

CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

# BIOGRAPHY OF FRED WOODWARD

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Fred Woodward was born 1953 in Noxapater, Mississippi, an agricultural community of approximately 500. He didn't have very many role models in that small community where most people didn't understand the world of art direction and graphic design. His parents looked upon his artistic inclinations with amused resignation and as a passing phase. He remarks "My parents still think I must have been a doorstep baby".

He attended Mississippi state university and it was there, for the first time that he met others who were interested in their environment and the way things looked. It wasn't till his third year at Mississippi state that design was ever an option for him. "Something about it just clicked" he says, recalling when he first started in the field. His early years were a slow and gradual rise, starting out as an unpaid part-time studio assistant, but he quickly earned recognition. Over a 10 year span, he worked as an art director at a variety of local outlets, including city magazines in Memphis and Dallas. In 1982 Woodward moved to the Sunday Magazine of the Dallas Times-Herald, followed by a post as art director of Texas Monthly.

Woodward learned from colleagues and also adopted standards from leaders in the field. Ronn Campisi at the Boston Globe and Greg Paul at the Cleveland Plain Dealer had already begun to revitalize the look of Sunday magazines. Speaking about their influence on him, Woodward says "They showed me the possibilities of the format". Woodward also earned respect from editors he worked for. At the Texas Monthly, editor Greg Curtis recalls "Fred breathed new life into [the magazine]".

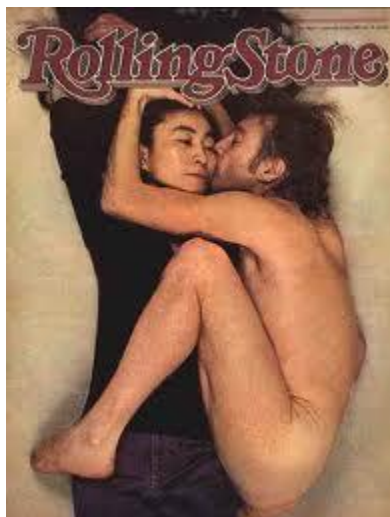
These formative years were marked with great growth and learning for Woodward, who thrived without pressure from publishers or direct competition in the market place. "I had the chance to experiment, to screw up" he says. Through a comparison of his earlier works, and in particular his handling of type, one can see a growing confidence in the young art director. He moved to cleaner, more restrained and less flashy or gimmicky typefaces. A distinct approach to type face would later become a hallmark of Woodward's signature style, demonstrated at Rolling Stone magazine.

In June 1987, Woodward starting working for Rolling Stone, a magazine where he would spend 14 years and for which he is perhaps best known. He oversaw almost 400 issues during that time. To consider his unique contribution to the magazine, it is important to consider the historical context in the decades prior to Woodward's tenure. Rolling Stone made its reputation among music fans in the late Sixties and early Seventies supporting classic rock acts like John Lennon and Bob Dylan. However, in the decade that followed, the magazine was slow to keep up with the times and became out of touch with younger audiences. Indeed, ten years prior to Woodward joining as art director, the magazine seemed conservative and had been transformed from 'the bible of Sixties counter-culture' to a mainstream publication.

By the time Woodward joined the magazine it was slow to recognize the importance of the grunge movement. Other competitors in the industry, such as Spin magazine, which launched in 1985, boasted younger and more passionate writers. All of this led to Rolling Stone beginning to look distinctly middle-aged. As art director, Woodward needed to change that image. In his first days on the job, he examined the two decades of visuals that preceded him, to understand the heritage of what he had inherited.

“When I was first starting out Rolling Stone typography was a big influence on me. All those classic typefaces they used taught me to love type. So when I got here, I dug up that library of great old font, just waiting to be rediscovered. It’s a link to my past, and to the history of the magazine” he says.

Woodward’s unique contribution to Rolling Stone’s visual style was made through typography, photography and the way they were choreographed together in the magazine. Woodward made deliberate choices when it came to typography, giving a meaning and setting the tone for the subject matter or persona. Not only did the typefaces work for the mood of the article, but the positioning of groups of words, or letters created an emotion or expression. In an effort to continue to have a look and feel that was different from other publications, Woodward worked with some talented designers to create new typefaces and adapt some classic old faces for their exclusive use. With Woodward at the helm, the library of typestyles grew by about two faces a month. His creative talent also lay in generating a typographic response to photographs. This is exemplified by the profiles of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Pee Wee Herman in 1992 issues of the magazine.



Woodward’s first cover came out two months after he started working at the magazine and displayed an image of heavy metal group Motley Crue. Although the magazine’s most famous cover shot of an intertwined John Lennon and Yoko Ono was published before he joined the magazine, Woodward oversaw his fair share of noteworthy covers. For instance, in September 1993, Janet Jackson appeared topless on the cover of the magazine with the hands of her then-husband René Elizondo, Jr. covering her breasts. Woodward went with the original full-length version of a cropped image, used on the cover of her album. Journalists commented that it became one of the most recognizable and lampooned magazine covers of the year and clearly established Jackson as both role model and sex symbol.



Besides critical acclaim, Woodward, earned Rolling Stone more international design awards than any other magazine in the U.S. Included in the list awards were the National Magazine Awards' General Excellence Prize. In 1990, the Art Directors Club of New York awarded a total of 17 gold and silver medals to the magazine. This was the most ever awarded to a single recipient in the club's 72 year history.

Today the magazine enjoys the status of cultural institution among many in the field of music journalism. Although it can be argued that Rolling Stone already had a history of innovative art directors, Woodward's memorable art direction helped maintain that reputation. Woodward himself has received many honours. The Society of Publication Designers awarded him the first ever "Best in Show" honor in 1995 and in 1996 he was the youngest person to ever be inducted into the Art Directors Hall of Fame. In 1997 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Type Directors Club. In 2004 he was given the prestigious AIGA medal for Design Legends.

If critics argue that Woodward's success or reputation was built on his association with Rolling Stone Magazine, one need only examine his record at his next post - GQ magazine. Woodward has held the post of design director since 2001. Critics say he "Continues to delight readers with his creative and innovative work". By 2009, he had been nominated for eight National Magazine Awards, including General Excellence, Design, Photography and Photo Portfolio.

## Research sources

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