

**WHAT YOUR MAGAZINE IS TRYING TO TELL YOU:  
AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE IN  
*WESTERN LIVING AND THE BLOCK***

by

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PROJECT REPORT  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
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## ABSTRACT

This project report investigates the language and discourse of two regional lifestyle magazines: *Western Living* and *The Block*. It analyzes how magazine editorial reflects and projects certain lifestyles and ideologies through the careful presentation of text and images to appeal to a specific demographic.

The two publications are compared through the framework of discourse analysis. Each magazine is viewed in its wider social context, illustrating how it reflects, (re)creates, and shapes the views of its readers. The interplay between editor, reader, and text is discussed at length.

The editorial content cited and analyzed comes primarily from the June/July 2006 and August 2006 issues of *Western Living* and Volume 1, Issues 3 and 4 of *The Block*, which the author of this report worked on as an editorial intern in the spring and summer of 2006.

Keywords: magazine; editorial; discourse analysis; *Western Living*; *The Block*

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Ingeborg and Anthony Kordic

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to the staff of *Western Living* and *The Block*, in particular Anicka Quin and Jim Tobler. Thanks also to John Maxwell, Mary Schendlinger, and Jim Sutherland.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2007, *Good* magazine came out with a list of “The 51 Best\* Magazines Ever.” In his introduction to the piece, *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter makes a sweeping statement about magazines and the difference between them and their print media counterparts: “News-papers tell you about *the* world; magazines tell you about *their* world – and by association, *your* world.”<sup>1</sup> While this project report does not purport to make any kind of declaration about newspapers (or “news-papers”, as Carter curiously hyphenates), the idea that magazines create their own worlds, while shaping and reflecting the worlds of their readers, is the driving force behind the study you are about to read.

The world of a magazine, unlike the world at large, is not chaotic, overwhelming, disorganized, or full of internal strife. The world of a magazine is more like the world as you wish it to be at any given time – a world with neat, well-articulated departments for every part of yourself: there might be shopping tips for your consumer self, dieting tips for your self-loathing self, hard-hitting articles for your socially conscious self, touching human interest stories for your sensitive self, and images of beautiful homes or vacation spots for the self you hope to become in the future. A magazine that can present these things to you in a neat, seamless package, without seeming scattered or disorganized is successful. In other words, the ability of a magazine to create a cohesive, multi-dimensional world that combines variability and consistency and speaks to its audience in a distinctive, unified voice, is what makes that magazine good. A magazine that knows itself and its audience is a magazine that

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, Graydon (introduction). “The 51 Best\* Magazines Ever”. *Good*. Issue 003. Mar/Apr 2007, 68

can recreate its own cohesive “world” with each issue, even as the content changes, writers and editors come and go, and audiences evolve. In contrast, a magazine unsure of its vision and its audience seems disorganized and empty. A reader never feels comfortable in such a magazine, and more often than not will abandon it very quickly.

The world that a magazine creates, or strives to create, is part of what James Paul Gee refers to as Discourse – that is, “the different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language ‘stuff.’”<sup>2</sup>

This stuff can include things such as values, beliefs, and identities, all of which are embedded in a magazine’s editorial mandate, either explicitly or implicitly. One should be able to pick up any magazine and deduce certain things about whom it is intended for. *Western Living*, on the surface level, is intended for people who live in western Canada. Scratch the surface and you will find that it is for western Canadians interested in home décor and design. Dig a little deeper and you will begin to glean other characteristics about *Western Living*’s readership, from the purely aesthetic - they have an appreciation for well-made objects for their home; they prefer clean, modern lines over bulky, frilly, traditional design – to the economic – they are willing to invest a lot money in their homes, and probably have significant buying power. Other characteristics, such as age, are evident in language, cultural references, even size and consistency of type.

Of course, the readers of *Western Living*, as of any other magazine, are heterogeneous, bringing with them their own sets of values, backgrounds and beliefs. While some of these characteristics are likely to be addressed in the magazine (why else would these particular

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<sup>2</sup> Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis – Theory and Method*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001 13

people read it?) other traits will not be. This is why the “world” of a magazine, to bring back Graydon Carter’s analogy, is in fact the world viewed from a certain perspective. As he puts it, “Writers, photographers, editors, and designers bundle the slice of the world they have chosen to explore and deliver it to you in a singularly affordable, transportable, lendable, replaceable, disposable, recyclable package.”<sup>3</sup> This bundle represents a discourse – a neat, attractive package of language plus “other stuff”.

This project report will explore both the intricacies of this language and how it is used, and the magazine’s place in a wider social context, specifically the ways in which language both reflects and shapes a specific social discourse. *Western Living* and *The Block* act as primary case studies and form the basis of this investigation.

The report will begin by outlining the two primary case studies: each magazine’s history, mandate, editorial profile, readership and circulation strategy. Despite obvious differences in the publications’ sizes and corporate structures, they are nevertheless trying to capture a similar audience – namely an audience of affluent, highly educated professionals who are style-conscious. The editorial profiles will illustrate how each publication interprets and speaks to this audience in its own way – *Western Living* maintains a strong shelter focus, while *The Block* is a general-interest magazine. Nevertheless, there are parallels in the perceived interests and preferences of the audience. The magazines are also similar in the regional division of their editorial content. While *Western Living*’s audience extends to major cities across western Canada, *The Block* is currently focused on different areas of the Lower Mainland. Both magazines have core content that appears in all issues, combined with local or regional content that varies from edition to edition to appeal to readers in specific markets.

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<sup>3</sup> Carter, in *ibid.*

After the preliminary comparison of the two magazines, the report will go on to the main analysis of ideology and language. The basic theory of discourse analysis will be introduced and its relation to magazine editorial will be addressed, followed by a discussion of the interaction between author, text, and reader. Then the analytical approach to the editorial content of *Western Living* and *The Block* will be outlined. Covers, articles and visual spreads will be approached with series of five analytical questions that assess each piece's connection to the magazine's editorial mandate and its audience. The report will then enter into the main analysis, comparing and contrasting specific shelter, service, and profile articles, front-of-book pieces, and covers from the two publications, in an attempt to illustrate how each magazine speaks to its audience and to anticipate how the audience would respond to the material presented.

The purpose of this analysis is to gain an understanding of how each magazine works, and in particular to illustrate the relationship between the topics covered by the magazines, the language used to convey those topics, and the magazines' readers.

## II. INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

I worked as an editorial intern at *Western Living* magazine from April 11 to July 7, 2006, and at *The Block* magazine from July 10 to September 1, 2006. The two publications, while in vastly different stages of development, have a similar target audience, which affects their vision and shapes their editorial content. *Western Living*, the veteran publication, knows exactly whom it is for, knows where to look for story ideas, and has a pool of writers to convey just the right tone for each piece. *The Block*, at the time of my internship, was in the process of putting together its third issue. It had a solid concept and a unique approach, but it was struggling to find a balance between its local content and the national magazine quality it wanted to convey to its readers and advertisers.

In using *Western Living* and *The Block* as case studies, my intention is not to compare the quality of the two in order to determine which magazine is better. To do so would be unfair, given not only *Western Living*'s long history but also its privileged position within a large national corporation. Rather, my intention is to look at how these two publications that are vying for a piece of the same demographic pie try to appeal to their readers in different ways. This comparison is less about who attracts the most readers and more about the types of editorial choices each magazine makes and the risks it takes, based on those readers' perceived needs and desires. Demographics – basic information about a given population, such as age, income, level of education, ethnic background, and place of residence<sup>4</sup> –

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Sammye; Prijatel, Patricia. *The Magazine From Cover To Cover – Inside a Dynamic Industry. Second Edition*. New York: NTC Publishing Group, 2007, 7

combined with psychographics – more elusive characteristics, including attitudes, preferences, beliefs, and values<sup>5</sup> – help magazine editors to choose appropriate material. While demographic data is relatively easy to come by, especially if the magazine is intended for an audience in a specific geographical region, as both *Western Living* and *The Block* are, psychographic data is typically obtained through methods such as reader surveys, focus groups, unsolicited reader feedback, and comprehensive data resources such as the Print Measures Bureau (PMB), and also through the magazine staff's experience and intimate knowledge of its readers and what they like and do not like. *Western Living* has a long history and many years of PMB statistics to rely on, whereas *The Block*, at the time of my internship had been in business for less than a year, and thus had no statistical information on its own readers. Its editorial lineup was based on the expertise of the editors.

Following is a profile of each magazine, including its history, current mission statement, editorial layout, reader profile, and circulation information.

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson & Prijatel. in *ibid.* 7

## Western Living

### History

*Western Living*, under its current name, was founded in 1971; however, it was developed from a similar magazine called *Western Homes and Living*, which was established in the early 1950s and lasted for about a decade. *Western Homes and Living*, a small, paid-circulation publication, had a strong focus on architecture and design.<sup>6</sup> As the name suggests, it specifically featured west coast movements in architecture, which at that time combined modern functionality with natural materials that blended into the lush BC landscape. The magazine was based in Vancouver, and billed itself as “A Magazine for the Pacific Coast of Canada.”<sup>7</sup> Vancouver and Victoria were its two major markets.

Although *Western Homes and Living* did contain some “lifestyle” content, such as recipes, style sections, and travel features, its focus on west coast architecture made it a niche magazine. By the mid-1960s, its appeal was beginning to wane and the magazine folded shortly after, only to be resurrected as *Western Living* in the early ’70s. The new *Western Living* maintained the previous publication’s focus on architectural design, starting off with a small controlled circulation. Then, as the magazine industry in western Canada gathered momentum throughout the 1970s, *Western Living* grew.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1980s, the staff had grown and changed and so did the magazine’s focus. Its editorial content became more general-interest and less architecture-centric. The quality of writing and layout improved. In the late ’80s a direct competitor surfaced in the form of *West*

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Jim Sutherland. August 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, Howard T. (editor) *Western Homes and Living*. September 1957.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Jim Sutherland. *ibid.*

magazine, an insert magazine in the *Globe & Mail*.<sup>9</sup> *Western Living* responded by becoming even more general-interest, while still holding on to its shelter/lifestyle roots. By the time *West* folded in the 1990s, a new trend was emerging in consumer magazines. Focused lifestyle magazines, such as *Martha Stewart Living* (with a focus on home décor and do-it-yourself projects) and *InStyle* (with a focus on celebrities and fashion) came to the fore from 1995 to 2000. These publications were consumer- and celebrity-driven and featured short, image-heavy articles over long, in-depth pieces. *Martha Stewart Living* in particular marked a return to domestic arts and crafts, which are traditionally female activities, and the overall tone and aesthetic of this publication was so successful that many shelter magazines tried to mimic it. *Western Living* also followed this trend to some extent. The result, as Jim Sutherland has noted, was that the male readership of shelter magazines (those that, like *Western Living*, had previously had a fairly balanced male-female audience) was reduced drastically.<sup>10</sup> In the case of *Western Living*, this affected not only the magazine's circulation, but also its distinguished reputation as an authority on architectural design, which had endured since its earliest days.

In 1999, *Western Living*'s parent company, Telemedia West (a division of Telemedia Communications Inc.), was acquired by Transcontinental Media, along with 10 other Telemedia titles, including *Vancouver Magazine*.<sup>11</sup> The takeover by Transcontinental, which is Canada's largest publisher of consumer magazines, marked an important period in *Western Living*'s evolution. By the time Jim Sutherland came on-board as editor of *Western Living* in 2000, the magazine was due for an editorial overhaul. Sutherland, who had worked at the magazine in the '80s and early '90s and knew the publication well, saw the need to maintain

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jim Sutherland. *ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.medias-transcontinental.com/En/Profil/historique.html>



the focus on shelter pieces that reflect the lifestyle and aesthetic of western Canada, while appealing to a wider general audience through service pieces dealing with cuisine, fashion, and travel. Today, the audience is evenly split between male and female readers, specifically well-educated professionals, most of whom are homeowners. It has separate editions for its seven major markets across western Canada.

