

Clockwise from top  
Interview May 1983, cover  
featuring Chris Atkins, star of  
the film Heaven, photographed  
by Greg Gorman; Interview  
November 1982, cover featuring  
Ali MacGraw photographed  
by Peter Strongwater; Interview  
September 1981, cover featuring  
Fran Lebowitz, author of  
Social Studies, photographed  
by Cris Alexander; Interview  
September 1983, cover featuring  
Timothy Hutton photographed  
by Matthew Rolston

Centre  
Interview May 1981, cover  
featuring Pirates of Penzance  
star Rex Smith photographed  
by Albert Watson

Still going strong today, Andy Warhol's Interview mag is the daddy of DIY publications, rising out of the 60s tradition of underground newspapers to become the infamous "crystal ball of pop culture". Here **Steven Heller** designer at Interview during the 70s—recalls the highs and lows, design faux pas, those pastel covers and spectre-like presence of the Bewigged One, that makes Interview unique in editorial history.

# Almost Famous





Centre  
Interview November 1982,  
spread featuring Niki de  
Saint Phalle photographed  
by Jean Pagliuso

I played a fairly minor role in the history of Interview magazine, and this is as good a time and place to toot my horn. In three or four issues published in 1971 my name appears on Interview's masthead under "layout"—not "design" or "designer", but "layout." That year, however, I "redesigned" Interview magazine at the request of Bob Colacello and Glenn O'Brien (who were the editor and ersatz "art director", respectively, and watched over me like hawks). If I do say so, my version was typographically cleaner than the handful of previous issues, which were grungy in the contemporary underground style.

When it premiered in 1969 at the Warhol Factory, high above Union Square in Manhattan (just a few blocks away from the legendary Max's Kansas City), Interview was Andy Warhol's very own DIY magazine before the term "Do It Yourself" became a fashion. It was his toy, but to be honest, Andy didn't really design or edit it himself—he had members of his entourage do it for him. In fact, I never even met him, but his spirit was pervasive, like a bewigged phantom peering through the clouds.

The first half-dozen or so issues of Interview (with a logo that read: "INTER/view") adhered to the slapdash tradition of late Sixties underground newspapers like the East Village Other and Berkeley Barb. I suppose it could have been influenced by George Maciunas's Fluxus periodicals—although I never heard any Interview editor mention Fluxus by name. However, I did see the editors reading the so-called cheap-chic newsprint fashion magazine RAGS (published by Rolling Stone's Straight Arrow Publishing Co. and where Barbara Kruger was a designer in her early years), which was somewhere between under- and middle ground. John Wilcox's Other Scenes, a scrappy underground tabloid edited by one of the founders of the Village Voice, was also on the table. Hence Interview's early issues did not exhibit any uniquely exceptional design approaches.

As far as I could tell, Warhol rarely got his hands dirty with this rag. He ruled Interview many blocks from where I was, and was surprisingly listed second on the masthead under co-editor and Chelsea Girls director Paul Morrissey. Not only had I never met Warhol, I was never even told that he (or Morrissey) passed my redesign before it went to press. I still wonder whether they even read the publication.

At this time I was also art director and designer of Rock, a second-tier music tabloid, which to make ends meet rented typesetting services to Interview (and other publications), and threw my "talents" in as what in the retail business is called "a loss-leader" (something free to lure customers into the store). Actually I deserved a better title, since all the type and graphic choices for the redesign were mine. Instead, Colacello, who selected all the photographs, in addition to writing and editing articles, saw himself as a.d., though O'Brien took that title for himself. They made choices they knew would please Andy, yet never dictated what typefaces I could use, or prohibited me from using my then-favourite two—Broadway and Busorama—which in retrospect was a big mistake.

