series editor: **Edward M. Gomez**

ROCKPORT

NEW DESIGN:
LOS ANGELES
THE EDGE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

series editor: **Edward M. Gomez**

associate editor: **Allison Goodman**

NEW DESIGN:
LOS ANGELES
THE EDGE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

CONTENTS

NEW DESIGN:
LOS ANGELES
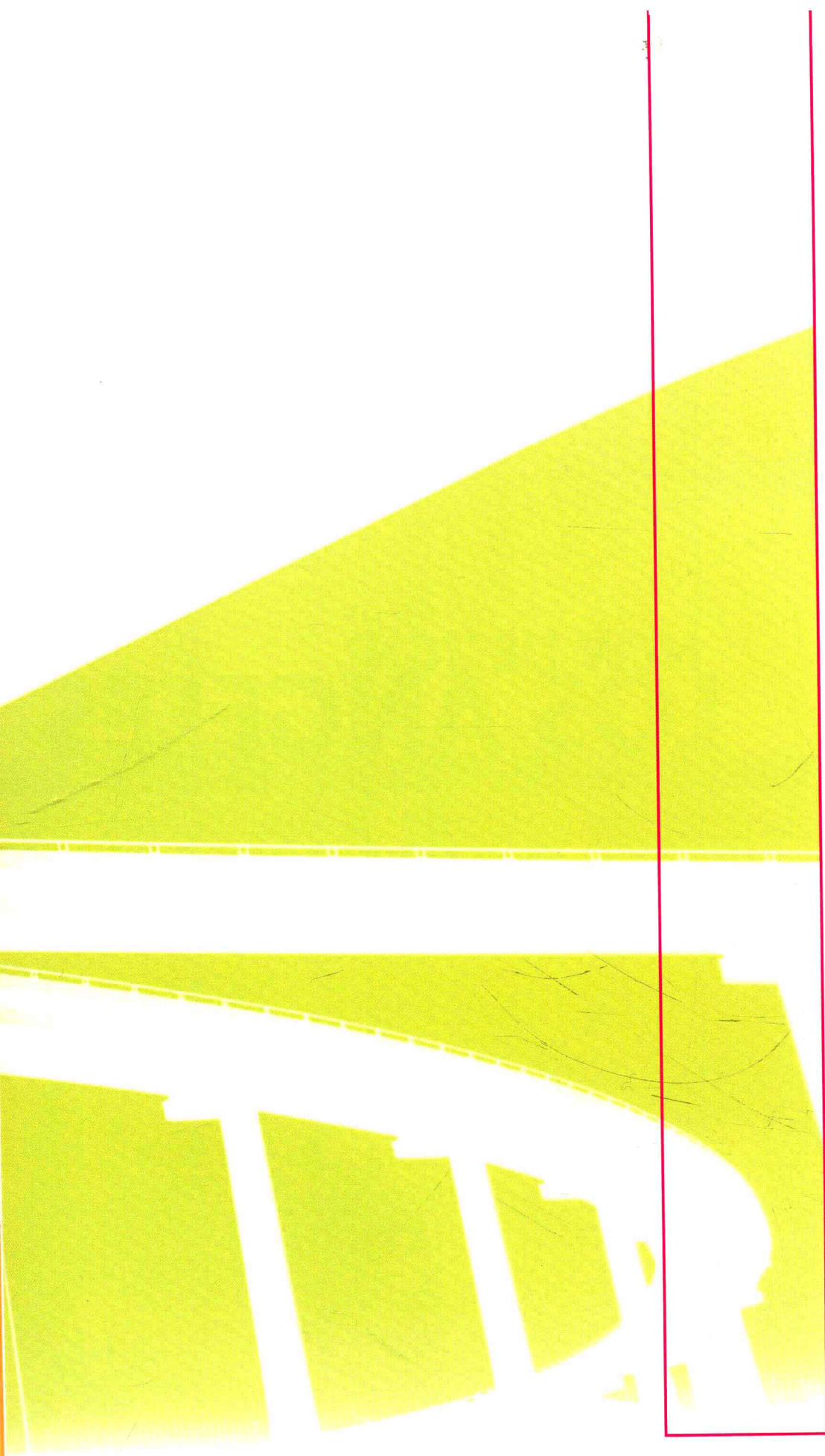
ROCKPORT

series editor: **Edward M. Gomez**

associate editor: **Allison Goodman**

NEW DESIGN:
LOS ANGELES
THE EDGE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

GLOUCESTER MASSACHUSETTS

ROCKPORT
PUBLISHERS

Acknowledgments

CONTENTS

In modern times, artists and creative types of all stripes have ventured westward to California, lured by its twin promises of beauty and bounty. Like the pioneering technician-entrepreneurs who founded Hollywood's legendary movie studios, many went for the light—and stayed, as much for the natural wonders as for the rewards of a new, young, less restrictive society. To this day, graphic designers, many with strong links to the now vast entertainment industries, continue to enjoy and find inspiration in an open, energetic, increasingly international environment that is aware of its uniqueness and resources. It is an independent-minded state that looks as easily to East Asia and the Pacific as it does to Mexico and Latin America. In Los Angeles in particular, California is a place of constant movement—of people, cultures, products, styles, and trends; it is a city in constant motion where many find an emblem in and on the road.

