

# The Washington Post

## Fauquier designer changed the look of National Geographic

From February 1910 until August 1979, that most collectible of magazines, National Geographic, was recognizable by its yellow cover and its border of clustered oak and laurel leaves. Howard E. Paine of Delaplane removed them gradually, sometimes one at a time. He replaced the border with color photography.

"We went ahead with glacial speed," Paine said. Leaf clusters were still visible nearly 20 years after he began altering the time-honored covers in September 1959. "We didn't want members writing in with, 'Where are my oak leaves?'"

I observed how enthusiastic he was as the changes occurred, for we were colleagues at National Geographic in the 1960s. He was in charge of the magazine's design and typography, a post he held until his retirement in December 1990.

Paine's August 1957 entree into the hallowed halls at 16th and M streets NW in the District followed an unlikely path, not that of the bevy of renowned scientists, writers and photographers who staffed the world's largest scientific and educational organization.

He had never studied art or design. "I think it was

all in my genes. My mother's father was a woodcutter," he told me recently at his home.

Observation helped, too. "I learned an awful lot about magazines looking at them as a kid," he said. "I pulled out the paintings that had great artwork, especially those I admired in my father's collection of Fortune magazines." They are still among his research materials.

After graduating as a philosophy major in 1950 from American International College in Springfield, Mass., Paine worked in his father's electrical appliance and fixtures store in Springfield. He had only two publishing credits: editor of his high school and college yearbooks.

A college friend, Salvatore Giansante, knowing that Paine was smart and remembering his editing the yearbook, said to him, "Paine, what are you doing here?"

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Following his retirement in 1990, one of Paine's many continuing layout ventures is to oversee the design of U.S. postage stamps. He chooses and coaches the artists, some of whom he first admired when he cut out their paintings some decades ago.

I asked Paine about his artistic credo. "Learning by the baleen method," he said. "The baleen whale will gulp a huge amount of ocean and squirt it all out except for the shrimp and morsels to eat. I take in everything and then spit out what I don't want."

*Cathy Hunter, archivist of the National Geographic Society, provided information for this report.*

*Eugene Scheel is a historian and mapmaker who lives in Waterford.*

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So Paine left the family electrical business and began writing and designing ads for a bank and advertising firm. To keep abreast of his new field, he subscribed to Advertising Age, Publishers Weekly and the New York Times.

In the Times, he answered an ad for an editor-designer for books about "science, geography and the world around us," as Paine recalled the wording. "I always loved books, so I replied to the box number. I thought the ad was from Golden Books, but after a few months I got a call" from a National Geographic senior officer.

"I had a portfolio of stuff," Paine said of his meetings with magazine staff members, "but I knew it was not what they wanted."

"This is what I showed them," Paine said to me. And, 52 years later, on his Delaplane parlor table, he penciled the drawing that got him the job: "an imaginary travel book, 'Walking the Streets of Paris,'" he said, as he sketched a river, houses and trees. "I called the author Nicole Pouisson, or something like that."

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