In August 2006, Sutherland mentioned that the magazine is due for another major “renovation” within the next year, but did not state specifically what he thought should be changed.<sup>12</sup> In late 2006, Sutherland left his position as editor and in 2007, Charlene Rooke (former editor of Air Canada’s in-flight magazine *enRoute* and of Calgary’s city magazine *Avenue*) came on-board as editor, joining the existing staff of Felicity Stone (Managing Editor), Anicka Quin (Associate Editor), Doris Cheung (Art Director), Amanda Ross (Westerly Editor) and Marilee Breitkreutz (Assistant Art Director). In July of 2006, Felicity Stone and Doris Cheung left their positions and were followed in January of 2007 by Amanda Ross, indicating that more change is imminent.

### **Mission Statement**

“As distinct as the region it serves, *Western Living* informs and entertains sophisticated, active and engaged urban readers on the subject of home design and décor, food and wine, and travel and leisure. Combining beautiful photography with service articles and quality journalism reflective of its core focus, the magazine reflects the growing power of the west by celebrating the qualities and accomplishments that make Western Canada unique.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Jim Sutherland. *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.transcontinentalpro.com/eng/pdf/wl\\_mk\\_en.pdf](http://www.transcontinentalpro.com/eng/pdf/wl_mk_en.pdf)

## Editorial Profile

*Western Living's* tagline – “Homes + Design, Travel, Food + Wine, The West” – sums up the contents of the magazine. A lifestyle magazine with a shelter focus and a strong western heritage, it strives to reflect and define the good life in western Canada, while remaining grounded with useful tips and homegrown designers.

Each issue is divided into the following sections:

- **Features** – primarily profiles of unique homes featuring original designs and their residents and designers, as well as profiles of well known regional figures or design trends and issues in western Canada
- **WL Travels** – primarily features western Canadian destinations, but sometimes including national and international vacation spots as well
- **Food + Wine** – profiles of well-known culinary personalities and restaurants, along with recipes and wine pairings
- **The Garden** – a monthly column by Cynthia Cushing<sup>14</sup>, profiling well-designed gardens and giving advice on how to develop and maintain your own
- **Mysterious West** – a monthly challenge where readers name the location in a photograph for the chance to win a western getaway
- **Westerly** – short pieces featuring news on products for the home or office, new stores, and up-and-coming designers, all with a local slant
- **Oh, For the Love of Dog** – a monthly column by John MacLachlan Gray illustrating the author's life with this dog, Gus<sup>15</sup>

## Reader Profile

*Western Living* targets an audience of affluent, well-educated professionals and homeowners, more specifically urban adults, aged 25 to 54 with high disposable incomes.

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<sup>14</sup> This column is now written by Jim Hole

<sup>15</sup> Gray's last column appeared in the August 2007 issue. He has now retired.

Based on PMB statistics from 2006, *Western Living* has a total circulation of 192,300 and a total readership of 755,000. PMB 2006 also states the following about *Western Living's* demographic:

- 61 percent of the readership is aged 25 to 54
- 63 percent is aged 35 to 64
- 52 percent of readers are female, and 48 percent are male
- 58 percent of readers are college graduates
- 48 percent of readers have household incomes of over \$75,000
- 85 percent of readers own their own home<sup>16</sup>

*Western Living* has gleaned the following statistics from PMB 2006 about the psychographics of its readership:

- *Western Living* readers are 118 percent more likely than the average population to spend over \$20,000 on home improvements over two years
- 71 percent of readers vacationed within Canada in the past year
- They are 134 percent more likely than average to spend more than \$50,000 on vehicles
- They are 94 percent more likely than average to visit an art gallery
- They are 66 percent more likely than average to spend over \$20 on a bottle of wine
- They are twice as likely to spend over \$1,500 a month on their credit card
- They are twice as likely to have a home valued over \$400,000
- They are 126 percent more likely to hold securities valued at \$500,000+<sup>17</sup>

### **Circulation**

*Western Living's* circulation strategy is a mixture of controlled circulation, paid subscription, and newsstand sales. Controlled circulation to high-income neighbourhoods in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg is the most

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<sup>16</sup> ibid

<sup>17</sup> ibid

substantial part of the strategy, targeting the top 15 percent of household income earners in western Canada. Ninety-five percent of the magazine's total circulation is delivered right to the homes of this coveted demographic, mostly through controlled circulation, and to a lesser extent through paid subscriptions. The balance of the circulation is on newsstands. Twenty-five hundred copies are available on newsstands throughout British Columbia including Chapters.

Distribution among the seven major markets is as follows:

- Vancouver – 55,000
- Victoria – 17,775
- Winnipeg – 22,660
- Edmonton – 35,115
- Calgary – 40,000
- Regina – 10,900
- Saskatoon – 10,900<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

## **The Block**

### **History**

The Block was launched in the spring of 2006, billing itself as a guide to modern living in select suburban areas throughout the Lower Mainland. The magazine emerged from a previous publication called InsideOut, which launched in September 2005. InsideOut had a shelter focus, and was geared to a small, select audience in the White Rock and south Surrey, with plans to expand to other communities. However, partially due to its inexperienced editorial staff and unsophisticated art direction, InsideOut was only into its second issue when publisher Jerry Arnold enlisted the help of Dean Pothitos to take the helm and completely revamp the publication. Pothitos took on the role of publisher and president of InsideOut, and in January 2006 the new issue came out, complete with a brand new staff and a brand new look. Kris Blizzard (now art director of The Block) came on board as art director and gave the magazine a clean, modern, uncluttered look. Though there was no senior editorial direction, the magazine had a fairly balanced mix of shelter and home décor articles.

A couple of months later, InsideOut was gone and The Block was born, with Dean Pothitos as publisher and Jessica Raya as the editor of its first issue. For Volume 1, Issue 2, Jim Tobler (former editor of NUVO) came on-board as editor. He was supported by three regional editors representing the then-three regions: Kate MacLennan (North Shore), Mary-Jo Dionne (Tri-Cities), and Ingrid C. King (Peninsula), in addition to Luisa Rino as the style editor, Jennifer Croll the assistant editor, and Kris Blizzard the art director.

As the self-professed magazine for the “savvy suburban,” *The Block* aimed to combine local content with lifestyle trends and reach a sought-after readership of affluent homeowners from White Rock to the North Shore and beyond.

The first two issues relied heavily on “regional” content, with the intent of giving readers in each of the three markets useful and interesting information about their own community. However, it soon became clear that it would be difficult to achieve the quality and feel of a national lifestyle magazine if the editors only relied on local stories and “experts.” To avoid the parochial feel of a community newspaper, the third and fourth issues scaled back the local content and gave more space to “national” content – that is, content that would be of interest to readers across the country. A four-page fashion spread was featured in Issue 3, and guest writers Sandra Tonn, Stephanie MacDonald, and Wesley Fok were brought in to write longer features on health, home décor, and electronics, respectively. Tonn and Fok established recurring columns in subsequent issues in these areas, and Kate MacLennan took on the additional role of Homes editor.

Local content prevailed in the form of one feature article and short service pieces in the front of the book listing community events, store and gallery openings, and local merchants, as well as the Last Word back page. By Issue 4, the Ask An Expert section, which had previously been different for each local market, now became “national.” The focus shifted to finding true experts, rather than experts labelled as such by virtue of the neighbourhood they lived and worked in.

In July and August of 2006, the publisher began to look for a new market to expand *The Block's* reach. In keeping with the magazine’s suburban lifestyle mandate, they at first looked at Richmond and Burnaby as potential expansion markets. In the end, though, they

decided that the new, fourth market would actually be Vancouver proper. Despite putting themselves in direct competition with more established titles such as *Vancouver* magazine, and to some extent *Western Living*, smaller publications *Vancouver Lifestyles* and *Vancouver View*, and weekly newspapers *The Georgia Straight*, *The West Ender*, and *The Vancouver Courier*, *The Block* management felt that the Vancouver market would present great opportunities for raising the magazine's profile and expanding the scope of its content. Moreover, Vancouver's multitude of suburb-like neighbourhoods ensured that the magazine's original mandate would still be met.

Since then, *The Block*'s staff has expanded and changed, with the addition of Susan Falk as managing editor, and Raina Delisle and Nasreen Gulamhusein replacing Ingrid King and Mary-Jo Dionne as Peninsula and Tri-Cities editors, respectively. Dean Pothitos left the publication in July of 2007.

### **Mission Statement**

"*The Block* is committed to creating a unique mix of content that enriches, enlivens and informs our readers' lives. *The Block* will continue to develop strong reader loyalty and become a part of the fabric of every community it serves."<sup>19</sup>

### **Editorial Profile**

*The Block* serves as a sort of lifestyle guide (to borrow from its tagline) for its readers, featuring news, advice, and profiles of dealing with home, community, health, style shopping, and fine dining. Each issue is divided into the following the following sections:

- **Home** – an examination of trends and products, balancing aspirational photography with practical advice and information

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<sup>19</sup> <http://theblockmagazine.com/Site/About.html>

- **Style** – fashion spreads and carefully chosen accessories and products, with an emphasis on functional beauty, including trends for both men and women
- **Health** – practical, informative articles on some of the most important health issues of the day, with advice on making wise health choices in everyday life.
- **Life** – articles about travel, electronics, technology, pets, plus music, book, and DVD reviews, and feature articles on suburban life
- **Food, Wine & Restaurant** – profiles of local restaurants, plus recommended recipes and wine pairings
- **Local Features** – articles highlighting the best, brightest and most interesting untold stories in each community
- **Block Watch, What's in Store, Calendar of Events** – event information, store and gallery openings, and recommendations on what to see, do, and buy in each community
- **Celebrity Profile** – in-depth interviews with well-known personalities, accompanied with by exclusive photography.<sup>20</sup>

## Reader Profile

*The Block* targets an audience of affluent, well-educated professionals and homeowners, specifically those living in suburban areas of Vancouver, and the communities of the Peninsula (White Rock and south Surrey), the Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody), and the North Shore. The magazine has a total circulation of 85,000 and a total readership of 340,000.

At the time of my internship, the Vancouver edition of the magazine had not yet been established, so statistics cited do not reflect this demographic. In addition, detailed demographic data for *The Block's* readership had not been compiled. The statistics below are taken from *The Block's* media kit.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://theblockmagazine.com/Site/Departments.html> [note: The Celebrity Profile section is a recent addition to the magazine and is not included in later discussion, which only covers Issues 3 and 4]



- Between 71 and 75 percent of residents in the North Shore, Peninsula, and Tri-Cities own their own homes
- The average *Block* reader on the North Shore has an average household income of \$118,421 (compared to the regional average of \$73,040)
- The average *Block* reader on the Peninsula has an average household income of \$90,657 (compared to the regional average of \$68,528)
- The average *Block* reader in the Tri-Cities has an average household income of \$102,296 (compared to the regional average of \$67,729)

### **Circulation**

*The Block* has a mixed circulation strategy of controlled circulation, paid subscriptions, and newsstand sales. As with *Western Living*, the vast majority of *Block* copies are distributed through controlled circulation, directly to affluent neighbourhoods in Vancouver, the North Shore, the Tri-Cities, and the Peninsula. Copies of *The Block* are also delivered directly to specialty shops, health clubs, hotels, select magazine stores, libraries, local shopping centres, restaurants, medical and dental offices, Chambers of Commerce and professional office buildings. The *Block* has a small subscription base and has recently begun to sell the magazine on newsstands.

Distribution among the magazine's four markets is as follows:

- Vancouver – 30,000
- North Shore – 20,000
- Tri-Cities – 20,000
- Peninsula – 20,000

### **III. IDEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE – HOW CULTURAL IDEALS AND VALUES ARE REFLECTED IN MAGAZINE EDITORIAL**

#### **Discourse Analysis and Magazines**

Discourse analysis, in simple terms, is the study of language use. Although there are countless approaches to discourse analysis, all recognize that language is inherently social, and that the way people communicate with one another –through words, actions, gestures, or other displays of opinion or identity – is influenced by the specific social context of any given moment. In the introduction, I cited Gee’s general definition of Discourse as the integration of language with non-linguistic “stuff.”<sup>21</sup> Gee goes on to specify exactly what that “stuff” is:

...different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others.<sup>22</sup>

A simple way to look at Discourse is as our social identity and the different ways, verbal and non-verbal, that we express our identity. Yet identity is not singular or straightforward. Every person on earth has multiple identities. How we choose to present ourselves varies greatly depending on the context, and our contexts are constantly changing and multiplying. We use non-verbal tools and symbols, as well as verbal or written language to present the part of ourselves we want to emphasize in any given situation. Clothing is an

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<sup>21</sup> Gee, in *ibid.* 13

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

example of the non-verbal symbols that Gee refers to. Clothes can express age, culture, economic class, sometimes occupation or even religious affiliation. Questions of ethnicity can crop up in different and unexpected ways. Sporting events, such as the World Cup in Soccer, can bring out the flag-waving nationalist in almost anyone. Personal identity, therefore, is very complex; we acquire new identities everywhere we go – every school we attend, every club we join, every cause we donate money to, every brand we buy. And even every magazine we read.

