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World

Where all good publications go to heaven

LONDON

Piles of pristine magazines are being preserved in a former cannon foundry

BY DAVID SHAFTEL

When James Hyman was a scriptwriter at MTV Europe in the 1990s, before the rise of the internet, there was a practical — as well as a compulsive — reason he amassed an enormous collection of magazines. "If you're interviewing David Bowie, you don't want to be like, 'O.K., mate, what's your favorite color?'" he said. "You want to go through all the magazines and be able to say, 'Talk about when you did the Nazi salute at Paddington Station in 1976.' You want to be like a lawyer when he preps his case."

Whenever possible, Mr. Hyman tried to keep two copies of each magazine he acquired. One pristine copy was for his nascent magazine collection and another was for general circulation among his colleagues, marked with his name to ensure it found its way back to him. The magazines he used to research features on musicians and bands formed the early core of what became the Hyman Archive, which now contains approximately 160,000 magazines, most of which are not digitally archived or anywhere on the internet.

It was frigid inside the archive during a recent visit — a good 10 degrees colder than the chilly air outside — and members of the staff were bundled up. Space heaters illuminated a nest that Tory Turk (the creative lead), Alexia Marmara (the editorial lead) and Mr. Hyman had made for themselves amid boxes of donations to the collection. It lines more than 3,000 feet of shelving in a former cannon foundry in the 18th-century Royal Arsenal complex in Woolwich, a suburban neighborhood abutting the Thames in southeast London.

The Hyman Archive was confirmed as the largest collection of magazines in 2012 by Guinness World Records; then, it had just 50,953 magazines, 2,312 of them unique titles. Now, a year and a half after Mr. Hyman was interviewed by BBC Radio 4, donations are pouring in, and amid them Mr. Hyman and his staff have carved out space for an armchair and a snack-laden desk. (The rest of the foundry is a storage facility used mostly by media companies to house film archives and the obsolete technology with which they were made.)

At a moment when the old titans like Condé Nast and Time Inc. are contracting, shape-shifting and anxiously hashtagging, herein lies a museum of real magazine making, testament to the old glossy solidity. The price of admission, however, is stiff: visitors can do research with a staffer's aid for 75 pounds per hour, or about $110, with negotiable day rates (and a student discount of 20 percent), or gingerly borrow a magazine for three working days for £50.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN FLEISHMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, James Hyman, founder of the the Hyman Archive, and Alexia Marmara, sort through some of the facility's 160,000 magazines. Among them are titles like Vogue, below.

"I always knew it was a cultural resource and that there was value in it," Mr. Hyman said of the archive. But having the collection verified by Guinness was about validation, he said, "because then people might take it more seriously than just thinking: 'Some lunatic's got a warehouse full of magazines.' "

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Ms. Turk has a knack for repackaging Mr. Hyman's animated monologues into what in the trade are called sound bites. "I maintain that James always had the foresight that this was going to be something else, more than just a sort of collector's dream," she said. "The archive is all about preserving and documenting the history of print."

Each member of the team has a particular familiarity with the archive's contents and has an institutional knowledge of certain titles and their whereabouts. Mr. Hyman is great on music, with a particular fondness for New Musical Express. Ms. Turk is strong on fashion, and Ms. Marmara is especially good at unearthing what Mr. Hyman calls "visual gold" — weird or unsung design elements, photo shoots or ads.

"If we all died tomorrow, it would be over," Ms. Turk said.

No donation is turned down, and Mr. Hyman described the archive as a final resting place for printed matter. "We're heaven for magazines," he said.

The archive, for example, recently accepted a "loan" of around 2,680 British, Italian, French and American fashion magazines dating back to the 1930s from the British writer Colin McDowell, the author of 25 books on fashion. Mr. McDowell said his magazines were becoming "unmanageable in my Soho pied-à-terre and overwhelming in my house in the country."

Mr. McDowell said he saved the magazines because they are "the quickest and most memorable source of information," and that he is "more interested in how clothes are featured in magazines than in their catwalk life," as well as in fashion photography and illustration trends. Mr. Hyman accepted the magazines on the condition that Mr. McDowell can recover them from the archive should he need them and that his collection remain intact.

Jeremy Leslie, the owner of MagCulture, a magazine shop in London that serves as the locus of a boom in independent magazine publishing in England, said that because magazines by their very nature are rushed to press, they reflect the particular quirks of society during short intervals of time.

"In order to understand the value of the Hyman Archive, you have to understand the value of magazines above and beyond their contemporary purpose," he said. "There is a canon of great magazines that is forming, but actually when you look through even magazines that are central to that canon, you see the pages you don't get shown. There are so many subplots to this bigger picture that don't get spotted unless you have the whole thing."

