

### Size Matters

There's more to James Hyman and his eponymous archive than just impressive statistics and rare volumes

### PART ONE COVER STORY



# Man Collects Large Number Of Magazines

James Hyman is the Guinness-Record-winning owner of the world's largest collection of magazines. But it's his plan to digitise, meta tag and publicly release his unprecedented cultural archive that will be his legacy

By James Cartwright  
Photography: Jake Green

'Man Collects Large Number Of Magazines' isn't a headline that's grabbing my attention too much. 'Man Amasses World's Largest Collection Of Magazines And Wins Guinness Record' is better, but still not worth the trip out to Woolwich Arsenal in the pissing rain and freezing cold, even when you consider that he's got 80,000 of the things and I really like magazines. Thankfully there's more to James Hyman and his eponymous archive than just impressive statistics and rare volumes, and he makes that clear from the minute we step into his cavernous warehouse.



For one thing, he doesn't suffer from the social ineptitude you'd perhaps expect from an obsessive collector. He's passionate about his magazines, but his enthusiasm extends to all aspects of popular culture and our first ten minutes together are given over to excited discussion of the AR 8000, an analogue scanner that could tap into the earliest models of mobile phone.



"It was fucking amazing the shit you would hear in the 90s," he says. "I heard my best mate cheating on someone, drugs, hookers, I even heard about a murder on it once. Someone got knifed. I didn't know what to do. I was just amazed at what I was hearing."



Then there's the fact that he's not just some loner, hoarding obsessively. He's been assisted for the last five years by Tory Turk, curator, subcultural theorist and chronicler of street style. The pair interact like close siblings, mutually respectful but constantly bickering, affectionate but acutely aware of each other's shortcomings. James asks questions of Tory as though she's his second brain, probing her for answers about magazines that he no longer has the mental capacity for, grasping mid-'rant' for the name of some publication he's seen that ripped off *The Face*. "Tory! If you remember this I'll be really impressed..."



### Rarities

It only takes a few minutes of walking the stacks to realise that James's collection is more sprawling and informative than anything currently available online. For hard and fast facts about cultural history, there's no better place to research

Fundamentally though, that first headline is pretty accurate, James is just a man with a lot of magazines, and he's heavily invested in getting other people to pay attention to them.



"We're fried today, we're just really fried," says Tory as we start to browse the warehouse shelves. "We have these meltdowns after counting thousands of magazines and looking at dates and logging and archiving it all for too long. I've had meltdowns over a pile of *Melody Makers* appearing from nowhere. James had a meltdown when ten *NMEs* went missing."



They're logging it all not just for posterity, but to scan, digitise, meta tag and eventually release to the public online, with articles browsable by keyword, aggregated by theme, images logged according to the subjects and objects within them—the musical genre of the band in that *Rolling Stone* snapshot, the couture wardrobe of that model in a rare edition of *Nova*. 80,000 meticulously documented titles spanning 100 years of magazine history, all at the disposal of anyone willing to part with a small fee.

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In It Together  
Tory Turk: "James had a meltdown  
when ten *NMEs* went missing"



...continued from previous spread

The process is highly complex and painfully slow, with numerous stages of licensing applications, copyright agreements, and a staggering number of man hours. They're confident, though, that the results will be worth the wait, and the finished archive will be a bountiful cultural resource for journalists, academics and researchers alike.



"People are already coming to us for research on a whole host of subjects," says James. "Brands are coming because they want to see stuff, the BBC have come for research into Christmas magazine covers, someone else is doing a PhD on the Krautrock group Tangerine Dream.



"We had one guy looking for an article in *GQ* about a fraudster he wanted to track down who had ripped off his mother. There's all sorts of bizarre requests about the information in our magazines, and it's very hard material to find on the internet."



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It's not just the rare titles like *Girls and Corpses*, *Hot Lava*, *Dirty Found*, *Fortean Times*, *Paranoia*, *European Trash Cinema* and *Ravescene*. There's *The Face*'s cover shoot of Eminem in a pink vest that his management vetoed for making him look too queer, every single one of the hundred individual covers *Loaded* printed to celebrate the millennium, the first documented use of 'mashup' in a 1988 issue of *Soul Underground*, and possibly the first mention of 'hoodies' in a 1920s *Womenswear Daily*. All the commentary and criticism you could possibly need to build a cohesive picture of the past century—plus some weird porno titles that we might be better off consigning to history.

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"Magazines are such a good reflection of the zeitgeist and our culture," says James, "and that's why I want to digitise this stuff—to highlight these relationships across culture and understand what's gone before, how people dressed and behaved and talked. You learn a lot from that.



"There are definite trends and patterns that start to appear, you see fashions emerge and die. That Jean-Paul Goude image that then becomes the *Paper* cover with Kim Kardashian. Or Demi Moore pregnant shot by Annie Leibovitz that then gets mimicked later on. If you think about it, people read these old magazines, get inspired, and then rehash it. It becomes cyclical."



Once digitised, the patterns in the archive will become increasingly clear, and researchers like Tory see huge potential in so accurately chronicling the recent past. Nevertheless, she's reticent to be handing it over to the public so completely, particularly given her own personal investment in the project.

"Before it all goes public, I want to write as many books and do as much work as possible, because we're essentially giving people all this research on a plate. If you put everything in a searchable database you don't have that same process of hunting for information or serendipitous discovery, and it's going to change how academia in this field is researched and published. If it's so easy to write an essay just by putting in your search terms for 'Paul Weller' or 'Mods' then you've got everything in five minutes. So what are the implications of that?"



Long-term, it'll make life easier for people like me, looking for information to support other articles. Even during my brief visit, I find useful tidbits for features I'm working on. But the thrill of being immersed in hundreds of shelves of papers goes out the window when you're simply searching a database. Unless you know to look for a specific article in *Illustrated Spanking Magazine*, *The Spanking of Yesteryear* it's unlikely you'll chance upon it digitally.



Tory's take is less Luddite than mine. "Things change!" she says. "I think it'll bring value back to the objects themselves, and we'll have better writing because people will be better informed."



As for James, he's just happy to keep indulging his lifetime habit, and should the archive fail to find investment, he's already got a backup plan. "These record and tape exchange shops in Notting Hill are my heaven. The guys there are all like John Cusack in *High Fidelity*. They fucking hate everyone. I want to work there, that's my dream. Make some money and then just sit in one of these places. They've already let me have a saves box." **Ends** *hymanarchive.com*