Each aspect of one's own personal discourse carries with it a whole slew of ever-evolving, sometimes contradictory values, beliefs and ideologies. Some may be explicit and emotionally charged – for example, if you belong to a nationality whose history is fraught with hundreds of years of political or religious oppression, any expression of said nationality (from wearing a soccer jersey to voting in a national election) is in effect an expression of that troubled history and the position of that nation in the world today. This may be what we more typically associate with ideological leanings or political beliefs. Yet even more seemingly benign aspects of our identity are full of ideological meaning. The neighbourhoods we live in, the bars and restaurants we frequent, the shows we watch on TV – all say something about who we are. It may seem superficial, and it is to a certain extent, but if we think about the *whys* – Why did I move to an expensive central neighbourhood when rent is far cheaper in the suburbs? Why do I go to a Local Bar A. every weekend but cringe at the idea of setting foot in Local Bar B.? Why do I religiously watch *Lost* every Wednesday night, but roll my eyes at those who watch *Battlestar Galactica*? – the answers to these questions will reveal certain things about who we are and what kind of image we want to present to the world.

So, what does this all have to do with magazines, and how does it relate to the analogy of a magazine expressing its own particular “world,” as Graydon Carter put it? And moreover, what can magazine editors take away from this analogy?

First of all, magazines communicate their own sets of values and beliefs through both language and symbols. These values and beliefs are a direct reflection of their readers’ values and beliefs – we assume that people read certain magazines because they are interested in the magazine’s subject matter and agree with the magazine’s point of view. The language that a magazine uses is the language its readers can understand, and likely use themselves. Yet the magazine is not merely a reflection of who the reader is and what he or she already knows; the magazine also acts an authority, an entertainer, a friend – someone the reader can relate to as peer on some occasions, a follower on others.

To sum up, discourse plays an integral part in magazine publishing. According to Linda McLoughlin, author of *The Language of Magazines*, “magazines present a particular view of the world as they see it and attempt to get others to see it that way too.”<sup>23</sup> This is half of it. Magazines in fact reflect a particular world view based partly on their readers’ world view, partly on their own world view, and partly on the world view of their advertisers. Then they mix up those views into a unique, original package that appeals and is beneficial to all three. As we shall see, the way words are strung together in a particular order, in a particular context, with a particular writer/speaker and a particular reader/listener reflect the ideologies, beliefs, and views of the magazine’s discourse community.

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<sup>23</sup> McLoughlin, Linda. *The Language of Magazines*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 82.

## Interaction Between Author, Text and Reader

Magazines are not designed merely to be consumed passively. They contain different parts to be perused at different paces. Articles are written in different voices, depending on what their intention is. A front-of-book piece informing the reader of a new product, for example, is often written in snappy language, with short sentences. This type of article is often witty, but easily understandable. It is meant to be read quickly, perhaps over morning coffee, during an afternoon commute, or during the commercial break of a favourite TV show. A lengthy profile of an actor in a high-end glossy, on the other hand, is meant to be read at leisure, perhaps in a bubble bath, at a local coffee shop, or at the beach. In-depth articles dealing with important issues or news topics usually adopt a commanding, confident tone. Service articles offering specific advice must have a clear, authoritative tone, as it is crucial that the reader perceives the information as reliable. The point is, the reader decides when and where to read a magazine: which parts to devour, which parts to skim, and which parts to skip entirely. In turn, the editor of the magazine decides what to put forth to the reader. The editor can choose to tempt the reader with a new line of skin-care products one month, persuade him to remodel his house the next month, or simply allow him to escape into another world for a couple of hours. Of course, the editor must be a good judge of what will appeal to the reader or at least know how to present material to make it palatable. This is accomplished in many different ways. In the following sections, I will cite and discuss some examples taken from recent issues of *Western Living* and *The Block* that illustrate the multifaceted role of language and Discourse in magazines.

For now, however, it is important to mention some of the specific ways in which magazine writers connect to their readers through language devices. In her book, *The Language of Magazines*, Linda McLoughlin states,

Writers of magazines are in difficulty in addressing a mass audience. They cannot possibly claim to know the identity of each individual reader, yet they often speak as though they already know the reader, their thoughts, attitudes, likes and dislikes.<sup>24</sup>

While a good magazine should in fact know quite a bit about its readers, McLoughlin is correct in her statement that magazines often do speak to their readers as though they know them intimately, a technique called “synthetic personalization”.<sup>25</sup> Some articles do this through simulated one-on-one conversations with their readers, involving a series of questions by the author and assumed responses by the reader.<sup>26</sup> This technique hinges on the assumption that the author and reader are of the same mind, and have the same opinion about something, and if the reader is quickly skimming the article he may very well find himself nodding in agreement because the questions are posed in such a way that make it difficult for him to disagree. McLoughlin cites an example from *FHM* magazine to illustrate this point:

Tired of hearing the missus moan about ‘women’s problems’? Course you are. That’s why we decided to test the validity of their claim that...sometimes it’s hard to be a woman.<sup>27</sup>

Here, the question is posed and immediately answered. *FHM*, a men’s magazine, presents a basic stereotype about women as truth. Even if the majority of women have never in their lives moaned about women’s problems, the concept is prevalent enough in our popular culture to make it seem real to the male reader. By answering the question the way he wants it to be answered, the author aligns himself with the reader. The reader, hearing the agreement in his head as he reads the words “Course you are”, feels as though he and author

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* 67

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* 68

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

are in agreement. It is important for the author to establish this allegiance from the outset of the article, so that the reader is more likely to agree or identify with the rest of what is being said.

This technique is not always as overtly manipulative as the example above. In the June/July 2006 issue of *Western Living*, a piece about recreation and resort properties begins like this:

Seeking recreational property? Dreaming of recreational property? No interest whatsoever in recreational property but curious about a phenomenon that's currently transforming western Canada? Welcome to the West's first ever resort and recreational property inventory.<sup>28</sup>

The series of questions is designed to elicit a positive response from virtually anyone reading the article. Chances are that some members of the audience are in fact planning to acquire some recreational property, several more do not have any specific plans to do so, but would love to, and still others have never given this idea much thought, but are nevertheless intrigued by the suggestion that recreational properties are “transforming western Canada”. The readers’ interest is now piqued and they are likely to read on.

Addressing the reader directly by the pronoun “you”<sup>29</sup> (or the implied “you”) is another technique authors use to synthetically personalize readers. This makes the reader a part of the story, while convincing him to think a certain way, or take a certain action. The reader is more inclined to agree with the author when addressed in this way than if the article had simply presented the information without directly involving or addressing the reader, so this is a particularly effective technique in articles where it is important for the reader to be convinced of something. Service articles in consumer magazines on nutrition, exercise,

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<sup>28</sup> Bridge, Tyee; Kordic, Lara. “The New Land Rush.” *Western Living*. June/July 2006, 76-94

<sup>29</sup> McLoughlin. 69

decorating, or shopping often address the reader directly. For example, the July 2007 issue of *Flare* contains a piece on solutions to 12 summer beauty issues (“Beauty & The Beach”). The piece is divided into numbered sections, each representing a specific problem, including “2. Your new summer sandals have given you blisters,” “9. Those laps in the pool are giving you one hot little bod, but your skin is parched,” and “12. Due to ghastly veins, your knees appear more like a danger zone than an erogenous zone.”<sup>30</sup> Each problem is followed by “expert” advice, including recommended products. By addressing readers directly, as though they all suffer from these afflictions, the author is at once playing on the readers’ insecurities and offering helpful solutions.

An author may also reach out to the reader by making his or her own identity known, thereby personalizing him or herself. Depending on the tone of the article, the author may relate to the reader as a “friend, advisor and entertainer, or their identity can shift between these roles.”<sup>31</sup> By speaking in the first person (“I”) or the collective first person (“we”) in this case representing the magazine as a whole, the magazine staff becomes human in the eyes of the reader. The editor’s note at the beginning of many magazines also achieves this personalization, as do pictures and short bios of contributors. In the case of *Sassy*, the much-loved and very much-missed teen magazine from the late 1980s and early ’90s, all members of the staff became so familiar – almost as vivid as a cast of characters on a popular TV show – that loyal readers could instantly identify the author of a piece just by his or her writing style.<sup>32</sup> Author identity at *Sassy* was particularly important in view of the magazine’s most dominant competitor, *Seventeen*, whose tone in those days could be

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<sup>30</sup> Kwan, Karen. “Beauty & the Beach.” *Flare*. July 2007. 51-54.

<sup>31</sup> McLoughlin. *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> Jesella, Kara; Meltzer, Marisa. *How Sassy Changed My Life – A Love Letter To the Greatest Teen Magazine of All Time*. New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2007,18-20.



described as authoritarian and preachy. Readers responded to *Sassy* because the staff spoke *to* them and *like* them in a very genuine way. Most staff were only a few years older than their target market, and frequently took on the “cool big sister” role rather than the role of parent, counselor or school nurse, as in other teen magazines.<sup>33</sup>

Very few if any magazines today have such a close relationship with their readers, but the relationship between author and reader is still essential if the reader is to feel a connection with the publication as a whole. And since the author herself is not physically present beside the reader, she uses the text not only to report on a certain subject, but to reflect her identity, which needs to be in synch with the identity of the magazine and simultaneously, the identity of the reader. This is why magazine articles often include slang or catchphrases that the authors or editors feel their readers would use, refer to people and events in popular culture that their readers would be familiar with, and even poke fun at politicians they assume their readers do not support. If overdone, these techniques can be construed as manipulative, artificial, or insulting to readers’ intelligence. However, if they are used sparingly and strategically they can act as subtle cues to the reader that this magazine is on his or her side.

## **Analytical Approach to Case Studies**

In the sections that follow, specific examples of editorial and visual content from *Western Living* and *The Block* will be compared and analysed, in an attempt to illustrate how these two regional lifestyle magazines with similar target demographics, communicate their particular discourses to their readers. The analysis will include specific feature articles (shelter, service, and profile), front-of-book service pieces, and covers taken from the

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* 4

June/July and August issues of *Western Living* and Volume 1, Issues 3 and 4 of *The Block*.

These issues in particular were chosen because they coincide with my internships. Each piece will be approached with the following list of analytical questions in mind:

1. What is the **overall tone** of this piece, and is it consistent with the type of piece? Are the readers, given what we know about them, likely to respond positively to this tone?
2. What is the **author's rhetorical distance from the audience** in this piece? Is this distance appropriate, considering the type of piece this is? What, if any, rhetorical devices does the author use to reach out to the reader?
3. How is this piece's **use of language** (vocabulary, cultural references, slang) appropriate for this audience?
4. What is the role of **visual imagery** in this piece? Are the images, if there are any, consistent with what we know about the audience's aesthetic sensibilities and preferences?
5. If the piece mentions **products or services for sale**, why are they being presented to this particular audience? Are they presented in an impartial way?

These questions are designed to demonstrate differences and similarities between the editorial approaches of the two magazines. Each piece is looked at in the wider context of the magazine it represents, and the audience that magazine represents, as well.

The first part of the analysis will deal with feature articles and a comparison of the magazines' approach to shelter, quality of life, and interviews. Features will be followed by a discussion of front-of-book pieces, typically short service articles dealing with consumer products or retail stores. Here, the focus of the analysis will be rhetorical devices used by the author to connect with the reader, as well as an assessment of the objectivity of each piece whose subject stands to gain commercially from their exposure in the magazine. The final pieces to be discussed are covers. The analysis will include the overall look of each cover and to what extent it projects the aesthetic of the magazine. Cover lines will also be assessed in

terms of their success in conveying the magazine's contents and compel the audience to read further.