This is especially true of niche magazines or ones that aren't widely thought of as classics, Mr. Leslie said. "When you come to look at something from 10 or 20 or 30 years ago, there are obvious kinds of historical archive-worthy elements, but they are also a great record of design trends, typefaces, photography, writing and technology, so they are fantastic records of time gone."

During a recent visit, Mr. Hyman showed a reporter some of the titles and design elements he considers particularly important, including fake ads from Mad magazine trolling the cigarette industry; Kate Moss's first cover (The Face, July 1990); The Notorious B.I.G.'s first appearance in The Source (March 1992); Rihanna on the cover of the first free issue of New Musical Express (September 2015) and a hacking magazine from 1984 called 2600, which, Mr. Hyman said, "is the frequency you used to use to get free calls if you blow your Cap'n Crunch whistle down the phone line," and lists all of the direct phone extensions in the Reagan White House.

For the archivists, "weird" is the highest praise. They're fascinated by the ads in a copy of Family Circle from 1974, and a cereal-box-shaped Select magazine from January 1997 — dedicated ironically to the year 1996 — occupies pride of place above their desk, despite a Jolly Rancher candy that came with the magazine having melted inside it.

Mr. Hyman isn't a completist, at least not anymore. "I used to be," he said, "but it will never end." Instead, he is seeking funding to finish meta-tagging and digitizing the entire archive for use by academics, curators and researchers. He still tries to get two copies of each magazine, but now it's because one needs to be unbound for faster scanning. An archivist has examined the setup at Cannon House and determined it will be safe for another five years or so before needing to be housed properly, ideally as the permanent collection in a proper museum of magazines.

"The style of exhibition is changing. It's becoming more populist, more based around contemporary culture, so therefore magazines are becoming important objects," Ms. Turk said. "They show the period, they're great objects."

Still, there are titles Mr. Hyman covets. He recently attended a lecture on Japanese magazines, and his mind was somewhat blown by the Tokyo-based Popeye, the nearly unclassifiable "magazine for city boys."

"My jaw just hit the ground. It was ridiculous. I was like, 'I can't wait for the crate to arrive with every issue of Popeye,' " he said. The speaker "had another magazine that was just about businessmen who'd gotten too drunk and went to sleep in the middle of the night in weird places. And he had two different magazines just about pigeons. I was like, 'whoa.' "

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
Today, sunshine and patchy clouds, a colder day, high 34. **Tonight,** clear, cold, low 23. **Tomorrow,** plenty of sunshine, seasonably cold, high 39. Weather map appears on Page B15.

