

**BACK TO BASICS WITH ED
ARNOLD** HOW ONE PAPER
COVERED THE OLYMPICS
THE BEST SMALL NEWSPAPERS
IN THE WORLD **INFO GRAPHICS**
ON A LIMITED BUDGET WHY
BIG CITY PAPERS
NEED TO RETHINK
THEIR BUSINESS
MORE THAN YOU
EVER WANTED
TO KNOW ABOUT
NAMEPLATES
12 STUDENTS
REDESIGN
THE NEW YORK
TIMES AND MORE



CONVERSATION



TONY JENKINS

Jenkins

Getting back
to basics with

Ed Arnold

Ed Arnold, often described as the Father of North American Newspaper Design, was honored by SND at its recent Minneapolis workshop with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his "Outstanding contributions to newspaper design and graphics worldwide. Through his decades of work as an author, teacher, lecturer and designer, he has done much to elevate the importance of visual journalism."

Arnold, former editor of Linotype News, newspaper owner, professor at Syracuse University, seminar leader at the American Press Institute and designer of many newspapers in a career spanning 60 years, talks to Design's editor **Tony Sutton** about his trade, his experiences and his hopes for the future.



JAMES KEGLEY

"I've often wondered what would happen if Ty Cobb had ever been asked to wear an ad. He'd say, 'Nuts to you, Bud, I'm not a walking billboard, I'm a baseball player'"

Sutton: You've been in the newspaper business for 60 years; are you happy with the way newspaper design has evolved during that time?

Arnold: I want to put on record that I'm not an old reprobate longing for a return to the good old days. I'm more of a proud father who is disappointed that his kids are only reaching 98 percent of their potential and wants them to reach 101 percent. My message to young designers is this: look, kids, you can do better, but the only way to achieve your potential is to go back to – and understand – the basics. That sounds boring, but it's reality.

This last month I've been circulating among high schools around my home in Roanoke, Virginia, seeing the football teams getting ready for the new season. They were doing exactly the same things I remember seeing in the '30s when I was in high school: basic blocking, basic ball handling, basic concentration of what the aim is – to get the ball across the opponents' line. If I were involved in newspaper design today, I'd fight to get back to basics, to convince everyone from the publisher down to the copyboy what our job really is. I'd love to do it, though. It's exciting. It's a challenge. It's fun. And I can't think of any other way of earning a living without working for it.

We're living in a better age because we have a more amenable mindset to new ideas. Design is recognized; you aren't bound by the very rigid limitations of hot metal. Pages are cheap to produce, and typefaces are cheap to produce – that's why we are getting all these God-awful abominations. However, I do get a feeling we are losing some of our concentration. I think that making sure that the reader reads all our copy and – more important – comprehends it has become secondary or almost entirely ignored. Display often becomes more important than the message the editor is trying to sell.

Sutton: In what way?

Arnold: Well, for example, I was looking at the *Detroit Free Press* display in its booth downstairs [in the SND conference's registration hall]. It has a bunch of beautiful front page posters, the kind that my kids used to put on the wall when they were teenagers. Well, you get one of these pages, and you're looking at it from 14 inches, and it's like standing in front of a circus poster, but it's almost impossible to read. The front-page images on our newspapers are becoming so big that they don't attract the reader, they attract the looker. And they often don't work because the broadsheet page is folded so you only see half of it in the news rack. We are over-designing, and we are over-coloring, so that the reader is confronted by a three-ring circus. Who do I watch? The bareback riders, the weightlifter or the jugglers? I no longer see page patterns that lead my eye through the page and tell me where to go. I call these patterns the Gutenberg Principle. When I pick up a piece of printed paper, I go immediately to the top left-hand corner and when I get to the bottom right I'm

done and I turn the page. That's it! I'm also unhappy with putting ads on the front page. It reminds me of the drivers in NASCAR and other auto races who are walking billboards. Every square inch of the uniform is an ad.

I've often wondered what would happen if Ty Cobb had ever been asked to wear an ad. He'd say, "Nuts to you, Bud, I'm not a walking billboard, I'm a baseball player."

Sutton: But surely advertising has always been an integral part of newspapers?

