

## BY PATRICK REDICAN

If you're like most people you can read your entire way through a book and never notice the typeface; you can put the book back on the shelf without ever having mentally remarked on its size or shape. You'll never have thought about the layout or blocking scheme and if somebody said something about the negative space on the page, you'd probably be mystified.

And that, says Brant Cowie, is the way it should be. "Design should go unnoticed. It should work on people even though they don't know a thing and don't notice a thing about it. It's that subtle."

And Brant Cowie should know. He's one of the country's foremost independent book designers, coffee table books, calendars, children's books and textbooks, covers for paperback novels. Brant has designed them all and the chances are good that if your pick up a Canadian published book, you'll find his company, Art Plus Incorporated, credited on the dust jacket or the copyright page.

The role of the book designer is to get the message, the feeling of the book across to the public visually through things like format, typeface, size, and layout. It is, the way Brant approaches it at least, a very demanding and precise craft and an artform that demands subtlety and imagination.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of how it might work: once a company decides to hire Brant to do a book, he will get together with the publishing company reps and the authors and together they will decide the format-size and shape-the typeface and perhaps a general idea of the layout pattern or design of the book.

Then he goes to work with manuscript of the book, perhaps already marked with layout suggestions, and prepares a dummy design for all or part of the book. This approved, he will "art direct" the book: commission creative art or photography for use throughout the book or the cover, design the cover, decide on the specific layout, finally he superintends the actual layout of the book.

This goes once again to the publishers and author for approval, it may be accepted or major or minor changes made and finally, it goes to print.

Depending on the book the amount of work varies. In a paperback, only cover design is necessary; coffee table books or children's books may offer a far more complex task. Some books limit the designer's scope because the material he has to work with and how he may work - say a limited number of pages or the size and shape - are strictly proscribed.

"Every book has its own character; my work demands attention to its personality so that the right feeling will be established, and so it appeals to the market it's aimed at. A murder mystery paperback has to be flashy. A book like "The Music of Man" has a more sophisticated appeal. "Path of the Paddle" (a book about canoeing) is a coffee table book, but it was meant to be a handbook as to be reset and relayed out three times in order to satisfy author Yehudi Menuhin; this sort of revamping is uncommon but, Brant admits, almost every project calls for him to modify some thing. He's

philosophical about it. "When I first started I resented the limitations more, but now I think that there are very few restrictions that aren't possible to work within and still be creative."

The creativity of the job, according to Brant, is its real attraction. "I find that I'm still developing, still learning new techniques. I've become more sensitive to more subtle styles and variations. Every project is a little bit different; every project is challenging."

Artplus is a joint venture of Brant and his wife, Maria and, although it didn't start out that way, it's become a local venture. It's located north of Marmora off the Centre Line Road, a loft addition to the Cowies' home.

It's an incredibly crowded and busy little place, a lot busier than it was supposed to be. "We expected it to be just an extension of our Toronto operation, but we decided to move the whole thing out here. Now we have five people working in a space meant for only two or three and we're trying to make room for a sixth."

How does a person get to be a book designer? Brant went to the Ontario College of Art and while there, worked on design of college publications. "The course was directed to advertising art and commercial art, and I wasn't all that interested in it. I was leery of the potential pressure - the wining and dining of clients to win contracts, that sort of thing. When I graduated and was about to go looking for a job, the first person I talked to said I should go into a publishing company.

"I was lucky, the first place I went to was Ryerson Press and they hired me as a junior artist. After six months there, Ryerson was taken over by a large American company, McGraw-Hill. I was lucky there too, because of the sheer volume of work they turned out: it was like a book factory. You had to learn to be quick and efficient or.. I was ambitious, I got to be art director within two years. I made mistakes, but I learned through my mistakes.

"But because of the size and volume of the work, they weren't as concerned about mistakes as I sometimes thought they should be. Often design mistakes went unnoticed, so eventually I left there and went freelance."

That was nine years ago and, although he admits to being scared when he started out, Brant Cowie and Artplus Incorporated have never had to look back. In spite of the fact that he's moved his headquarters to Marmora and is centering his operation here more and more, the volume of work is still growing. "This year will really be the test, because it's the first year that the entire operation will be in Marmora, but it looks very good so far."

Brant thinks the reason for his success is because he pays a great deal of attention to quality. "We do work on the theory that if we produce good, high-quality work we will always be in business. Of course, a general decline in economy would hurt us as well, but we think we could keep afloat."

Whether or not the business can make it in Marmora, Brant is committed to continue living here. "I think I would rather drive a cab in Belleville than go back to living in Toronto," he said. "I like living in the country far too much. I like everything about it. I can't say that there's less pressure, because this is still a very high pressure business, no matter where I am. But the country environment really helps."

MARMORA HERALD

4 FEB 1981

PG 8-A

## Marmora company re-locates

**Marmora** - Enterprising players in the publishing world and data management services, The ArtPlus Group, will now be calling Belleville home.

The recent purchase of the Ontario Business College building at 54 Victoria Avenue is a grand leap forward in the amalgamation of services offered through The ArtPlus Group of companies. It's a bold step for owner Brant T. Cowie who envisions a corporate, global direction for the business he started from scratch 26 years ago. This corporate vision includes an overall company logo and new name for the stoic OBC building. Amid diligent renovations, The ArtPlus Group is now housed in the aptly named Graphic Design and Communications Centre.

The changing face of technology has also changed the vision of design and the tools used in production. Internet, CD-ROMs, video and sophisticated multimedia affords The ArtPlus Group a creative freedom and competitive edge. These developments have helped secure high profile clients including President's Choice (Loblaws), Corning Canada, CTV, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, Stoddart Publishing and ITP Nelson.

Inside The ArtPlus Group, three companies work side-by-side to continue the growth of this business and face the approaching millennium with a new vision and look. ArtPlus Limited, the original company, houses the design and production venture. TYPeline Express grew directly out of the film needs of ArtPlus Limited to become a service bureau, and now specializes in short-run print. The most recent addition, ArtPlus.Net, is a digital service provider. With co-owner Mike Carleton at the helm, ArtPlus.Net will be taking this business further into the new media arena through sophisticated database archiving and automated text-formatting services.

Being true to its roots, The ArtPlus Group is still a strong contender in pre-press book production. As a completely integrated communications resource, The ArtPlus Group is prepared to help corporations reach their global growth potential.

In total, approximately 24 full-time jobs have been added to this area's workforce through The ArtPlus Group.

COMMUNITY PRESS  
EASTERN EDITION  
29 OCT 1999  
PC 12