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AMERICAN MASS- MARKET MAGAZINES

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BON APPÉTIT

“Publishers have always been quick in sensing new interests within the public and then establishing new publications to cater to them.”¹ Cleon T. (Bud) Knapp was quick in sensing America’s food revolution of the 1970s. Bud Knapp, owner and chairman of Knapp Communications Corporation (publisher of *Architectural Digest**), purchased a small food and beverage magazine called *Bon Appétit* from the Pillsbury Company in the mid-1970s² and, with the aid of a new editor Paige Rense, transformed this liquor store giveaway into one of America’s most successful gourmet food magazines.³

America’s food revolution of the 1970s was due to many factors. A health and fitness craze was sweeping the country. The hippies of the 1960s were growing up and making money, yet they still wanted healthful and natural foods. Due to smaller families and two-income households, Americans had more money to spend.⁴ The young urban professionals (yuppies) were discovering cooking as a way to spend their newly earned leisure dollars. Greater numbers of men, as well as the affluent, were discovering cooking for fun and entertainment. Other people were cooking as a way of rebelling against the country’s fast-food restaurants. New products, such as food processors and microwave ovens, were saving people time and effort.⁵ Even the recession of the 1970s helped popularize fine food and cooking: “Unable to make a down payment for a house, a couple happily pays \$8 for a jar of gourmet mustard.”⁶

Bon Appétit began in 1956 as a free promotional magazine edited by James A. Shanahan and published by American Colortype Company of Chicago, Illinois. After years as a liquor store giveaway, and under various editors and publishers,⁷ *Bon Appétit* was acquired by the Pillsbury Company in 1970. Pillsbury published *Bon Appétit* bimonthly, and over the next five years increased the magazine’s paid circulation to 250,000, with 50,000 newsstand sales and

200,000 distributed free by liquor stores making bulk purchases.⁸ In 1975 Bud Knapp bought *Bon Appétit* for \$80,000.⁹ He moved the magazine to Los Angeles, and by the end of that year turned it into a monthly periodical. Within the next three years *Bon Appétit*'s paid circulation doubled twice.¹⁰ By the mid-1980s circulation reached 1,300,834, with newsstand sales of 152,861 and subscriptions of 1,147,973.¹¹ The cover price increased to the present \$2.50, and the annual subscription rate to \$18.00.

Since a fine food magazine aimed at very wealthy gourmets already existed (*Gourmet*), Bud Knapp aimed *Bon Appétit* at a slightly more medium-income group.¹² Knapp stated, "Our editorial will be less esoteric than *Gourmet* and a little more creative than the tuna-fish-casserole type."¹³ *Bon Appétit* was for readers "in the kitchen with their sleeves rolled up trying recipes in the latest issue . . . the magazine will spend many hours in the kitchen and emerge spattered and stained, evidence that it is being used."¹⁴ This was a magazine "for the kitchen counter, not the coffee table."¹⁵

Therefore, *Bon Appétit* contained about 80–100 recipes per issue, with step-by-step instructions on preparing food, and choosing and serving wine and other beverages.¹⁶ Every recipe was tasted and tasted by *Bon Appétit*'s staff, and every recipe was to contain ingredients found on the shelves of any supermarket.¹⁷ Also, *Bon Appétit* featured entertainment and travel articles, book reviews,¹⁸ and columns such as "Too Busy to Cook?" and "Cooking for Two."¹⁹ Extremely attractive photographs colored the pages throughout each issue.

The readers of *Bon Appétit* often were called "upscale." A 1981 study showed the magazine's readers having a median income of \$26,752, with 75.2 percent of them being female, 24.8 percent male, and a median age of 41.5.²⁰ A 1987 study listed *Bon Appétit*'s readers as having incomes of \$46,000 + per year, with 70 percent of them employed, and throwing 61 million parties a year.²¹

In 1980 *Bon Appétit* began a three-year survey of its "upscale readers," and published its results in a study called "Tracking the Food Enthusiasts." Out of 3,000 subscribers polled, 2,376 replied. Of those responding, 86 percent said they cooked for fun; only 4 percent thought cooking was a chore. Eighty-four percent said they considered themselves creative cooks, and 95 percent considered cooking a form of self-expression.²²

Advertisers were very eager to appeal to *Bon Appétit*'s upscale readers. They saw the food enthusiast as "a potential customer for a wide variety of products. . . . An interest in good food usually includes a desire to travel to a multitude of gourmet spots around the world. In addition, the food connoisseur often appreciates the best in everything—automobiles, liquor, jewelry, furniture and *objets d'art*."²³ Needless to say, *Bon Appétit* attracted advertisers of many kinds of upscale products. In 1981 *Bon Appétit* earned \$17.25 million from 1,119 pages of advertising.²⁴ A 1987 study listed a four-color advertising page as costing \$28,340.²⁵ The advertising revenues, and the circulation figures exceeding 1,300,000, make *Bon Appétit* an extremely successful magazine.