Arnold: Just before we got into World War II, Ralph Ingersoll started a beautiful newspaper called *PM*. It had no ads, just journalism. Then the paper got so many complaints from readers that they started treating ads as news – "The big news today is that Macy's is doing this, Saks 5th Avenue is doing that," and so on. Then Ingersoll finally said, "This is advertising, let's get some money for it." Unfortunately, newsprint rationing came in, and Ingersoll didn't have any previous-use base point, so *PM* went under, which was a shame because it was a very handsome newspaper. But I believe advertising must be subordinate to news and if you have to have it on page one, God forbid, put it down at the foot of the page, not at the top. The higher on the page, the more importance it assumes, and I'd be damned if I'd let any ad be more important than the news.

I redid the *Boston Globe* in the mid '60s. At the time advertising filled a bit more than a quarter of the page and I kept telling John Taylor, the publisher, "Get those ads off, for Pete's sake." Well, he finally agreed and the ads disappeared as the contracts expired until there was only one left – about eight-inches deep by two columns wide. It was a beer ad that was predominantly a beautiful picture of Massachusetts, so it didn't mar the page design at all. The day that ad disappeared, ABC announced that the *Globe* was the No. 1 paper in Boston. As soon as I heard this, I got on the phone and said, "See, John, if you had taken my advice earlier you'd have been No. 1 years ago."

There's something a little tawdry about ads on page one, but I'm sure we're going to have to live with them because the trend is growing all the time."

Sutton: Yes, the corporate bean counters aren't going to back down on that one. Talking about bean counters, what do you think about the movement of North American newspapers to the narrow 50-inch web?

Arnold: It's stupid, incredibly stupid. What we are selling, basically, are square inches of printed material. We have a press that will print a certain width every time it goes clunk. And we're making it so it gives us less. But it costs just as much in electricity to run the press, it costs just as much for the real estate the press occupies and everything else. It's like taking a five-ton truck and drawing a yellow line down one side and saying this is going to remain unused. Economically, I



JAMES KEGLEY

American Press Institute director William Winter presents Arnold with API's Lifetime Achievement award.

can't figure it out. And I think it is a shame, ethically, because we are supposedly selling a full-page ad and it has been so wide for umpteens years and, all of a sudden, the pages come out narrower, but the advertising rate doesn't come down. As a matter of fact, the ad rate usually goes up. I just can't understand it.

We have smart people in the newspaper business, but they sure aren't demonstrating their IQ in this situation. It's interesting to watch the price of newsprint go up as the web width has shrunk. The paper manufacturers have a machine that will create a web and, every five yards they make a penny profit. Then, when the publishers got smart and reduced the width of their papers, the papermakers said, "These stupid American publishers want us to cut down our capacity and make narrower webs, so we'll lose eight percent of our income. We'll just add eight percent to the bill, like restaurants do with the automatic tip." So, newsprint manufacturers didn't drop a penny on that deal. They never will, because they've got us by the short hair. And the publishers weren't smart enough to realize that.

Sutton: Publishers will do anything to maximize profits, of course. That's their job.

Arnold: Well, actually it isn't. It's like a contractor who says, "I'm going to save some money and raise the profits by buying 25 percent less lumber, and then I'm going to build a two-bedroom house instead of the three bedrooms we're used to." So, if I'm charging the same money for this house versus the old house, then I'm cheating the consumer. That's what newspapers are doing. And this new page – almost twice as deep as it is wide – is aesthetically the worse design area you can have. My daughter was in Syracuse last week and brought home a copy of the *Post-Standard*, and I said, "What the hell is this?" I tried to read it, and it's coming between my legs and I have to scroll up. It's just horrendous from a design point of view.

It gets worse. I've been reading the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* here at the conference with its four-paragraph stories on the front page. Then I go to an inside page and find a story that basically consumes the whole page, without art. I just wonder if newspaper designers and editors ever sit down and read their own

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"In my local paper, jump heads are one word, about 42 pt. bold sans serifs, saying 'Taxes,' and the story just goes on and on and on. This is the easy way out. I don't have to write another headline. I don't have to write subheads"

papers to see how a reader reacts to the obstacles that we plant in their way. I drove from Roanoke to Michigan in June. Naturally, I bought every paper along the way and found some of them so hard to read it seemed that editors were deliberately placing obstacles for readers. Often our efforts seem to be intended solely to attract lookers, but not to serve readers. When we were at API's 2020 thing I said to the group, "We're a bunch of great architects, but we're lousy carpenters. I can see this great mansion there, a thing to bring joy into your heart. But the doors don't lock very nicely, the windows stick, and when I come into my kitchen I can't open my fridge." You still have to have a saw, a hammer and a bunch of nails to build something. Those are the basics and we've got to drum these into our kids to start with.