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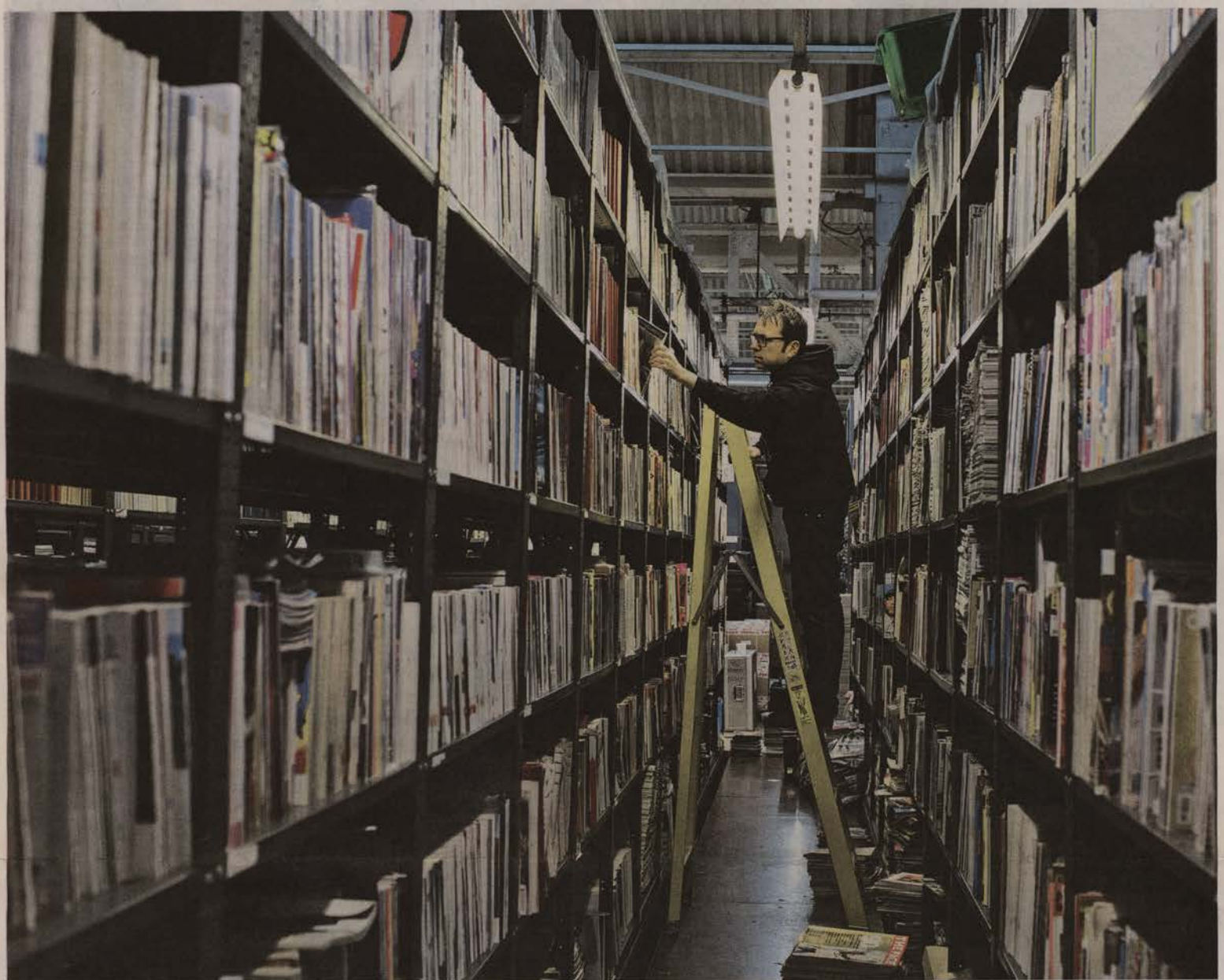

LAUREN FLEISHMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Purgatory for Print

In the internet age, a quirky London magazine archive preserves a stunning trove of the real thing.

By DAVID SHAFTEL

LONDON — When James Hyman was a scriptwriter at MTV Europe, in the 1990s, before the rise of the internet, there was a practical — as well as compulsive — reason he amassed an enormous collection of magazines. "If you're interviewing David Bowie, you don't want to be like, 'O.K., mate, what's your favorite color?'" he said. "You want to go through all the magazines and be able to say, 'Talk about when you did the Nazi salute at Paddington Station in 1976.' You want to be like a lawyer when he preps his case."

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James Hyman, above, founder of the world's largest private magazine collection. He began collecting as a teenager.

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Top row from left: James Hyman holding the first issue of Deluxe, with a cover illustration by the British pop artist Peter Blake; stacks of British Vogue in the archive. Left, Alexia Marmara, the archive's editorial lead, with copies of Zoom.

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Mr. Hyman has kept magazines in various storage spaces since the late '80s, and had many, many magazines at home, in his spare room. But in 2010 his wife was expecting a baby. "I wasn't given any ultimatums," he said, "but it was like, 'You're going to have to sort this out.'" (At that time, Ms. Turk also helped Mr. Hyman pare down his collection of about 40,000 compact discs, like a scene out of the Nick Hornby novel "High Fidelity.")

From 2012 the magazines sat nearly untouched in storage, including at an idle meat factory in Islington, during which time Mr. Hyman said he acquired another 30,000 to 40,000 magazines. Some 90,000 were shelved in alphabetical order at Cannon House in 2015, but the collection is too big to shift when, say, they get a set of 60 rare Playboys or a camper van full of issues of Athletics Weekly from the 1970s, as they recently did. Instead, another area of the archive is dedicated to magazines that have been acquired since the move.

The archive is still peppered with periodicals from the MTV days, marked "James." To illustrate the point, Mr. Hyman, 47, pulled from the shelves a 1995 issue of the defunct FactSheet5 — "The definitive guide to the zine revolution" — with his name scrawled on the cover in black marker. After all these years, Mr. Hyman is still intimately familiar with its contents. "This is a phenomenal publication. It listed zines, just a quirky catalog that reviewed fringe zines. It was sick," he said, before seeking out and indicating a surprisingly positive review of a zine dedicated entirely to its founder's genitals.

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There is also a copy of the British trade magazine Television from 1980, the cover of which features a bikini-clad model holding what appear to be the innards of a television set. "This is an early example of a sexy model selling technology," Ms. Marmara said. "It's just so weird. The one after that they went back to showing just the technology."

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