Since the mid-1980s, Los Angeles graphic designers have also had to learn to "drive" another ubiquitous, indispensable machine. It is one that has become as much a symbol of their state as the automobile, as well as the most important tool of their profession. It is the desktop computer, and Los Angeles designers have taken to it with enthusiasm and verve, often as innovators in their use of its capacities for typography, image-handling, and other fundamental aspects of the art and science of visual communications.

Southern California Institute of Architecture Poster
CREATIVE DIRECTORS: Sean Adams,
Noreen Morioka
PHOTOGRAPHY: Anthony Terumi

Designer April Greiman was one of the first to embrace the Apple Macintosh computer, which was introduced in 1984, and to envision its broad potential for the communications-design field. Her experiments with collage-like layouts for posters and her use of multiple typefaces within the same headline or logo, often not in adherence to any underlying modernist, rectilinear, organizing grid, anticipated the techniques and looks that today's relatively easy-to-use hardware and software would soon allow and engender. Greiman coined the term *hybrid imagery* to refer to the blending of traditional (now old-fashioned) photomechanical techniques of print production with the new digital technology's abilities to manipulate texts and images and to compose whole pages and books on a screen.

In a business and cultural environment strongly influenced by and sensitive to technology and media—after all, southern California is a center of the entertainment, aerospace, and advertising industries—graphic designers have taken to the computer partly out of an eagerness to explore its reach and partly out of necessity.

It's no secret that the computer has become the most powerful resource in graphic design and other communications fields. At the same time, with the telecommunications explosion that has brought the world to any Internet user or TV viewer's fingertips and screen, computers have begun to redefine the
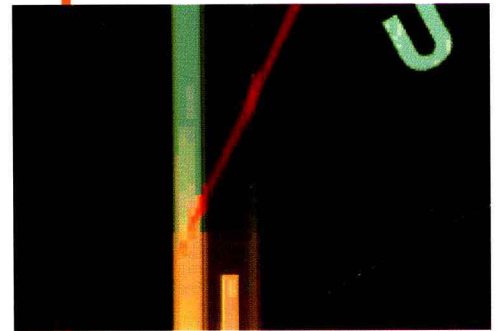
purposes and aesthetic principles that for generations have guided and shaped graphic design. The computer's radical effects on visual literacy and on language itself have reinforced such critical points of view even as they have given expression to new forms of communication—hypertext, motion graphics—hitherto inconceivable on the printed page.

Thus, many Los Angeles designers speak with excitement about, and have rushed to explore, the new avenues of cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural discourse that rapidly evolving technologies have opened up, and the new techniques and opportunities for artistic expression that they have introduced. "The understanding of time-based design will now define and direct the professional landscape," observes designer Geoff Kaplan. He recognizes

the inescapable role of the fourth dimension—time—in such new and proliferating formats as Web pages, motion graphics, and interactive applications of all kinds that incorporate information-carrying screens.

In the meantime, printed materials of every size and format already have reflected the daunting power of digital tools—and, arguably, have demonstrated many a designer's tendency to create in a certain manner because a software program has compelled him to do so. This can be seen in everything from the obligatory multi-layering of images and type that now appears in or on so many brochures, books, and packages, to the aggressively unconventional layouts created by the pop-culture magazine *Raygun*'s former but lastingly influential art director David Carson. Such work has been revered by postmodernist aesthetes who have relished its way of giving concrete expression, in a deconstructionist mode, to the otherwise merely conceptual, unexpected, formula-busting possibilities of

J League video sequence
DESIGNERS: Geoff Kaplan, Kyle Cooper

what a printed page can be. It has also been derided as chaotic and decadent, or self-indulgent and irresponsible, not to mention downright illegible.