To know its audience, a magazine publisher relies on basic demographic information, but a considerable amount of experience and intuition on the part of the editor is also required. Ultimately, and somewhat paradoxically, the best measure of what the audience wants is the magazine itself. Editorially speaking, the magazine should both mirror and dictate the needs of the audience. The overall purpose of this analysis is to see two different interpretations of how a regional lifestyle magazine in western Canada reaches its audience.

## **Case Studies**

### **Feature Articles – Shelter, Quality of Life, and Profile**

Feature articles are distinguishable not only by their length, but also by the depth of reportage. In both *Western Living* and *The Block*, the editorial well tends to be filled with both service or profile articles, or a combination of the two: for instance, a chef is profiled and some of his recipes are included at the end of the article, or a house is profiled and floor plans are shown to give readers ideas on how to remodel their own homes. The August 2006 issue of *Western Living* also includes a number of personal essays, which have a service slant. The examples below taken from feature articles in *Western Living* and *The Block* serve to illustrate tone, purpose, and relevance to each magazine's greater mandate.

### **Shelter Articles – Residential Representations**

While *Western Living* and *The Block* contain a similar mix of categories, such as shopping, dining, and travel, they differ significantly in their treatment of shelter. *Western Living's* identity is strongly rooted in architectural design, as one can observe from the

magazine's earliest issues, while *The Block's* general-interest approach treats shelter as just one component of its lifestyle format.

*Western Living's* shelter focus attracts a more specialized audience – specialized both in its level of interest in residential design and in its aesthetic preferences. Shelter articles tend to focus on the actual structural layout of the house and how this contributes to its beauty and functionality, thereby distinguishing the magazine from others that are more concerned with the ephemeral aspects of shelter, such as interior furnishings and accents. The focus on structure appeals to readers who have either built or heavily renovated homes or are seriously thinking about doing so. Given that 85 percent of *Western Living* readers are homeowners, this focus is well placed. The fact that they are 118 percent more likely than the average population to spend over \$20,000 on home improvements over two years (see Readership Profile), is a mixed result of readers actively seeking out a magazine that addresses renovation and the editors responding to readers' specific needs. Most of the homes featured in the magazine have a specific look – very clean and modern, sometimes bordering on minimalist. The consistency of this particular style accomplishes two things: first, it gives the magazine a visual distinctiveness and helps to establish the *Western Living* brand, and second, the style itself, because it is uncluttered, helps to showcase the architectural structure.

*The Block's* approach to shelter articles designed to appeal to a wider audience. As mentioned above, shelter is viewed as one component of lifestyle, and is given similar amount of attention as the magazine's other features on health, beauty, electronics, travel, and fashion. Shelter is nevertheless an important focus to *The Block*, especially since home ownership in the communities it distributes to is high (about 73 percent) and many readers have likely invested a great deal of time and money in their homes. In contrast to *Western*

*Living, The Block* focuses on the more decorative aspects of shelter, in particular small accents that can make a difference to the overall ambience of a home without requiring large, drastic changes. This approach is appropriate for a new magazine whose audience is not yet well established. The articles are useful to those wanting to improve the look of their homes, but the suggestions given usually require little work and relatively small financial commitment on the part of the reader. This is partly a trust issue – *The Block* is a new magazine and a reader approaching it for the first or second time is unlikely to take an unknown writer’s advice on how to make drastic changes to her home – and partly a practical editorial choice – it makes sense for a magazine that is meant to appeal to a wide audience to give readers a taste of several relevant subjects rather than go deeply into one area. Focusing on attractive, decorative details appeals to style conscious readers, but does not require them to have a lot of background knowledge or an overwhelmingly strong need for the information in the article. The articles are there mainly to give visual pleasure and easy suggestions.

#### **Modern Homes, Then and Now**

As far back as 1957, when the magazine was still called *Western Homes and Living*, an article called “A House for Young Moderns” featured a sleek bungalow with functional, practical spaces ideal for young modern families, complete with detailed floor plans that readers could use to inspire their own homes (see Figures 1 and 2).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Mitchell (editor). “A House for Young Moderns”. *Western Homes and Living*. September 1957. 12-15.



Figure 1 A House For Young Moderns (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

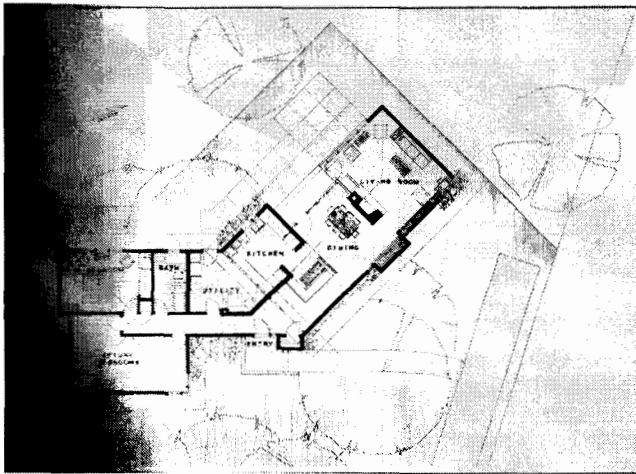


Figure 2 Young Moderns Floor Plan (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

Almost half a century later, *Western Living* featured another practical living space to meet the specific needs of a couple relocating from a houseboat to a lakefront property.<sup>35</sup> (see Figures 3 and 4) Though the styles have changed, both pieces highlight the architect as well as the owners – stressing the link between creator and consumer and the collaborative process of building something for a specific set of needs, preferences and desires. The interaction between architect and homeowner(s) puts both parties in an active role. The architect is obviously the main visionary and the one with the skills to carry out the vision, but the homeowners (here, in both cases, couples) also share in the process.

<sup>35</sup> Sutherland, Jim. "Back to the Land". *Western Living*. June/July 2006. 58-64.



Figure 3 Back to the Land Title Page (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

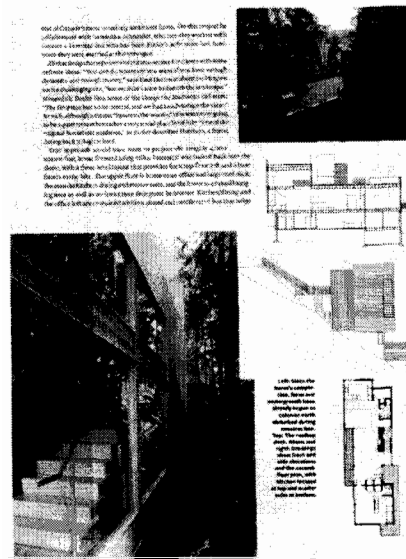


Figure 4 Back to the Land Images and Floor Plan (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

In the 1957 example, John and Joy Skillings of Victoria are a young married couple and the featured house (designed specifically for them by architect John A. Di Castri) is the first home they have purchased together. The text, set against exterior and interior shots of the house in all its fresh, modern glory, draws a clear link between the newness of the house and the newlyweds who live in it. More specifically, the newness of the marriage, in which everything (even housework!) is an adventure, reflects the fresh perspective that inspired the design of the house itself. The text implies that the home is a shared space, owned and occupied by both husband and wife.

The article goes on to stress some of the couple's lifestyle choices and how they are reflected in the architecture. For instance, they hope to host many dinner parties ("The large efficient kitchen can handle guest dinners and buffets quite comfortably, and forms a

convenient part of the party traffic plan”<sup>36</sup>), and they plan to start a family in the future (“At present there is only one master bedroom, but a large room now used as a den or rumpus room is designed to be divided into two bedrooms later”<sup>37</sup>). Images of the kitchen and living room area are interspersed with short descriptions highlighting unique design details. A floor plan of the whole house, including the now-rumpus room labelled as “Future Bedrooms” is laid out beside a summary of the architectural vision, where it is again stressed that this home is “designed for the needs of a young married couple.”<sup>38</sup>

The story of the Skillingses’ house transcends basic architectural description to sketch an image of domestic bliss. While this specific example may seem a bit outdated now, the basic premise of intertwining architectural design and people to elicit an emotional, often aspirational response in readers, has endured in *Western Living* and other shelter magazines to this day.

In the June/July 2006 issue of *Western Living*, Jim Sutherland writes a home feature called “Back to the Land” about an Andrew Butler-designed house on Shuswap Lake. Butler, a renowned Toronto-based architect with strong western roots, designed the home for his friends Karen and Paul Harrison, who had been living on a houseboat on the Shuswap before deciding to go “back to the land” by building a more permanent structure.

The interplay between images and text is handled efficiently. On the title page (see Figure 3), the house is captured from a dramatic angle – the photo was taken from the ground looking up at the house, at a diagonal, making the structure appear large and imposing. The viewer can almost imagine being inside the house and gazing out one of the

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchell. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* 15.



large windows. The text is pared down to give the reader just enough of a sense of the backstory before giving a straightforward description of the design process, allowing the images to convey most of the feeling of the piece. The use of the expression “Back to the Land” implies a natural lifestyle, simple and spare. Yet the phrase also insinuates a sense of adventure or personal challenge, of living without modern conveniences and braving the elements day after day. In this case, the phrase is used somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as the featured house is far from a shack in the woods. Its sleek modern architecture and wood-panelled exterior blends almost seamlessly into its natural surroundings.

The following pages of the story are more straightforwardly laid out, giving attractive views of the house from various angles and highlighting the most impressive interior features, such as the combined kitchen and dining area which was “designed to accommodate a crowd”<sup>39</sup> and the spacious master bath with its “natural palette of wood and stone.”<sup>40</sup>

As in the “Young Moderns” article of 1957, this piece gives the reader a sense of the people involved in this project – the architect and the homeowners – right in its opening paragraphs:

British Columbia’s Shuswap Lake is known for the armada of houseboats that during the summer months turn its rocky shores and isolated arms into a Super Natural party zone. As these houseboaters mature, it’s understandable that some of them would look for a permanent place on their favourite body of water, a real estate quest that is becoming more and more difficult.<sup>41</sup>

This first paragraph sets the scene – Shuswap Lake – and its atmosphere – “a Super Natural party zone” (in the summer months, at least). It also says something about the permanent

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<sup>39</sup> Sutherland, Jim. “Back To the Land.” *Western Living*. June/July 2006. 61

<sup>40</sup> Sutherland, Jim. “Back To the Land.” *Western Living*. June/July 2006. 64

<sup>41</sup> Sutherland, Jim. “Back To the Land.” *Western Living*. June/July 2006. 61

residents of the area, and while it does not mention Karen and Paul Harrison until the second paragraph, it insinuates that the yet-unnamed subjects of this article are among the “maturing” houseboaters looking for a bit more quiet and stability – something that might not have been an issue in years past, either because the area itself has changed, or because their tastes have, or a combination of both.

In the second paragraph, we are introduced to the Harrisons by name, as well to their architect, Andrew Butler:

So it was that the lot secured by Calgarians Karen and Paul Harrison features a slope of almost 45 degrees – and there went Paul Harrison’s original vision of a log cabin, an idea quickly scotched by architect Andrew Butler. “I joked that the logs would roll into the lake,” says Butler, noting that the form is in fact best suited to flat land. [The final structure] honours much of the owners’ intent, while taking a shape that will wear as well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the log cabin did in the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>42</sup>

From this short passage, we can guess that the Harrisons and Butler have quite a friendly relationship, based on the lighthearted tone in which Butler recalls reacting to Paul Harrison’s initial idea of modelling the house after a log cabin. The open and easy style of communication between architect and homeowners cited in this passage gives the impression that the design process as a whole was very open and collaborative. This adds a human element to the design-heavy story. Although the Harrisons are seldom mentioned beyond these first two paragraphs, it has been established that the house is made specifically for them. The article goes on to outline Butler’s background and professional training and influences, followed by a descriptive yet succinct account of the design process.

The combination of three key elements – visually effective photography of the house, the human element including the interaction between the architect and homeowners,

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<sup>42</sup> ibid

and the more technical discussion of the design process – give the reader a well-rounded account of home design. This formula, as we have seen, has been used in the magazine for decades. It is successful because it does not rely too heavily on any one element. If there were only photographs of the house and little or no text, the reader would not have a context for what he or she was viewing. If the story focused primarily on the homeowners and their backstory, the design aspect would suffer and devoted readers with a keen interest in architecture would have to look elsewhere. Yet if the article contained nothing but the architect's process, it would again be lacking context, and it might be too dry for readers who have only a casual interest in architecture. As a general interest magazine, *Western Living* has to balance architectural design with lifestyle. Luckily, these two things go hand in hand.