I still cannot understand why Andy didn't vet my typography. Before becoming America's pioneering Pop Artist, he was an accomplished graphic designer/illustrator (with a distinctive hand-lettering style) and should have been the first to realise that my pairing of Art Deco Broadway type for the nameplate "INTER/view" and the curvaceous Busorama typeface for the subtitle "Andy Warhol's Film Magazine" was one of the dumbest combinations ever. It was unsuitably retro and inappropriate for a progressive journal; moreover, the two faces lacked any harmony whatsoever. Add to that the heavy oxford rules I placed at the top and bottom of each page, and, if I had been in charge, I would have fired me. Still, no one uttered a displeased peep, and the magazine kept my logo for six issues, even after I voluntarily left for greener pastures (at Screw magazine).



Centre  
Interview September 1983,  
spread featuring Close-Ups,  
featuring Susan Sarandon  
photographed by Jean  
Pagliuso (left) and Brooke  
Shields photographed by  
Albert Watson (right)

Photography by  
Christoffer Rudquist

Mercifully for readers and staff, with Vol. 2, No. 10 the editors (or maybe Warhol himself) switched to a handwritten version that read Andy Warhol's Interview, and it has more or less remained there on the cover ever since. Soon after I left, of course, Interview became a herald of late twentieth-century celebrity, glitz and fashion, as well as a significant outlet for photography and graphic design. It is so iconic that a few years ago an ambitious, limited-edition, seven-volume, thirty-five-year anniversary collection, *Andy Warhol's Interview: The Crystal Ball of Pop Culture*, edited by Sandra J. Brant and Ingrid Sischy, was published by Karl Lagerfeld's 7L, Steidl Publishers. This mammoth boxed set only covered the first decade, from 1969 to 1979.

Interview evolved into "the definitive guide to the most significant stars of today and tomorrow," say the reprint's editors, and it was the first magazine to employ a unique question-and-answer format to delve candidly into the minds of celebrities, artists, politicians, filmmakers, musicians and literary figures. In many of the issues, celebrities interview other celebrities, which was a Warholian conceit that gave Interview its deliciously voyeuristic appeal. Yet it is the visual persona, beginning with the haphazard original design, the pseudo-Deco redesign that I perpetrated and ultimately the introduction of mannered photo-illustration celebrity portrait covers by Richard Bernstein (1939–2002) that defined Interview's graphic personality during the disco decade. Indeed, the latter marked a truly unique approach to editorial cover design.

Bernstein's covers owed much to Sixties fashion illustration; his heavily retouched photographs with paint, pencil and pastel monumentalised subjects like nothing else in print. He exaggerated their already glamorous visages through colourful graphic enhancements that made each personality into a veritable mask that hid blemishes while accentuating their auras. He made "Superstars" into "Megastars" (which was also the title of his book of collected Interview covers)—fifteen minutes became weeks, months and years.

The most memorable issue that I worked on was devoted to Luciano Visconti's film version of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (Vol. 2, No. 4), and was filled with stunning film stills of Dirk Bogarde, Silvana Mangano and Björn Andrésen. It was a startling issue, one of the last Interviews to use 'handout' or publicity photos. Interview gradually shifted from publicity stock to its own photo sessions with the eminences of celebrity and fashion photography—Robert Mapplethorpe, Barry McKinley, Francesco Scavullo, Herb Ritts, Ara Gallant, Peter Beard, Bruce Weber, Berry Berenson Perkins. These and others were given the freedom to create original work. Despite the continued use of yellowing newsprint, these photographs jumped off the pages.

Typographically, that first decade of Interview was comparatively staid. Compared to, say, Fred Woodward's *Rolling Stone* of the same period, which expressed its typographic exuberance in so many ways, Interview's interior format was fairly neutral, allowing the photographs to take centre stage. It wasn't until the Nineties, when Fabien Baron and later Tibor Kalman grabbed the design reins, that the magazine's graphic attributes formed a dynamic fusion. During the Seventies, Interview was still uncertain whether it should hold to its avant-garde, alternative-culture persona or march from the underground into the fashionable mainstream. Of course, with Ingrid Sischy at the helm starting in 1990, after Warhol's demise in 1987, the magazine became more art, culture and fashion-oriented, and decidedly establishment with its chic/new wave sensibility. She brought in Kalman as creative director and designer, with whom she had worked at Art Forum, and that's when the die was cast. Although Interview has hit some rocks in the road of relevance along the way, it continues to move—and groove.