Sutton: Tell us more about those basics?

Arnold: Well, one of them is getting the line length correct, another is the Gutenberg Principle: things start at the top left corner of the page, and the eye wants to go down and to the right because that's the exit. It doesn't want to go backward, and whenever we try to make the reader go backward that's an irritation. We fail to recognize that the reading eye and the reading process are very delicate instruments and consequently are affected by very minute factors. That's something we have to continually be aware of.

Another thing we have to remember is that these typographic errors are like the old Chinese water torture: they're accumulative. I wake up in the morning and look at my clock. That's my first typographic encounter of the day. Then I read the back of my cornflakes box, and I see a billion signs all over the place as I drive to the office. I get to my workplace, and there's a pile of stuff on my desk, a kaleidoscope of different typestyles. By the time I get to my newspaper, I've accumulated a bunch of straws, and finally there's this one piddling thing on page one and it's the final straw that breaks this camel's back. The connections are sometimes hard to realize, but we've got to make them because that's the world we're living in.

We've also got to be aware of some of the early research into typefaces. I don't think any sane person would argue that roman is not the best body type. That ought to be a given. We also know that, when used in mass, sans serifs and italics have low readability. We also know that condensed letters have low readability. But we ignore those truths ... I have a typeface on my computer – Arial, I believe it's called – and even in so-called normal setting, when I get an 'r' and an 'n' together it comes up as 'm' every time. Now, when I'm reading, I don't read letter by letter; I read words, and all of a sudden I hit a word I don't understand because it's got that damn 'm' in it. Then, when I look closely, I see it's not an 'm', but that damn 'r' and 'n' cozying up. Every one of those little interruptions is another straw that helps to break this camel's back.

Today we have a fad for using condensed sans ser-

ifs; we have to condense type just to get words to fit into five-pica columns. They're irritating and the word breaks often make them almost impossible to read. Another thing that we seem to have completely overlooked is that headlines in all caps are less legible than lower case. I sat in on a session this morning, and the speaker had done a paper in Leicester, England, and come up with all caps headlines in a narrow face with no leading so the characters practically touched the line below. The designer probably thought it looked good, but it sure isn't good to read.

Fortunately, we haven't got round to using all caps in text. There was a time when William Randolph Hearst was still The Chief, when the teletype would ring lustily in his newsrooms, and one of his editorials would appear with orders that it must run on page one and it MUST – thank heavens – BE SET IN ALL CAPS, so that the peasants couldn't read it anyway.

We have, on the advertising side, the idea that all caps adds strength and attention to everything. Other than to the word SALE, they don't.

People forget the basics, and that's sad, because it means that at some place in their education their mentor has failed miserably. As an ex-journalism teacher, I see my failures and those of my colleagues too often.

Sutton: A lot of these mistakes are made because designers are not trained as editors. The work they do is often very pretty, but not functional. Why haven't American newspapers got past this obstacle?

Arnold: This again goes back to journalism schools. In the old days, they didn't produce designers, so what happened? The editor who wanted a designer went to an art school and often got into trouble. I had an experience in New Orleans, where I had earlier redesigned both of the papers, the *Times Picayune* and I think the other was called *The State*. Several years later, I got a call from the managing editor who had hired a young designer and asked me to take a look at the work. Well, I was reluctant; I'm not going there to second guess someone else – but we were very good friends, so when he offered to take me for some good shrimp I agreed.

I went to New Orleans, and this kid was in the process of designing a new body face. This was like a guy being hired to run a bakery who goes out and plants the wheat field. I kept quiet on that, but when I asked him to explain his basic game plan, he said, "I envision the page as a bunch of areas that I shift around until it suits my eye, and then I put stuff in it."

I replied, "Well, that's fine, but what do you do if you get a story that won't fit into one of these areas?"

"Then," he said, "I stand on my prerogative and move it to an inside page."

"Son," I answered, "if you stand on prerogatives, you'll soon be standing on the bread line."