In short, “Back to the Land” is of particular interest to *Western Living* readers, who are predominantly homeowners, like the Harrisons, and who are also known to invest heavily in home improvement projects. The tone of the article is a mixture of formal and lively, which is consistent with the fact that this is a serious design story with a human element. Although the story is engaging, the writing style is subtle. The author's voice is not obvious; he does not address the audience directly, which would be superfluous and distracting in a piece such as this, where the content is key. The parallels in content and style with “A House For Young Moderns” in 1957 confirm this article's place in *Western Living*.

#### **Well-Seasoned – Small Changes, Big Impact**

Issue 3 of *The Block* contains an article by Stephanie MacDonald that exemplifies the magazine's approach to shelter articles. The piece, entitled “Well-Seasoned”, gives readers practical suggestions on how to update their home décor seasonally without making major renovations or changing their furniture. As mentioned above, most *Block* readers are homeowners, so the subject of home improvement is relevant to their lives. They are also

assumed to be style-conscious and sophisticated, so the tips presented in this article will likely be of interest to them. However, it is the author's approach to the subject, more than the subject itself, that connects with the audience. Many publications that give home décor tips, but this article takes a different attitude to decorating than is typically found in shelter magazines:

Flipping through the pages of current decorating and design magazines, anyone lacking a personal fortune and good-sized domestic staff could be forgiven for being alarmed by cover lines such as “157 Pages of Extravagant Spring Makeovers” that fairly beg the question: does anyone actually re-paint their house to herald spring, or pitch that dated chocolate sofa (so autumn!) for a sectional in the trendiest shade of winter cranberry?<sup>43</sup>

By drawing attention to the unrealistic suggestions made by other magazines (that readers should completely remodel their homes seasonally), the author places herself, and by association *The Block*, in opposition to typical shelter magazines, and (it is implied) on the side of readers, who represent regular people, or “anyone lacking a personal fortune or good-sized domestic staff.” In fact, the author herself could be one of these regular people, and in establishing this alliance with readers, she is now in a position of trust. She relates to the readers and wants to help them where other magazines have failed them. She thus takes on the voice of a helpful friend – someone who is in the same boat as the reader, but at the same time is privy to some inside information that she is generously willing to share.

The whole premise of the article is based on the assumption that the readers *do* need help, that their homes *are* in need of updating, but that until now they have not known where to turn. The idea is that people can make their homes look more summery or wintry (or reflective of whichever season it may be) simply by changing the colours and textures of certain decorative items around the house, such as tablecloths, throw pillows, or lampshades.

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<sup>43</sup> *The Block*. Volume 1, Issue 3. 32

The author cites advice from local designers, who back up the claim that redecorating every season is impractical and unnecessary, not to mention expensive, but that making subtle updates can be very effective.

Overall, this article's combination of relevant information and conversational (yet subtly persuasive) tone make it appropriate to this audience and this type of piece. The tone establishes a connection between author and audience, while the helpful information reinforces the audience's trust in the author. Cultural references are used to trigger recognition and reinforce a connection with the audience. For example, the author assumes that this audience reads shelter magazines (not a far-fetched assumption if they are reading this article), so she uses a typical magazine cover line to grab attention and help present her point.

Other references, though, seem to suggest that the audience being addressed is predominantly female, which is not known to be the case. The subject of interior decorating is traditionally seen as a matter of more interest to women than to men because women have historically been situated in the domestic sphere. However, for a contemporary audience, it is not really the subject matter that is the issue, but the feminization of it that may be misplaced for this audience. At one point the author compares wearing a cashmere sweater in August to using a floral tablecloth in October. When this analogy is resurrected in the final paragraph of the article, it becomes even more gender-specific: "Unless you're the type who sees nothing wrong with wearing a cotton sundress and flip-flops to a holiday cocktail gathering, you have no excuse not to try dressing your home for the outside environment."<sup>44</sup> The use of the pronoun "you" places the reader directly in the situation; however, if the reader is male (and not a cross-dresser) the analogy simply does not work. Since *The Block's*

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* 33

readership consists of both men and women, it is important not to project one gender or the other onto them through the editorial content or the tone. Doing so could alienate one segment of the audience.

### **Quality of Life Articles – Reporting on Health and Sustainable Living**

A service article is intended to help a reader solve a problem, improve a condition, make a decision, or perform an action. This section of the report will focus on the magazines' treatment of subjects related to readers' quality of life, such as health and sustainable living. For *Western Living*, sustainable living is explored once a year in a special issue. The topic is a bit of a departure for the shelter-focused magazine, so the editors must find a way to custom-design it to their audience's needs and wants. Health articles are regularly featured in *The Block*. Like shelter, health is treated as one aspect of lifestyle, and is assumed to be relevant to the audience as a whole. The information in these articles is not widely known but useful to the average health-conscious consumer. The tone is authoritative yet accessible, and the information is clearly laid out for readers who are not nutrition experts.

### **Addressing Health Concerns for Lifestyle Readers**

In "Lipids to Lose," Kate MacLennan sorts through the perceived confusion over trans fats, defining what exactly they are, identifying which foods are likely to contain the dangerous lipids, and offering straight information on what could happen to you if you choose to ignore the warnings and indulge. By combining a concise collection of facts with a light, witty writing style, the author establishes herself as a friendly advice-giver, rather than a bearer of bad news:

So put this article down right now, run to your cupboards and refrigerator, and throw away everything containing transfats. Don't think there aren't any because unless you're a devout vegan, there almost assuredly are.<sup>45</sup>

The tone is appropriate to this publication because *The Block* is a lifestyle magazine, not a medical journal. Readers' interest in the subject matter is personal; that is, they want to know about it insofar as it affects their lives and the lives of their family members. They likely do not want to read overly theoretical information or scientific. The author does a good job in personalizing the readers by addressing them directly and telling them exactly what to do, to a certain extent.

However, if there is one problem with this article is that it may underestimate the audience's existing knowledge of trans fats:

Eating has gotten a tad more complicated these days. Don't eat MSG, do eat Omega-3 acids, only eat organic. Most recently? Snack on some chocolate chip cookies and you be seriously messing with your own mortality.<sup>46</sup>

This passage misses the mark slightly. Many people are confused by the flood of nutrition information circulating through the media these days, the issue of trans fats has been given so much attention in recent years that it is virtually impossible not to know the basic facts by now. The information in this article, though accurate, does not tell the audience much that has not been available in countless other publications and news reports. It also does not give advice beyond listing which foods to avoid, when the audience could also benefit from a list of alternative foods that are healthier. Nevertheless, the article does address an important health concern that no doubt affects the lives of *The Block's* readers.

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, 36

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

### **Project Green – Lifestyle with a Social Conscience**

The challenge for *Western Living* to make their green issue a success was to uphold the magazine's mission of reflecting an upscale lifestyle, while promoting or displaying ecologically responsible choices. The key was to keep the content light and interesting, steering clear of political references and focusing on positive examples of sustainable living rather than depressing accounts of environmental devastation. However, this issue is not without its critical commentary. The most topical section in it is the "City Report Card", which gave each major city in western Canada (representing each of *Western Living's* target markets) a grade based on their actions or plans to become more environmentally friendly. The grading system was based on freelance writer Marcie Good's extensive interviews with urban planners, environmental experts, critics and commentators. In the end, each city got a letter grade along with a concise 150- to 200-word assessment positioned as a sidebar and scattered throughout the issue's Project Green editorial package. No city got a failing grade, but Edmonton and Calgary did not fare as well as the rest, each earning only a C- for their urban sprawl and dependency on cars. Vancouver and Victoria fared the best, each getting an A-.<sup>47</sup> The Project Green package, which included all the special "green" content and extended for more than forty pages, was still primarily focused on design and lifestyle. The inclusion of the City Report Cards gave the whole thing a cautiously opinionated feel, as though the editors wanted people to be aware of the issues but recognized that this was not the publication to debate something so serious. The piece brought one angry letter from a reader who referred to the Edmonton Report Card as "narrow-minded" and "a shocking display of incompetence"<sup>48</sup>. The letter appeared in the October 2006 issue, and Marcie Good

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<sup>47</sup> Good, Marcie. "City Report Card." *Western Living*. August 2006. 31-47

<sup>48</sup> Letters. *Western Living*. October 2006. 8



wrote a concise response in which she accounted for some of the points made in the article and ultimately stood by her assessment.

The rest of the Project Green package was not quite so controversial. It contained a series of first-person essays, highlighting positive examples of ordinary people (actually, regular *Western Living* contributors) who are taking small yet impressive steps to live more ecologically conscious lives. Adriana Barton, Dan Rubenstein, and James Glave each write about their own experiences in a way that balances useful information with lively, sometimes self-deprecating personal commentary:

At the risk of being shunned by my green-scene friends, I have a confession: I am an energy glutton. Last year, my husband and I contributed 22 tonnes of carbon dioxide to global warming. That's enough greenhouse gas to fill 22 typical Canadian homes – and well above the hefty national average of 5 tonnes per person each year.<sup>49</sup>

By beginning her essay with a personal confession and then linking her own experience with some hard-hitting energy statistics, Barton lets the audience know right away that this is a personal story with a purpose. Moreover, her confessional tone makes her relatable to the average reader who, like Barton, is feeling a little bit uneasy about the number of tonnes of carbon dioxide he or she has contributed to global warming through extensive air travel, which we soon learn is the source of Barton's less than stellar environmental record. The solution she has found to ease her conscience and help the environment all at the same time is carbon offset. Barton's description and endorsement of this system will likely resonate with many *Western Living* readers, who are avid travellers themselves. The light yet informative tone of the essay is a gentle call to action, which is echoed in Dan Rubenstein and James Glave's essays as well.

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<sup>49</sup> Barton, Adriana. "Fly Your Cake and Eat It Too." *Western Living*. August 2006. 32

Rubenstein's essay, "Have Car, Never Use It," begins with an admiring account of his wife's ability to accomplish five errands in two hours alongside two small children and without the use of a car. The mention of family humanizes Rubenstein (as does the photo of him and his wife and children accompanying the text) in the mind of the reader. It makes him a trustworthy and sympathetic figure and therefore worth listening to. He tells the story with light touches of humour and anecdotes that most parents of small children will relate to, such as the description of the "fleet of strollers" his family owns for transporting their fraternal twin daughters around town.<sup>50</sup>

James Glave also uses the family angle when describing his struggle to build an ecologically sound home that appeases his and his wife's discerning eye for attractive design. He starts by describing a green home he recently designed that has all the sustainable features he is looking for and still looks good, before revealing that he in fact constructed the house out of Lego, "with design input from [his] preschooler."<sup>51</sup> The Lego anecdote accomplishes two things: first, it establishes Glave as a father, and more specifically, a father who plays with his children, which paints him in a positive light, and second, it is a unique way of introducing his point, which is that a green home is a wonderful idea in theory, but when it comes to style, unless money is no object, homeowners have limited options. Throughout the essay, Glave maintains an informal tone to connect with the audience and points to his own environmental shortcomings, much as Barton did in her piece. When describing the house that he and his wife did end up building, Glave admits, "despite our

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<sup>50</sup> Rubenstein. *ibid.* 38-39.

<sup>51</sup> Glave, James. "The Crying of Lot 55." *Western Living*. August 2006. 62

best intentions, it is only marginally eco-savvy.”<sup>52</sup> Anticipating the reader’s question of why this was the case, he continues his confession with refreshing candour:

The truth is, we’re greedy. We tried to balance conscience with entitlement, location with ambition, risk with loss, and available cash with available life force. The end result won’t win any awards; among its greener qualities is its paint job.<sup>53</sup>

Many readers will relate to this passage on more than one level. As a magazine that appeals predominantly to people’s design sensibilities and certainly does its share of promoting material consumption, *Western Living* sometimes seems to imply that the sky is the limit when it comes to designing a house. With this green-themed issue, however, the magazine attempts to unite the aesthetically pleasing with the environmentally friendly. Glave’s acknowledgement that this is not the easiest thing to do, and his frank discussion about the financial realities of building a green home, is an honest approach that readers will likely appreciate.