One of the persons mainly responsible for *Bon Appétit's* success under Knapp was its founding editor Paige Rense. To describe Paige Rense's talent, Bud Knapp said, "It's taste and it's guts and it's a matching of her vision with that of readers. . . . Paige has an ability to work with people in an extraordinarily successful way. I think all good editors have that same quality. It's a degree of integrity that she has that I've supported and tried to enhance. . . . I haven't seen anyone better at getting the best out of a creative group."²⁶

Yet some people criticized *Bon Appétit's* editorial content: "The vast majority of *Bon Appétit* recipes have failed me. . . . I followed *BA's* instructions. . . . Why then, have most of my *Bon Appétit* cooking sprees ended in disaster?"²⁷ Paige Rense has said that her "aim is that anybody should be able to make these recipes."²⁸ Paige Rense also has said, "I think that food is love and I think we should make love, easy."²⁹ One critic disliked *Bon Appétit's* "lack of humor,"³⁰ and called the magazine "too bustling, too socially aggressive, too Yuppie to really have class."³¹ However, that same critic admitted, "But when it comes to recipes, and for many readers it does come down to recipes, *Bon Appétit* seems to me the winner. . . . [Its recipes] seem more appealing than those in *Gourmet*; less exotic, a bit more conventional, perhaps, but more sumptuous, the ones you'd like to eat."³²

Indeed, so many people liked to eat "*bon appétit*," that the magazine branched into several different directions. *Bon Appétit* cookbooks were published by Knapp Press, a book division of Knapp Communications Corporate.³³ *Bon Appétit* merchandise such as cookware, cutlery, paper goods, and dinnerware were developed by Wilshire Marketing Company, a marketing division of Knapp.³⁴ *Bon Appétit* food stores opened as a joint venture between Knapp and Safeway Stores Company, America's largest grocery chain.³⁵ *Bon Appétit* days were held in department stores such as J. W. Robinson Company, and featured the magazine's staff demonstrating equipment and craftsmanship.³⁶ By the mid-1980s *Bon Appétit* indeed had grown into the largest and most successful epicurean magazine of its time.

Notes

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4. Jaye Scholl, "Hot Cuisine: Americans Develop a Taste for Gourmet Foods," *Barron's*, 27 September 1982, p. 34.
5. Dan Zenka, "Cashing in on Creative Cookery," *Marketing Communications*, May 1983, p. 34.
6. Scholl, "Hot Cuisine," p. 34.

7. Mark McHugh, Library Aide, Minneapolis Public Library, in telephone conversations 3-4, November, 1988.
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12. Kleinfeld, "Knapp Publishes," p. D16.
13. Daugherty, "Architecture," p. 51.
14. Charlene Canape, "Five Upscale Magazines Battle for the Epicurean Market," *Advertising Age*, 12 September, 1983, p. M4.
15. Mark Bittman, "Publishers Have Taste for More Than Food," *Advertising Age*, 3 October 1985, p. 54.
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18. *National Directory*, p. 291.
19. Judith Sims, "Cooking by the Book . . . er, Magazine," *Los Angeles*, 1 December 1980, p. 376.
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22. Canape, "Five Upscale Magazines," p. M38.
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25. "Magazine Scene," p. 12.
26. Joanna Powell, "Paige Rense: Editor-in-Chief of *Architectural Digest*, *Bon Appétit*, and *GEO*," *Washington Journalism Review*, 5 May 1983, p. 41.
27. Sims, "Cooking by the Book," p. 376.
28. Kleinfeld, "Knapp Publishes," p. D16.
29. N. R. Kleinfeld, "A Growing Appetite for Food Magazines," *New York Times*, 1 July 1980, p. B10.
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35. "Safeway Says, Bon Appétit!," *Sales and Marketing Management*, 15 March 1982, p. 15.
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LOCATION SOURCES

Library of Congress, New York Public Library, and many other libraries.

Publication History

TITLE AND TITLE CHANGES

Bon Appétit: A Magazine of Good Taste, 1956-1976; *Bon Appétit*, 1976-1980; *Bon Appétit: America's Food and Entertaining Magazine*, 1980-present.

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PUBLISHERS AND PLACES OF PUBLICATION

American Colortype Company, Chicago, Illinois: James A. Shanahan, 1956–1959. Home Publications, Inc., San Francisco, California: James A. Shanahan, 1959–1961; Duncan Scott, 1961–1962. Beverage News, Inc., Wichita, Kansas: Betty Paige, 1962–1964. Billett Publishing Company, Wichita, Kansas: W. C. Carreras, 1964. Financial Publications, Kansas City, Missouri: Henry Bodendiek, 1964–1965; M. Frank Jones, 1965–1970. Bon Appétit Division of Pillsbury Company, Kansas City, Missouri: M. Frank Jones, 1970–1975. Bon Appétit Publishing Corporation (Subsidiary of Knapp Communications Corporation), Los Angeles, California: Cleon T. Knapp, 1975–1978; John L. Decker, 1978–1981; Ernest M. Walker, 1981–1982; Leda Sanford Gordon, 1982–1983; Robert B. Phelps, 1983–1988, George B. Dippy, 1988–present.

EDITORS

James A. Shanahan, 1956–1961; Alan Shearer, 1961–1962; Charles Walters, 1962–1963; Betty Paige, 1963–1964; W. C. Carreras, 1964; Floyd Sageser, 1964–1965; M. Frank Jones, 1965–1976; Paige Rense, 1976–1983; Marilou Vaughan, 1983–1985; William J. Garry, 1985–present.

CIRCULATION

1,300,834.



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