Now we often see designers who are not journalists. If they're not controlled, many of them will create moveable art galleries. You can't blame them because

they often don't have any idea of news judgment.

Sutton: What would you do to change that attitude?

Arnold: I believe the sender of the message has a responsibility to his audience. We have an attitude that if the reader doesn't understand a story, it's his fault, and it will be resolved if he concentrates on it. That's rubbish. The responsibility is always on the part of the sender, never the receiver. We have to say, "I'm not a designer, I'm a newspaperman, and I'm using this particular tool to communicate with my readers." It's just like a reporter sitting down and saying to himself, "How do I start this story? Do I say, 'The city council last night approved a new sewer ...' or do I start out with 'John Smith has lived here 90 years and the sewer has always been stinking ...'" Our decisions always have to be based on news, and when we become journalists we are, whether or not we want to be, dedicated to transmitting the truth, the real honest-to-God truth and not the virtual truth.

This is why I would love to see a journalism school deliberately set out to train journalists – all of the skills – and that's all. I get kind of tired of hearing about Syracuse, which used to be a school of journalism, but now it's a school of mass communication in contemporary society or something like that. The titles of these schools are getting longer, and poor old journalism is down in the bottom corner. It's interesting, though, how many people like to think of themselves as communicators. The year before I went to Syracuse in 1960, Newhouse had made a very sizeable donation that built a beautiful building. It had a conference on how it should be spent, at which communicators came out of the woodwork. Someone from the school of forestry said, "We're communicators; we're the guys who plant the trees that make the newsprint." And all the vultures gathered. Same doggone thing when I went to Virginia Commonwealth University; everybody's a communicator and wants a suite in the new building. At Michigan State, my alma mater, audiologists, people who work with the deaf, call themselves communicators, and they're part of the school. So we had journalism, then we added advertising and audiology and all these other forms of communication all under one tent. I don't get that stuff at all. What bothers me is that journalism is now near the bottom of the food chain. That's wrong; journalism schools have got to teach journalism.

Sutton: That's an interesting point. In Europe the sub editors usually do the tasks of editing and page layout, and some of them are very, very talented in both skills; but in North America there's almost a church and state separation, which regularly results in splashy over design of feature fronts followed by deathly dull inside pages.

Arnold: Yes, you can have the best writing in the world, but you still have to get people to read it, and this again is where you have to go back to the basics. When I was



Left: Ed Arnold tells a story after being presented with SND's Lifetime Achievement Award.

CARSTEN GREGERSEN



Below: Arnold chats with Gordon Preece, art director of Canada's Winnipeg Free Press, Preece's wife, Deborah, right, and daughter, Lindsay, left.

CARSTEN GREGERSEN

the only picture editor in upstate Michigan – and later when I was barnstorming on the lecture circuit – a question that constantly came up was, "Where does the picture editor or photo editor or art director sit?" Out by the darkroom, he had as much contact with the newsroom as the guy in circulation on the next floor. This was a very, very intense debate, and it was less than trivial, because it was not really about where the guy's desk went, but it was about his place in the network. I think we've come a long way in integrating the departments, but we must still be careful so it's not overdone. There was a very great newspaper in Pennsylvania, and the young publisher came in via an inheritance. He was very interested in design and insisted that the art director sit in on the daily news conference. Pretty soon, the tail began wagging the

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The pages Arnold produced for API's Design 2000 (top) and 2020 (above) seminars.

dog and decisions were made on art instead of content. The result was a beautiful paper the readers didn't like. The circulation fell quickly, and they had to revise it again. So here was a question, not of including the art director, but of giving the art director two votes for everyone else's one.

Sutton: You've made several interesting points about the folly of putting too much faith in art directors who are not news people. Perhaps one of the basic rules should be an understanding that pretty newspapers are not good newspapers without good journalism.

Arnold: Right. Often designers seem to be more concerned with creating traveling art galleries than newspapers. But this is not a sign that their moral fiber is unravelling. Most of them are good people; they're smart, but they just look at it from a different point of view because they've been trained from a different point of view.

Sutton: You were very involved with API's newspapers of the future seminars in 1988 and again last year. Tell me the thinking behind the pages you produced.