The article indicates that environmentalism involves more than just buying trendy new products that are vaguely natural looking, which is how some other consumer magazines have portrayed it; rather, switching to a more sustainable lifestyle is an ongoing process that is difficult and does not always pay off as might be expected. The article does end on a positive note, which is crucial so as not to undermine the green movement that this issue (and Glave himself) is trying so hard to promote.

Overall, these three pieces are relevant to this audience not only because they talk about an issue that is at the forefront of popular discussion today, but also because they are written from the point of view of people who seem to represent a similar age bracket and

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<sup>52</sup> ibid

<sup>53</sup> ibid

lifestyle to *Western Living* readers. Moreover, as a regular contributor to the magazine, each author is aware of the magazine's regular topics and mandate, and is able to integrate personal details into these topics.

### **Profile Articles – Representing People of Interest**

A profile article is usually a description of a person (although the definition can also refer to architectural profiles, company profiles, and travel destination profiles) told either in biography style, or in the form of an interview. Both *The Block* and *Western Living* feature profiles of local people, either celebrities or simply people who have accomplished something that is thought to be of interest to the magazines' audiences.

#### **Profile Of an Artist On the North Shore**

Issue 4 of *The Block* contains a profile of artist David Burns, written by Kate McLennan.<sup>54</sup> This is a good example of an interview in which the interviewer subtly removes herself from the article and focuses entirely on the subject, with little or no evidence of their interaction. The result is clean and simple prose that highlights the artist's background, achievements, and stylistic influences. The North Shore landscape, which is ever-present in Burns's work, exemplifies the level of achievement *The Block* editors wish to convey in their neighbourhood features. As a local artist based in Lions Bay, Burns may seem to be a natural choice for the North Shore edition of the magazine – but it is really the style of his work combined with his representation by a renowned Vancouver gallery that makes him an appropriate subject.

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<sup>54</sup> McLennan, Kate. "Painting the Cathedral." *The Block*. Issue 4. 24-25

In her opening paragraph, McLennan contrasts Burns's art with that of other celebrated contemporary artists, saying that Burns's tranquil landscapes go against the grain of current art trends:

Urban wastelands are a hit in Canadian art circles these days. If you have a camera, a lick of artistic savvy and an afternoon to spare, aim your lens at a junkyard and you could be papering the walls of a gallery faster than you can say "sizzling social commentary."<sup>55</sup>

Most likely, this flip assessment of modern photography would not be tolerated in a serious art journal, but in a lifestyle magazine, whose readers may be good judges of aesthetics but not necessarily art experts, McLennan's comment is right on. Burns is depicted as someone who takes a more traditional approach to his art – something that this audience likely appreciates.

Burns was the first visual artist to be featured in *The Block*, and the choice was appropriate. Because the aesthetic tastes of these readers are not known, it is better to choose visual displays that are likely to appeal to a mass audience rather than a small group of people. Burns's style is easily understandable; it is not too modern or avant-garde. He is a local figure, which makes him more accessible to these readers, even if they have no particular interest in art. Finally, *Block* readers are image-conscious and affluent, so collecting art may very well be an interest of theirs. As such, this article is also relevant to the publication.

#### **Celebrity Profile**

The June/July 2006 issue of *Western Living* included a profile of James Barber, the chef and television personality best known for his long-running CBC series *The Urban Peasant*. The profile by Brian Preston, is written in a casual, lighthearted style, easily

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<sup>55</sup> McLennan. in *ibid.* 25.

transporting the reader to the Koksilah Valley where Barber lives and the interview took place.

The rest of the article chronicles Barber's prolific career as told within the framework of Preston's visit. The rapport between author and subject is evident throughout. Although it is unknown whether the two men knew each other prior to this meeting, they appear totally comfortable with one another. At one point, Preston comments that Barber's first cookbook, published in the 1960s, looks "hippie-dippie,"<sup>56</sup> to which Barber casually responds, "Yeah, well, in those days I had hair down the middle of my back."<sup>57</sup> Barber's manner is blunt and entertaining, as he regales Preston (and readers) with personal anecdotes and shares on his own philosophy that anyone can learn how to cook: "You gotta be casual about it to make it work."<sup>58</sup> It appears that Preston adapts this casualness to his writing style, which – like Barber's cooking – is the casual approach of someone who knows exactly what he is doing.

This article is a good example of writing suited to the *Western Living* audience. It has a neat, engaging structure. The informal tone puts readers at ease, and there is enough information to make reading it worth their while. The language is colourful and entertaining, and the use of slang is appropriate to the feeling of a casual conversation between friends that prevails throughout the article. As a subject, James Barber is also appropriate for this audience. Cooking is one of the main interests of *Western Living* readers and Barber is a well-known and well-respected authority on the subject. The article's candid tone gives readers new insight into Barber's persona. Finally, the article has a service component. Following the

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<sup>56</sup> Preston, Brian. "Peasant Food". in *ibid.* 44

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

profile of Barber is a short piece by Sid Cross about pairing Barber's food with wine from BC's Joie winery.

The combination of entertainment, special interest, and service gives readers much to think about. While any of these components would be fine on its own, the balance of all three ensures that no reader is left out. Some may simply want to read a light, funny story; others want to learn more about a well-known personality, while still others want to pick up some practical tips. It is important for a magazine to cover all these bases, and in this case it covers all three in the same article.

### **Front of the Book – Reporting on Consumer Goods and Services**

Lifestyle magazines must address different aspects of their readers' lives and in today's increasingly consumer-driven world, this includes what to buy, which stores to visit, and which new trends to look out for. Writing about products and services that are for sale, however, can sometimes raise an ethical dilemma for magazine editors and writers. Official editorial guidelines state that editorial and advertising must remain separate, but short front-of-book service pieces highlighting products, designers, and stores remain a staple of most consumer magazines.

It is the responsibility of the editor to ensure that these pieces are genuinely newsworthy insofar as they actually add value to readers' lives. As such, they should not sound like advertisements. The choice to include a product in a magazine must be based on the product's merit and the perceived needs and tastes of magazine's audience, never on pressure from advertisers.

The writing in product-based service pieces is short and snappy. It has to convey the character and purpose of the product and the reasons it might be of interest to the reader,

usually within one to two short paragraphs (approximately 150 to 400 words). The tone is often airy and humorous, evoking the pleasant, informal atmosphere of a shopping trip. Many readers browse through these articles in much the same way as they window shop: to check out what is new and appealing, and to make mental notes on items that “jump out” at them. Therefore, information must be reliable and clearly laid out for readers interested in purchasing the products shown or investigating them at a later date.

### **Westerly – Product and Retail News**

The products and services featured in both *Western Living* and *The Block* typically come from local merchants, artisans, and designers, and rarely overlap with the magazines’ advertisers. In *Western Living*, the “Westerly” section at the front of the book is the place to go for information on new things to buy or browse. Subjects are chosen on the basis of merit and relevance to readers’ tastes and needs. The Westerlies below illustrate how writers present products or stores by combining emotion with practical information. Without a social context, a product would be nothing but an object. But by presenting a simulated situation, a writer can elicit an emotional response in the reader:



MAN BEDS DOG – Sleeping with your best friend just got easier.

[PETS] What good is your clean, contemporary décor if it's marred by that unsightly pile of chewed cushion you call a dog bed? Glenn Ross of Vurv Design not only creates modern minimalist furniture for you, but brings the same aesthetic line for your canine companion. Based on his observation that dogs tend to "like sleeping underneath things" and that "the higher they are the more privileged they seem to feel," Ross designed the Dog Pod to offer the feeling of security that comes with partial enclosure. He also made it compatible with his platform bed so that master and mastiff can spend nights slumbering together at the same level (beats you sleeping on the floor). The model shown here is in jatoba veneer, while the bedding is a machine washable white faux fur pad (next up: a diamond-patterned faux fur in pink). Measuring just two feet long by a foot and a half tall, the Dog Pod may now only accommodate the dogs you see riding shotgun in handbags, but a medium-sized version is in the works. – Masaji Takei<sup>59</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this report, the author's technique of addressing the readers as if he knew them personally is known as "synthetic personalization." In this example, the writer places the reader directly in a situation in which he needs or at least desires the product being presented: a designer dog bed. The author makes two main assumptions about the reader: first, that his house has "clean, contemporary décor," which happens to be the type of décor most prominently featured in the magazine, and second, that he owns a dog. Not every reader does, but it is safe to assume that many do, especially since the magazine has a regular monthly column about a dog. The article is peppered with cute turns of phrase and snappy literary devices, such as alliteration and bracketed asides, that make for nice easy reading, regardless of whether you are looking for a designer dog bed or not.

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<sup>59</sup> *Western Living*, June/July 2006. 15

To sum up, the subject of this piece is of interest to *Western Living's* style-conscious readers, who value modern design concepts and are affluent, and many of whom own dogs. The use of language and breezy tone is appropriate for this type of article, and the tone is consistent with other pieces in this section. Readers are likely to respond to this tone because it matches the frivolous subject matter and they can recognize it as a piece that is not meant to be serious or in-depth. The author engages the readers directly, keeping them at a close rhetorical distance. The information is presented in a clear, concise manner, which is beneficial to those members of the audience actually interested in learning more about the designer or product. The author highlights the product's positive attributes without crossing the line into promotional language. Quotes by the designer and information about the design give the piece credibility and signals to the reader that this is reportage rather than promotion.

The second example from the *Westerly* section opens by placing the reader in a specific cultural context and attempting to draw her in by addressing her directly with the pronoun "you":

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU – Real buddhas really can help you achieve a higher state of being.

[NEW STORE] You bought your incense at the dollar store, your Feng Shui book at Costco and your prayer beads from a kiosk in the mall. And you still haven't achieved spiritual enlightenment? Shocking. Finding authentic Eastern artifacts for your home can be almost as elusive as finding inner peace, but Buddha Village Imports, the only company in North America to import home décor products directly from Burma, can help. Launched earlier this year by Burmese-born Htu Htu, Buddha Village Imports carries exquisitely crafted Buddha statues, intricate teak wall hangings and wicker products, all hand selected from artisans and co-ops throughout the country. A social worker (helping Burmese refugees) turned entrepreneur (who is able to circumvent Burma's complicated export issues by virtue of his nationality), Htu Htu is now finding a new way to give back to his homeland. Refusing to buy from state-run factories or stores, he ensures that the small artist community of Amarapura continues to flourish, despite Burma's political and economic isolation. Buddha statues start at \$12 for a 7-inch sculpture. –Lara Kordic<sup>60</sup>

The opening passage refers to mass production of spiritual symbols from Asia, such as incense, prayer beads and the practice of Feng Shui, whose original cultural and spiritual significance has been neutralized by mass production. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with these goods, given their popularity in North America, and it is therefore fairly likely that she may have even purchased some of them in the past. The references to a “dollar store,” “Costco,” and “a kiosk in the mall” have connotations of cheapness and mass production, and the insinuation that the reader may have shopped at these places is meant to be a light jab at their consumerist habits.

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<sup>60</sup> *Western Living*, August 2006. 17

The second paragraph draws on the idea of a product having spiritual properties – but in the case of the products at Buddha Village Imports, the satisfaction comes in the knowledge that the customer is purchasing something that directly aids Burmese artisans. The owner of the company is presented as someone with a noble goal and an admirable background. The reader feels that by supporting him, they too are helping the people of Burma. Moreover, the goods’ authenticity and fine craftsmanship make them more attractive to the discerning *Western Living* audience than anything found in a mall.

The author opens the piece at a short rhetorical distance from readers, addressing them directly and speaking in familiar, colloquial terms. Once this connection has been established, the second paragraph becomes less informal and more informative about the subject. The colloquial tone keeps the piece light, which is appropriate for this type of article, and the factual aspect is useful and interesting for readers. The piece casts this store and its proprietor in a positive light, but remains grounded in the facts, aside from the statement that the store can help one achieve inner peace, which is an obvious exaggeration and intended to be humorous.

On the whole, this piece deals with subject matter – home décor – that is known to be of interest to the *Western Living* audience. Cultural references pertaining to the commercialization of Eastern spirituality in North America will be familiar to the audience, given that they live and shop here. The piece also assumes that readers have at least a basic knowledge of Burma’s isolation in order to understand why it is unusual for these products to be sold in Canada. Some readers are not familiar with this situation, which could make the piece more difficult, though not impossible to understand. Brief references to Burma’s political situation are necessary to the story, but not discussed at length, given the apolitical nature of this magazine and the predominantly light tone of Westerly articles.

