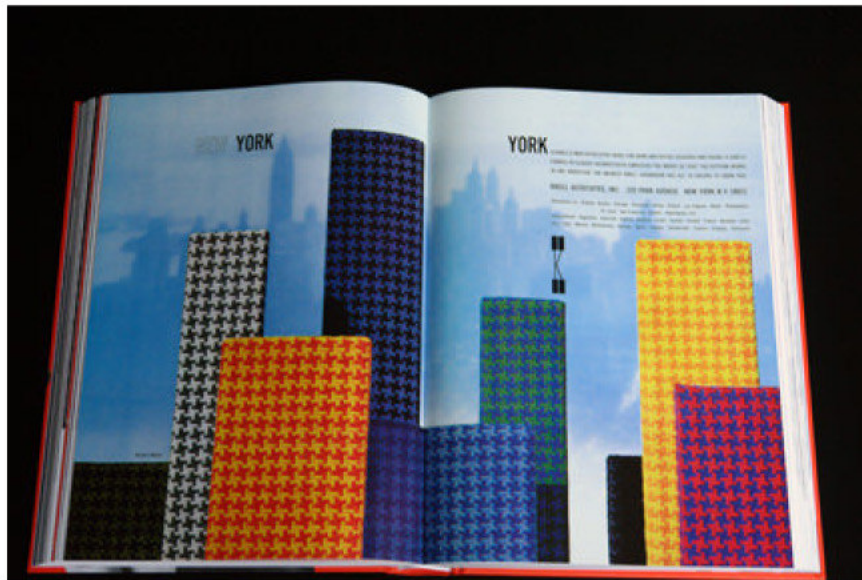
And no oil company today would have the nerve to use a whale to advertise oil!

The industry inevitably absorbed the social changes of the wider world – it began to recognise the strength of the “Black dollar”...

...and with the expanding female workforce, the female dollar too.

Other outside influences seemed to pass the advertising world by – there's not much sign civil rights movement, student protests or the Vietnam War!

The advertising hotbeds of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles & San Francisco held onto a more idealistic view of the world, but their output still reflects many aspects of mid 20th century society.



There's a really interesting 3-minute [slideshow on the BBC website](#) where [Tashen America](#)'s executive editor, [Jim Heimann](#) describes the images and the role they played in shaping modern culture.



There's lots of great artwork, graphics, typography & photography to feast your eyes upon in the two volumes – over 600 pages in total!

So treat yourself to a copy – or even better, put it on your birthday or Christmas pressie list. Then settle yourself into a comfy chair and wallow in all the mid century wonderfulness!!!

Mid-century Ads: Advertising from the Mad Men Era is available from [Amazon](#) and [Hive](#)

[Many thanks to [Taschen](#) for this review copy]