Arnold: I had a great time at API in 1989 when we did the Newspapers for the Year 2000 project. I put numbers on the stories in my prototype. Natural-ly No. 1 was in the top corner, but No. 2 could have been anywhere. One editor ripped the hell out of the idea, but I had the last laugh when I noticed that one of the San Francisco newspapers is now listing 10 stories at the foot of the page. This might have seemed a dumb idea, but it was not unintelligent.

In my page for API's latest 2020 project I deliberately broke the page with the top half filled with news and devoted the bottom to various degrees of fluff. I took my cue from *Time* and *Newsweek*. You go 20 pages into those magazines before you ever get something that looks like news. All that comes before that is entertainment, gossip and other fluff. The same thing is happening in newspapers. I mentioned that when I went up to Michigan I bought every newspaper I could find. Invariably at least a third of the front pages were filled with fluff. My newspaper is particularly bad in its news judgment, but we still have a big story about the guy who raises three-legged horses, and the one who collects snails. Look at the local papers here at this conference, and you'll find that a hell of a lot of page one is fluff. Granted you have to run some of it, but for heaven's sake, let's put it in the fluff department and tell readers that our main function on the front page is to bring them the news. Another thing that bugs me as a reader are the tiny three-inch stories under the round-up in the international news section, where I find there's been another uprising in Indonesia and 12,000 people are dead. Three paragraphs! That's not enough; I want to know more about it, but,

no, that's all I get. And then I'll go over to page two, page four, anywhere and find a whole damned page of text without even a piece of art on it. In my local paper, jump heads are one word, about 42 pt. bold sans serifs, saying "Taxes," and the story just goes on and on and on. This is the easy way out. I don't have to write another headline. I don't have to write subheads. That all takes time to write; instead I fill the pages with two or three stories and get the paper on the press as quickly as possible.

Sutton: And then we wonder why people stop buying newspapers.

Arnold: I think there is a real arrogance among newspaper people, who seem to be saying: "I know more than you do, and if you don't understand, go away, kid, and stop bothering me." An awful lot of stories are written to impress reporters' sources: "I cover city hall, and I want to show the mayor that I'm just as smart as he is and probably a little better." And so many of these stories are full of inside jokes. If you know the language you may be interested, but I'm sure much of this flies over the heads of most of our readers. It's not only arrogant, it's also bad communication.

Sutton: Let's go back to the API sessions. You mentioned that with your 2020 page, the top of the page is for news while the bottom is reserved for fluff. Do you believe that it's better putting the lighter stuff in an entirely different section or on its own pages?

Arnold: I think my page is a compromise, and the way I had envisioned it wasn't entirely a split between news and light stuff. Some was hard fluff, if you will. I had the best athlete of the week, the best quote of the day, the best TV. I made them all the bests, and it's quite arbitrary and artificial. I shouldn't talk about my page specifically, but I was trying to nail down the concept that we have two kinds of news and that some form of compartmentalizing is convenient to the reader. This is not a judgment on the news value, this is for the readers. The analogy is walking into Wal-Mart. I want to know where the shoes are, I want to know where the typewriters are and so on.

Speaking of typewriters reminds me of a cute story. Many years ago, *The Saginaw News* used to have a dictatorial editor, Fred Kirstowsky, who ran everything. One night, I came in to do my story, and there was Fred busy doing things to all the typewriters. I asked him what he was doing. He answered, "I'm doing copy control." He had asked me earlier if I had a formula for working out story lengths. "Sure," I replied, "It's so many inches to the page if I get 72 characters to a line. But some people type to different widths." Fred finally came up with a solution. He set each line to 73 characters and put some liquid solder on it, so that every typewriter in the place had the same line width. Now that's using technology; I often think of it.

Sutton: My final question on API's 2020 event and the



Emphasizing the basics: Ed Arnold in action at one of the many seminars he conducted for API.

one before: the books are neat and some of the ideas quite stealable but are these future newspaper projects worthwhile at a deeper level? Is there any real benefit to the industry?

Arnold: I don't think there is any solid value because you're preaching to the choir. And you really want to preach to the pastor – the publisher. Somebody said that to me at API at one time: "This is fine telling us but why don't you tell it to the publishers?" So Monty Curtis, the executive director, gets us a gig as a two-man panel at a meeting of a bunch of publishers at the time when Hubert Humphrey was campaigning for President. We had just gone on stage, and were waiting to be introduced when there was a flurry at the entrance. Humphrey had arrived. He was supposed to talk the day before but never made it; he was always running 36 hours late. Now he had time to extend short greetings to these publishers, so he climbed onto the stage and started talking. He talked and talked and his five minutes stretched to 45. Monty and I were anchored there, so couldn't walk off. But, finally, the chairman came up and thanked him, and Hubert left. Then the chairman said, "Well, we're just about in time for the next session," so I never did get to pass my great message to the publishers. I thought this must have been a message from above.