### **What's In Store – New or Newly Discovered Shops**

Front-of-book service pieces in *The Block* have a similar tone and purpose to those of the Westerlies. They are short, and lightly humour and easily recognizable cultural references. The “What’s In Store” section is one of two monthly columns that tell readers about new or newly discovered stores and attractions in their community. This section is different for each edition of the magazine and is written by a regional editor, who lives in the area and knows it inside out.

Writing about local businesses gives the magazine a more intimate, neighbourhood feeling; however, it may prove to be something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, What’s In Store presents readers with shops and businesses that are easily accessible to them. On the other hand, it is difficult to keep the pieces sounding fresh and exciting issue after issue. Readers may already be familiar with all the new shops in the neighbourhood by the time the issue comes out, and material may be scarce in one regional market and plentiful in another, depending on circumstances beyond the magazine’s control. Small communities yield limited story options, especially if the magazine is addressing an affluent, discerning audience. One solution would be to mix regional What’s In Store pieces with those that appear in every edition, similar to what *Western Living* does with its Westerly section.

There is also an inherent unevenness between regions. The North Shore has more high-end boutiques, galleries and trendy cafés than do the Tri-Cities and Peninsula. The magazine’s commitment to presenting premium products and shopping ideas sometimes seems at odds with the limitations of its local markets. *The Block* has scaled back its local content in favour of “national” (or magazine-wide) content in recent issues, but the What’s In Store column remains to give local readers a sense of connection with the publication.

The first What's In Store piece below appeared in the North Shore edition. It is written in a way that upholds the North Shore's posh reputation:

SPANISH INQUISITION

Picture it. You're perched on a brasserie chair at a tiny, round marble table, nibbling a wedge of manchego and hunk of spicy chorizo over a glass of Tempranillo or a creamy Americano. Perhaps you were imagining your last trip to Barcelona, but we were conjuring up Café TrafIQ. The breezy eatery, under new management since February, has become somewhat of an escape for North Shore-ites who subscribe to such European inclinations as "nibble lots, gorge never," and "wine and espresso are good for you." Besides, who doesn't like punctuating a rainy Sunday stroll on the Ambleside Sea Wall with vino and savory snacks?

—Kate MacLennan<sup>61</sup>

In this case, the author demands a bit of worldliness of her reader, playing into the assumption that North Shore residents are affluent world travellers who are familiar with European delicacies. This is far from the truth for many, but for them too, the description allows the reader a sense of escape. Then, the author transports the reader from the Barcelona image into a European-inspired café in West Vancouver, implying that the reader can find a similar escape in his own neighbourhood.

In short, the sophisticated atmosphere of this café will likely be attractive to many members of the West Vancouver audience. Based on what is known about this community's preferences and buying power, one can assume that many of them are in fact well travelled and have expensive taste in food and wine. The tone is slightly more formal and refined than that of the previous piece, which fits with the elegant ambiance of the subject matter

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<sup>61</sup> *The Block*. Volume 1, Issue 4. 12 (North Shore Edition)

presented. The author begins by setting up a specific social context for the reader to imagine himself in before she introduces the facts about the café in a factual manner.

The content in the Tri-Cities' What's In Store section is quite different, reflecting a less flashy, more traditional image:

GRAMMA'S TREATS AND SWEETS

Shirley Temple, eat your lollipop-heart out. Cindy Lee, daughter of chocoholic Lucille Shneider, did what any good chocoholic's daughter would in memory of her candy-loving mom. She opened a candy store. Walk into Gramma's (as Lucille was called by everyone) and step back to a day when you didn't worry about things like cavities and complexion. Feast your eyes and tummy on stuff you haven't seen since you were a kid (bottle caps, taffy) and likely, stuff your dad hasn't seen since he was, either.

—Mary-Jo Dionne

A family-owned candy store conjures up a very nostalgic and wholesome feeling, and this piece embraces that with its cute and peppy tone. The reference to Shirley Temple is consistent with the retro quality of the store, and the story of Cindy Lee and her mother gives one a warm, fuzzy feeling. The author addresses the audience directly, inviting them to visit the store and “step back” to a simpler time. Like the North Shore café piece, the candy store is presented as having a transformative quality – in this case, the reader is transported back to an earlier, more innocent era.

Overall, the subject matter of this piece is rather innocuous, so broadly speaking, it could appeal to anyone – not just the *Block* audience, but anyone living in the Tri-Cities area who likes candy and would enjoy the novelty of an old-fashioned candy store. It may have

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<sup>62</sup> The Block. Volume 1, Issue 3. 14. (Tri-Cities Edition)

special appeal for those who have children, as many of the readers do; however, it is actually addressed to adults, hence the nostalgic tone.

### **Covers – Looking at Visual Imagery**

Like verbal language, the “visual language” of a magazine speaks to a particular audience by presenting imagery that the audience can relate to or is perhaps already familiar with. Cover images are crucial to a magazine’s success on the newsstand, as the cover must stand out amongst all others. In addition, the style of a particular magazine’s covers is part of the branding of that magazine. The font and positioning of the masthead is almost always consistent in most consumer magazines, and the type of cover image usually shows continuity from issue to issue. This consistency signals to loyal readers that they can count on a certain type of editorial content and quality that they have come to expect from the magazine. A typical *Western Living* cover typically features an interior photograph of a room, or an exterior shot of a house, showcasing unique architecture and design that will be featured in that issue. People are only occasionally included in the cover shot, and when they do appear, they are usually not central to the scene. Both of the *Western Living* covers discussed below are not very typical of the magazine’s cover style, and were chosen simply because these were the two issues I worked on as an intern. Each cover is distinct, the first maintaining a deliberate visual structure reminiscent of some of the magazine’s more typical covers, and the other an even further departure, more reminiscent of a fashion magazine, while still including components that are fundamental to the magazine’s mandate.

#### **Western Living – June/July 2006**

The June/July issue (see Figure 5) is an uncharacteristic *Western Living* cover, featuring an outdoor shot of a lake with a pier and a canoe in the foreground. At the end of



the pier, a woman and man sit in casual summer clothes, their backs turned to us, enjoying the view of the lake. Between them is a German shepherd, gazing off to the side. Although the landscape shot is not often seen on a *Western Living* cover, the photo recalls the clean lines and cool colours of the magazine's other covers. Although we are outside, everything is neat and orderly, with the canoe, the pier, and the people all turning toward the same point in the distance. The effect is simple, yet effective.

This cover exemplifies a theme – summering in the West – that is relevant in the lives of *Western Living* readers, 71 percent of whom, as we know, have vacationed within Canada in the past year. As experienced domestic travellers and residents of the major urban centres of western Canada, this audience will likely respond to this cover image for its sense of rural escape.



Figure 5 Summering In The West Cover (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

The clean, measured look of the photo transposes an organized feeling onto a natural landscape, something this audience may appreciate, given the magazine's penchant for clean lines in architecture. As for language, the main headline – Summer Starts Here – is

a bold statement. It positions the magazine as an authority on all subjects related to summer, and hits the newsstands in early June, at the peak of people's longing for summer. Other headlines entice the reader with promises of great deals and useful, comprehensive information, or hint at design-centric stories, which will no doubt appeal to this audience of homeowners and avid renovators. Overall, this cover fits very well with *Western Living's* mandate, is likely to please its readers and invite them to read what is inside, and although it depicts a natural landscape rather than a man-made design, maintains the clean aesthetic of other covers and the magazine itself.

#### **Western Living – August 2006**

The August 2006 cover (see Figure 6) is even more atypical of a *Western Living* cover shot. For the magazine's first annual sustainable living issue, this cover expresses the environmental theme through a vivid green background. Again, this is an exterior shot without any architectural showcase. The setting is a forest, and in the foreground, a model dressed all in white perches on one of four stools that are made of 50 percent recycled paper, which blend in well with the natural setting and set up the idea of sustainability merging with style.



Figure 6 Green Cover (used by permission from *Western Living* magazine)

Although the model does not look terribly comfortable sitting on a paper stool in the middle of the forest wearing an outfit better suited to an office, the cover is visually effective, overall. It is also well timed. 2006 marked the release of Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, which raised the profile and credibility of global warming among the mainstream public and had the perhaps unintended effect of making environmentalism trendy. In May, three months prior to the release of this issue, *Vanity Fair* came out with its first green issue, which featured a scene quite similar to the one above. Other consumer magazines, including *Elle* and *LouLou* have also added special green issues to their yearly editorial calendars, while new glossy publications with sustainability slants (*Granville* in Vancouver and *Verdant* in the United States) have launched in the past year. The marriage of sustainability and style in consumer magazines is aimed especially at people who have become more environmentally aware in recent years and are willing to make some changes in their lives to help the planet, yet who still want to look good, have attractive homes, and enjoy the good things in life (such as food, wine, travel and shopping).

The *Western Living* cover shown in Figure 6 does a sound job of expressing this idea of stylish sustainability. While sustainability is not a topic explicitly found to be of interest to *Western Living*'s readers, the way it is presented makes it appealing to this style-conscious audience. The green backdrop is both visually engaging and holds environmental connotations, while the main headline "Green and Greener – Sustainability and How to Get There" tells the reader directly that this issue is going to deal with green living and give practical advice on how to make more responsible environmental choices. The furniture shown on the cover is especially attractive to this audience for its distinctive modern-looking design, which would blend into a sleek, sophisticated interior as well as it does in this forest scene. Moreover, this issue is coming out at a time when the environment is on everybody's mind, which makes it especially relevant to this audience of "sophisticated, active and engaged urban readers."

If there is one element in the photograph that seems out of place, it is the model. *Western Living* rarely features people as the focal point of their covers, yet this model's position in the centre of the photo and her bright white outfit draw the eye directly to her. Certainly she is attractive and well put together, and thus may appeal to the readers' style-conscious sensibilities, but since fashion is not a regular feature of this magazine, the presence of a fashion model may confuse some readers, or even turn off the 48 percent of readers who are male, who might mistake this issue for a women's magazine at first glance.

All in all, this cover is an interesting departure for *Western Living*. The bright green background is certainly eye-catching, and the incorporation of modern interior design into a natural backdrop is a whimsical approach to the theme. Since this is a special issue, it is fitting that the cover has a different look. Yet, perhaps the cover would have been more

appealing to this audience if the design elements, instead of the model, were the focal point of the photograph.

*The Block's* covers also have quite a unique aesthetic among regional lifestyle magazines. Whereas *Western Living* is firmly rooted in western Canada in terms of the designs, homes, and landscapes featured on its covers, and other publications that are tied to a specific city or region (such as *Vancouver Magazine*, *Vancouver Lifestyles*, and *British Columbia Magazine*) regularly show well-known public figures or recognizable landscapes, *The Block* takes a more abstract approach. The magazine is exclusively read by people on the Lower Mainland, but the covers make no visual references to this region through landscape shots or well-known locations, and no photos of prominent people featured in the magazine. Instead, a typical *Block* cover is almost like a still-life painting, with objects are carefully placed against a blank or blurred background. The overall effect is minimalist and clean, and is quite reminiscent of *Real Simple* or *Martha Stewart Living* covers, whose covers also regularly feature inanimate objects found in or around the home. The idea is that *The Block's* suburban audience, generally regarded as more family- and home-oriented than urban dwellers, may appreciate these uncomplicated images of domestic suburban life. The simple, clean layout is present throughout the interior of the magazine as well.

### **The Block – Volume 1, Issue 3**

The theme of *The Block's* third issue, which came out in August 2006, is “In the Neighbourhood.” It is fitting, therefore, that the cover depicts one of the most common and familiar symbols of the suburban North American neighbourhood – the white picket fence (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Neighbourhood Cover (used by permission from *The Block* magazine)

This cover image conveys a pleasant, if simplistic, view of suburban life, and at least on a purely aesthetic level, it may be appealing to *The Block's* suburban audience. Because the fence is positioned in the foreground, the viewer can imagine that he is gazing into a neighbour's yard only to see that yes, in fact, the grass *is* greener on the other side of the fence. The magazine, as represented by the white picket fence and green lawn, holds the secret to the bright, shiny lifestyle that everyone wants. Readers are still on the outside looking in, but the cover seems to suggest that if they turn the page, they will escape into this idealized world.