"I basically feel like I'm painting with type and images," Carson has said of his efforts to visually convey the emotion of a text. His work has spawned a whole international school of—depending on a viewer's point of view—fashionably disagreeable or intelligently challenging graphic design that turns up regularly in pop-music, fashion, and other hip-design settings. Distilled for the masses, it also has made its way into television and the movies. Having quickly emerged as just another style in its own right, it is one more visual language, with its own grammar and
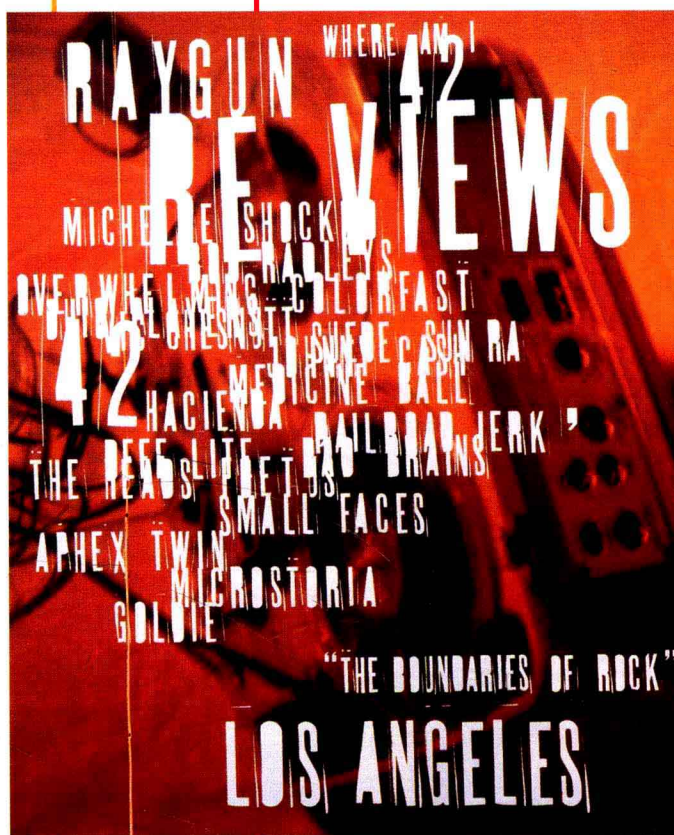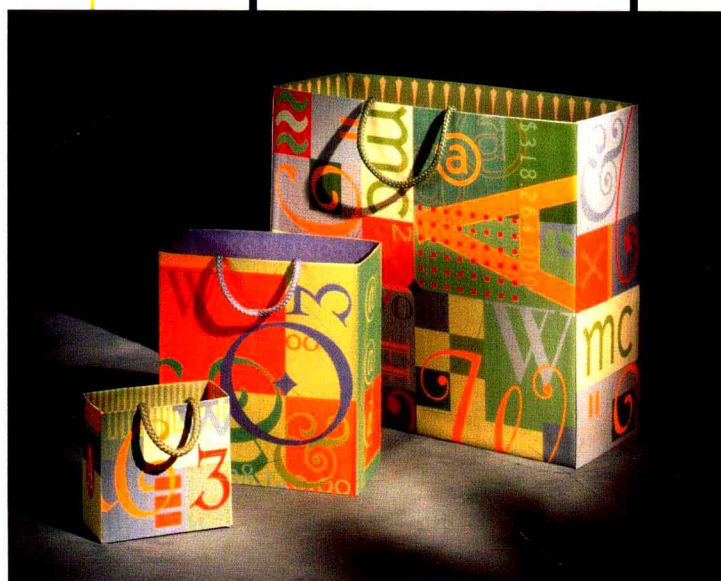
Raygun *covers*
ART DIRECTORS: Chris Ashworth and Scott Denton Cardew; Robert Hales

Michel & Company gift bags
DESIGNERS/ILLUSTRATOR: Maggie van Oppen

vocabulary, however erratic, that many Los Angeles designers, like their counterparts in other large media centers, have swiftly and capably assimilated.

"I try to keep up with what's happening in the world and to remain open—but not a slave—to new trends," notes designer Kim Baer, echoing a sentiment shared by many of her Los Angeles colleagues. "I read voraciously and try to do the best work I can without resorting to any grand formulas or panaceas about 'what will work.'" Baer recognizes that graphic design can and should be about clarity and organization on the one hand, and about style on the other. The first aspect is as much a reflection of a designer's talents and skills as the second is an expression of a very human need to feel forward movement and progress—to experience what Baer calls "a visual landscape that changes."

Jar labels
ART DIRECTOR: Kim Baer
DESIGNER: Maggie van Oppen
ILLUSTRATOR: Sudi McCollum

So, too, are dramatic shifts apparent in the professional landscape in which Los Angeles graphic designers ply their trade. Thanks again to the influence of new technology and telecommunications, and to the past two decades' massive structural changes in the economy to which these same forces have contributed, some designers now regard large design firms as outmoded dinosaurs, whose vaunted "full-service" offerings, high overhead, and glitzy images are no longer cost-effective. Some argue that these larger companies have become too dependent on corporate clients with deep pockets (read: the entertainment industries) whose more or less similar, marketing-driven needs tend to produce generally uninteresting, homogenized design.

Alternatively, many notable small, one- to three-person design studios have sprung up whose principals feel they can be more creative and less wasteful and still serve clients' needs by tapping into well-cultivated networks of talented freelance specialists. For these designers, their entrepreneurial spirit nourishes their artistic vision and vice versa; mixing up their client bases, they do what they can to avoid becoming exploited partners with entertainment conglomerates who trade prestige for abusive payment practices or unreasonable demands. "We're leaner but more flexible," explains Petrula Vrontikis, one of several designers featured in this volume whose studio fits this emerging model. "We're not locked-in in any way, so to each project we can bring a design solution with its own special twist. Our set-up allows for genuinely personal service and truly meaningful—and intelligent—relationships between clients and designers."