Sutton: Still on the subject of the future, I'm sure you have some comments about the design of websites.

Arnold: The typography on the Web is abominable. It is such a kaleidoscope that you don't know where to go. And designers use too much condensed sans which is hard to read. Last week, for example, I had to look up something in the Encarta dictionary, and I brought this thing up on my screen, and I literally couldn't read it. I couldn't get through it because the word spacing is absolutely minimal, and the leading is less than minimal. Now this ought to be fine typography because books have always had a tradition of fine type, but this comes out stinking. My daughter Bethany writes a daily column for the country's biggest Christian website, and I check her page to see if she's spelling properly, but the typography is lousy. I read it because it's my duty, it's a point of pride, but I sure don't enjoy the physical experience.

Like you, I'm a professional reader; we can sit down and read a poor typography in a newspaper. It doesn't bother me, I can read it fine, but your typical reader almost moves his lips when he reads. We've got to accept the fact that most of our readers are not very good at reading and give them every bit of help that we can. One of the things we can do is to raise newspaper body type by another point.

While we're on the subject of body type, one of the great battles in the 1950s was raising the size to 9 pt. after 8 pt. had been the standard for 50 years. The trouble was that Associated Press was sending everything line for line on the Teletype at 12 picas. When the pub-

"We've got to accept the fact that most of our readers are not very good at reading and give them every bit of help that we can"

"Then we see these infernal narrow columns that have become so popular with designers ... Reading that is like walking down a staircase with regular steps, but then hitting a shorter one and bumping down to the bottom. It's irritating and it's doggone near painful"

lishers asked for 9 at 12, AP wouldn't play ball, so we had a fight. Then the *San Jose News* had a bigger fight because they wanted to reduce the column width to 11 picas. AP said, "No soap." Well, Pete Southam, who had just retired as head honcho at Southam newspapers in Canada, was interested in typography so he invited me to Ottawa and asked what we could do about the problem. I said, "Pete you're president of Canadian Press, surely you've got some clout." He asked me for the answer. I told him the solution was as simple as changing the margin release on a typewriter. It was that easy, no matter what CP or AP said. So Pete used his clout and Canadian Press went to 11 pica columns. Then the people down here said, "If those Canadians can do it, why the hell can't we?" and, very reluctantly, AP changed its transmission to 9 at 11. It was like moving the pyramids five yards to the south.

Sutton: We spoke earlier about the need to turn lookers into readers, but wouldn't you agree that we also have to take care that we don't oversimplify everything to the point of irrelevance?

Arnold: That's the distinction that we have to reiterate constantly, that there are viewers and there are readers. And they are not identical functions or identical roles. It sounds so tiresome to keep repeating this, but you've got to get back to the basics again. People are totally ignorant of the history of our craft, which is an honorable one. The printer is the schoolteacher of the world, but we don't learn or understand our own history because no one teaches us. There are always bright spots, like when I was working with *La Presse* in Montreal. The publisher at the time was an elderly French version of Conrad Black, and she was sitting in a lot of meetings. During one, we were trying to come up with a new headline type. French words are longer than English, and I was trying to get a legible typeface that would enable the heads to fit properly. I asked the publisher why her paper hadn't developed headlines like American papers, who'd say something like "Ike goes to NATO," whereas *La Presse* would say, "Monsieur le President Eisenhower ..." Well, madame almost fainted, so I dropped that ball very quickly. Later, one of my hosts took me outside her office where there was a plaque from the French Academy honoring madam for her valiant efforts to preserve the purity of the French language. There's a lesson there.

Sutton: You've redesigned many newspapers in your time. Talk about some of your experiences and those of the other newspaper design pioneers.