Yet, one cannot help but compare the image to a scene from *Leave It to Beaver*. In all its abstract symbolism, the photo is perhaps too pristine and impersonal, too retro, and too removed from real life for the reader to identify with. *The Block's* readers may reside in the suburbs, but they also live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An idyllic scene such as this one depicts a suburbia that people dreamed of 50 years ago. Even the symbolism of the picket fence has

taken on an ironic meaning in today's popular culture, evoking the dark secrets of those living behind it – however, there is nothing in the magazine to hint that this image is meant to be viewed ironically. Suburbia today, even an idealized suburbia, is far removed from this image. And as a self-professed “guide to *modern* living” [my emphasis], *The Block* should be depicting something a bit more, well, modern.

Overall, image-wise, there is a discrepancy between what the cover depicts and what the reader wants, needs, and relates to. However, taken at face value the cover is pleasant to look at and easy to understand. In terms of language, the headlines could have been chosen more carefully, if the purpose is to entice readers to learn what is on the other side of the proverbial fence. The main headline – “In the Neighbourhood” – is a bit vague. The reader would probably like to know *what* is in the neighbourhood and why is it of interest to him. This would have been a perfect opportunity to showcase the service articles in this issue, drawing the reader in with persuasive, urgent language. However, the headlines “Seasonal Décor,” “Evolution of the MP3,” and “Cats vs. Dogs: Who’s the Better Best Friend” do little to evoke the feeling of must-read articles. Quantifying the décor tips (e.g. 10 Easy Design Tips to Transform Your House), or stressing the advice aspect of the MP3 article (e.g. Your Definitive Guide to Choosing an MP3 Player) would make the headlines stand out for readers. At this point, the reader is deciding whether or not to read the magazine, so it is important to grab his attention by telling him in simple terms how these articles will benefit him. Otherwise, the he has little incentive to read on.

#### **The Block – Volume 1, Issue 4**

*The Block*'s fourth issue (see Figure 8) came out in mid-November 2006, just in time for the Christmas season:



Figure 8 Holiday Cover (used by permission from *The Block* magazine)

This cover follows the same minimalist still-life formula as most other *Block* covers, but it is quite distinct from the previous cover, not only because of the fact that it is an interior shot, but also because of the mood it projects. The Issue 3 cover uses a single iconic image to depict an idyllic suburban neighbourhood, but the Issue 4 cover takes a less conventional approach to presenting the holiday season. The only Christmas references are the parcel wrapped in black paper and ribbon and the three red tree ornaments placed on the table beneath the black antler-shaped candelabrum (which together rather unsettlingly resemble Rudolf's detached nose and antlers). The man's dress shirt and bow tie strewn over the white plastic chair imply that a formal celebration has just taken place. The remaining design elements – namely the wood panelling and the white shag carpeting – evoke the modernist aesthetic of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but instead of looking hopelessly old-fashioned, they give the scene a stylishly retro feel.



The role of the cover image is not just to be interesting and different, but also to attract readers and give them a taste of what is inside the magazine. Since *The Block*'s covers do tend to be more conceptual than literal, it is important at least to represent a style or mood that is likely to appeal to the audience at large. Given that *The Block* is delivered to suburban homeowners about which not much was known at the time this issue was released, such a scene is an interesting, if somewhat risky, choice. Unlike *Western Living*, which has an audience built around its modern design aesthetic, *The Block* does not know whether its readers prefer clean modern lines or more traditional styles. This cover image exudes a style that is very measured and restrained. A suburban audience, which is likely to include many families with children, may find this style too restrained, cold, and impractical for their hectic daily lives. Then again, some parents might enjoy this style simply for its minimalist, uncluttered feel – not because they wish to emulate it in their own homes, but because it is different and provides them with a bit of visual escape, and may be evocative of the less hectic life they must sometimes long for.

Overall, this cover is distinctive and has a very engaging style. However, it is unknown whether this style will appeal to *Block* readers, given the magazine's general-interest lifestyle subjects and the fact that this is only the fourth issue and not much is known about the readers and their preferences. A Christmas scene that was more traditional yet still followed the typical *Block* still-life cover formula may have broader appeal. Also, the objects shown on the cover, with the exception of the present wrapped in black, do not appear anywhere else in the magazine. One cannot help but wonder whom this image was chosen for and what it is meant to represent. The main headline on this cover reads "The Holidays On Your Block". The use of the word "your" makes the magazine relevant to the reader,

drawing him in. Some specific hints as to how he personally will benefit from the articles in the magazine would be even more persuasive.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The editorial objective of any magazine is to appear whole and united and to reflect a social discourse that complies with the interests, desires, needs, and tastes of its readership and the magazine's own editorial vision. The discourse of a magazine encompasses different identities – including regional, economic, social, and aesthetic – that should fit together seamlessly. By upholding its discourse, a magazine is able to interact with readers, advising them, entertaining them, challenging them, and responding to their wants and needs. If the magazine does not use language (both written and visual) that appeals to its readers and corresponds with *their* identities, its message is lost.

Throughout this report, the relationship between *Western Living* and *The Block* and their respective audiences has been explored. A preliminary introduction to the two case studies profiled the history, mission, editorial profile, readership, and circulation of each magazine and revealed certain parallels and disparities between them.

*Western Living* targets readers across western Canada who are affluent, well educated and style-conscious. The magazine's strong shelter focus appeals especially to the 85 percent of readers who own their own homes, and the prevailing style aesthetic of the magazine – sleek and modern – is something that loyal readers have come to expect over the past five decades. As a focused lifestyle publication, *Western Living* puts shelter and serious design stories first, and travel, food, and wine articles second. This mixture of design-heavy pieces with lifestyle articles appeals to residential design aficionados as well more casual readers who are looking for lighter topics.

*The Block* targets a similar group of affluent, well-educated and style-conscious readers and is distributed to select homes in suburban communities across the Lower Mainland. *The Block* covers many of the same topics as *Western Living*, but it takes more of a general interest approach with a balanced focus on shelter, shopping, fashion, food and drink, and recreation. Because it is a new magazine, the general-interest format is appropriate in the sense that it gives emerging readers a taste of different topics that have fairly wide appeal. Limited data on the magazine's readers in the first year of publication put the onus on editors to create a discourse for the magazine to follow and project onto the audience, taking care to select material that would appeal to the greatest number of readers. As the magazine grows and develops, and more becomes known about readers' tastes and interests, this discourse will likely evolve, and perhaps become more specialized.

Following the introduction to the case studies, the report discussed discourse analysis and its relevance to magazines. Discourse analysis, the study of language use, is a complex field that encompasses not only the literal meaning of verbal expression, but the meaning *behind* the meaning as revealed through the social context within which language is used and the multifaceted identity of the person or people using it. Social discourse can be expressed both through language and through non-linguistic symbols, or tools that reflect different parts of one's identity.

As mentioned above, every magazine reflects a specific discourse through both its editorial content and its visual language. This discourse is a combination of what the editors wish to say, and what readers wish to read about. The relationship between the magazine and its readers shapes the content, tone, and overall vision of the magazine's editorial content. Beyond simply presenting subject matter that is believed to be of interest to the readers, the editor must present it in such a way that it is appealing and enticing. This

requires not only an intimate knowledge of the readers and the subject matter presented, but also a way to convey a tone that is appropriate in its context and that connects the audience to the article. Writers often establish this connection by using rhetorical devices that imply an existing relationship with, or knowledge of, the reader. This is referred to throughout the report as synthetic personalization, and it is used primarily to draw a reader in at the beginning of an article, and then reinforce the connection with the reader at various points in the piece.

The first set of examples compared and analyzed were feature articles. Shelter articles, while important to both magazines, are given very different treatments. *Western Living* has a long tradition of presenting architectural design pieces to its readers, and the example cited in this report combines design with a human-interest story, which has the added effect of broadening the audience. *The Block* approaches shelter not as a focal point, but as one component of lifestyle, and as such, does not claim to be as big of an authority on structural design as *Western Living* is. Rather, it appeals to a wide audience by offering easy solutions to decorating issues. The magazines' approaches to quality of life subjects such as health and sustainable living also differ. For *The Block*, health is a regular feature of discussion and the approach is similar to the one taken toward shelter. That is, health articles give simple, comprehensive advice that is deemed to be relevant to readers' lives. *Western Living*, on the other hand, does not have a health feature, but does address another important concern: sustainability. The green issue discussed in this section is not part of the magazine's regular mandate, but rather a once-a-year occurrence. In keeping with its editorial vision, the magazine (for the most part) steers clear of controversial discussion when addressing environmental issues, but rather incorporates the subject into its shelter-focused lifestyle format, connecting with readers through first-person essays on different aspects of

sustainable living. Profile articles, the final pair of features analyzed in this report, are also treated slightly differently by the two magazines. *The Block* profiles a local artist, while *Western Living* profiles a celebrity chef. While both are engaging, the chef is more definitively known to be a person of interest to the *Western Living* audience, and the piece has the added benefit of including a service component.

The next part of the analysis compared the front-of-book sections of the two magazines. *Western Living*, in its Westerly section and *The Block*, through its What's in Store section, have similar purposes and rhetorical approaches. Both focus on local retail stores or goods and are appropriately objective in their reportage. Both use a conversational tone and employ rhetorical devices that transport the reader into a social context where he can relate to the product or store presented. Moreover, both use this section to inject regional or local content into the magazine to establish a connection with readers in each of their markets. But while *Western Living* often combines regional Westerlies with those that appear in each edition, *The Block's* What's In Store section is completely different for each of the magazine's four local markets, which sometimes diminishes the quality of the subjects presented in a certain edition.

The comparison of cover images from *Western Living* and *The Block* found that each magazine follows a different visual formula that contributes to the branding of the publication making it recognizable to its audience. The two *Western Living* examples, which were released during my internship, are both departures from the magazine's typical covers; however, both use visual references that fall under the publication's mandate, albeit to varying degrees. The comparison revealed that *Western Living* covers are more literal and reflective of the magazine's contents than *The Block's* covers. *The Block* uses a distinctive still-life style to convey an abstract concept or to distinguish itself visually from other regional

publications, rather than explicitly show the reader what is in the magazine. This is a unique approach, but it may fail to connect with some general-interest readers, especially since the audience is not yet well established.

The overall intent of this analysis has been to illustrate the role of discourse and social language in any magazine, by highlighting the editorial approach and assessing the self-awareness and audience connection in these two specific publications. The analyses of these two case studies have shown, somewhat unsurprisingly, that the longer a magazine is in business, the more time it has to establish an audience, and in turn, the better an editor can draw on his knowledge of that audience to present editorial content that will keep the audience interested issue after issue, year after year. In going through *Western Living's* editorial content for this report, I was struck by how seamlessly all the sections fit together, how each issue was part of a greater whole, and how this really was a textbook case of what Graydon Carter has referred to as the “world” of a magazine. *Western Living* has evolved and redefined itself many times since its earliest days – in fact, it is currently going through a redesign under new editor Charlene Rooke. This evolution is necessary to keep the magazine fresh and exciting and to broaden its appeal to new readers, while keeping the old readers satisfied.

This analysis has also revealed that a new magazine, even one with a solid concept, cannot possibly have an intimate knowledge of its audience until both the magazine and the audience become established. *The Block* staff, who had been in business for under a year at the time of my internship, had little concrete data about the magazine’s readers. They had to rely on general population statistics from the communities to which they distributed, which gave only a vague picture of what their readership was actually like, and on the expertise of their editors and authors. The lack of demographic data may have indirectly impacted the

editorial content of the magazine, as certain articles presented topics or perspectives that sometimes seemed misplaced. However, *The Block*'s editorial staff has been able to present some material with wide appeal and relevance within the magazine's genre. As the magazine slowly builds up a trust with its readers it will eventually start to make more confident editorial choices – choices that set it apart from other publications and that show a genuine awareness of and consideration for its readers. As some of the editorial examples in this report show, *The Block* is well on its way to establishing itself in the minds of readers by presenting a mixture of subjects with broad appeal and those that resonate with local audiences.



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