Arnold: There was a guy, Deacon Farrar, who had been the No. 1 newspaper designer for years. When he went to redo *The Detroit News* in the late '40s, he got a suite at the Hotel Cadillac, then the city's best hotel. He had no contact with the staff of the paper and only spoke to the publisher immediately after he talked to God. He was in Detroit for weeks, pasting up pages in his suite, but he alienated the staff with his memos so much that

within two months the only trace of Farrar's footsteps was a funny little sideless box he had designed; everything else moved back to what it was before.

Well, I saw this from the outside, and it taught me a lesson: get the staff involved fast because they're just as smart as you are, probably a little smarter. So one of the things that I always did was ask that somebody would come up with a headline schedule and get them working on anything else they could possibly do. My idea was get in there, get the job done and get the hell out as soon as I'd done the job properly.

I had a colleague at Virginia Commonwealth University who worked for two years on a redesign of a state newspaper. Two years on one job? Well, a lot of this is management, which likes to procrastinate. So, I'd go in to whoever had to make the decisions and say, "Look here, we've got to get this all set now because I'm catching a plane in a couple of hours, and we can't do anything until you sign off." And it would work.

There are many ways to move publishers. I redesigned *The Toronto Star* when Beland Honderich was the publisher. He was a conservative man who didn't believe in doing things that hadn't been done before. We completed the redesign, complete with stylebook and a new nameplate – which, incidentally, they still use after all these decades. Everything was all set, but he couldn't bring himself to push the button. Then the word came out that *The Globe and Mail* was building a new plant, and they would be coming up with a new design. That was that, Beland pushed the button, and bam, bam, bam, there we were.

But it's always a good idea to make sure everything is set up in advance. When Gannett bought a little weekly in Titusville, Florida, to convert into a daily called *Today*, it had staff on duty for at least a month, putting out a paper every day up to the point of dropping it off at the carrier spots. Then somebody would come right up behind, picking them up fast. The first day the paper came out they were hit by a hurricane. The staff did a terrific job because they had got plenty of training in putting the paper out every day.

On the other hand, I was at another paper on Long Island that had committed to a start-up date. I was there a week before the launch date, and the new, reconditioned, press was still not running. This was the last days of the newspaper wars, and only half the papers – a Sunday edition – got out. It was a total mess because they just wouldn't take another week to get the job running properly. Then we had the extreme on the other side when *El Mundo* started in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It had a full staff in operation for a year and put out a paper up to platemaking every day. And that was too long because they lost a lot of good people who got bored and said, "What the hell is this?" But when they did start they had a veteran staff. And it wasn't totally Mickey Mouse because there was another morning newspaper in the same shop, so they were also working for *El Vocero*, which had kept to the same design I had given them 22 years earlier.



CARSTEN GREGERSEN

Ed Arnold gets a standing ovation as he goes to collect his Lifetime Achievement Award at the Minneapolis workshop.

Sutton: A good design should last longer than a couple of years, shouldn't it?

Arnold: A colleague put out a book that was very successful. I met him later and asked what he was doing. He told me he was writing his second book and was having to make so many changes that it bothered him. "Brother," I replied, "if your first book had been sound, you would have had principles that didn't have to be changed." And I have stuck to that philosophy constantly. This sounds like bragging, I'm sure, but once in a while, I go back to one of my books and read it and know I would make no apologies at all if I put it out again with all the words the way they are, just changing the illustrations. The basic principles don't change because the eye and the brain don't change. The same principles apply to newspapers – if the design is solid, it should survive.

Sutton: I believe you were the guy responsible for the innovative switch from eight columns to six columns in North American newspapers in the 1960s? How did that come about?

Arnold: Way back in Ben Franklin's day, his old chum Giambattista Bodoni, and the other master printers of Europe came up with the idea of an optimum line length that was one-and-a-half times the lower case alphabet length. When you translated that into the type we were using it came to 14 picas. When I trans-

formed the *Louisville Courier Journal* and *The Louisville Times* with Norm Isaac in 1964, we came up with a six-column format because that gave us 14 pica columns. Some papers had used six columns for their front pages before then, but these were the first ones to use the same format right through. But, back to Bodoni and Franklin. They also said that the minimum line length should be 25 percent less than the optimum, while the maximum line length is 50 percent more, so it all comes out basically to character counts of 32, 42 and 64 characters. But, today, especially in Canada, I see pages where the cutlines run clear across the sheet.

Sutton: Surely that's acceptable if it only makes one or two lines.

Arnold: If it is only one line then it's tolerable, but it's that terrible jump back to the start of the next line that causes trouble. Then we see these infernal narrow columns that have become so popular with designers. I was doing a critique of a publication that shall be nameless – even with you, because I know this is going into the designers' equivalent of the *Congressional Record*. It was using many columns of about five picas wide, which usually means one word per line and a lot of the time that word has to be hyphenated. Reading that is like walking down a staircase with regular steps, but then hitting a shorter one and bumping

"Every automobile is going to have four wheels, and it's going to have an engine and windshield because that's the function of the beast. Newspapers, because they all share the same function, are going to basically be the same"

CONVERSATION



JAMES KEGLEY

Gurus gather: Roger Black, Ed Arnold and Mario Garcia.

"The job of a preacher is to discover the basic principles and then articulate them. Finding those principles often takes more work than people are willing to devote"

down to the bottom. It's irritating and it's doggone near painful. The result is that what was, at the time of the *Courier-Journal*, the optimum line of 14 picas, today becomes a maximum. The established formula for the shortest line doesn't even allow for one unhyphenated word. I don't think that the people who are inflicting this on the reader give a hoot in hades about the historical formula for readability.

Sutton: We may disagree about cutlines, but we certainly agree that a sense of history is important.

Arnold: I write a column for a print and graphics magazine in Washington D.C., and I'm always telling my readers that they should be aware of their legacy and be proud of it. I think a newspaper designer should be familiar with Bodoni, with John Allen, the old Linotype News editor, and maybe W.A. Dwiggins, who designed the Caledonian and Metro typefaces, and so on. Anyone who is unfamiliar with them is as incomplete as a doctor who doesn't know what Lister did or what Jonas Salk did. We've got to realize we're members of the oldest mechanical craft in the world, apart from carpentry. Damn it, we ought to be proud of our craft, and we should consider that we have a body of literature; we're not sleight-of-hand guys going along by whimsy and the fad of the moment.

I think the Society for News Design is doing a good job in this progression. I spoke to a little girl from South America this morning, and if it hadn't been for SND she would have been a clerk. SND has given us a cachet, which is good – but we need to do a lot of work building on that.

Sutton: How do you react to the criticism that SND has contributed to a sameness in newspapers because people steal things from the annual rather than do

their own original thinking?

Arnold: Well, there was a time when I was barnstorming around the country. Inevitably someone would say, "You're coming up with a stereotype and every newspaper is going to look like an Ed Arnold newspaper." Heck, no! But, when you think about it, every newspaper is going to look like a newspaper. Every automobile is going to have four wheels, and it's going to have an engine and a windshield because that's the function of the beast. And newspapers, because they all share the same function, are going to basically be the same. What bugs me, though, are teachers who don't have a message. When I was very young and inexperienced, there was a trainer called Howard Taylor who worked with Copley Newspapers in California. He had a dog and pony show that he took round the country. It consisted of projecting pages onto a screen, and he'd say, "Now, here's a great page, isn't it?" Yup, yup. He'd say, "Up here, we've got a picture of a three-legged elephant. Great picture, isn't it?" Yup, yup. "Over here we've got a nice headline; kind of a pun. Pretty nice, isn't it?" Yup, yup. "Over here, we've got a picture of a 107-year-old woman playing golf. Great picture?" Yup, yup.

So, a few days later, I'm back at my weekly paper. I don't have a picture of a three-legged elephant, our puns are so bad that no one understands them, and we've got no 107-year-old golfers. So what have I learned? Not a single thing, because Taylor never said the basic principle of design is to get readers' attention to the prime corner. When I was given a national forum by Linotype, I really took it as a responsibility to develop a formula, one that is still very sound. The job of a teacher is to discover the basic principles and then articulate them. Finding those principles often takes more work than people are willing to devote. Anyone who thinks he can wing it by just standing up and talking is deceiving himself and probably boring the audience.

Sutton: We'd better stop now before we start to bore our audience. One last question: what does it feel like to be a living legend?

Arnold: Unbelievable! ♦

Ed Arnold was profiled in another extended interview with Phil Nesbitt in issue 32 of *Design* magazine (November, 1988). That interview discussed many areas of Arnold's life not covered in this interview. If you'd like a copy, please e-mail Dave Gray, SND's executive director, at snd@snd.org.