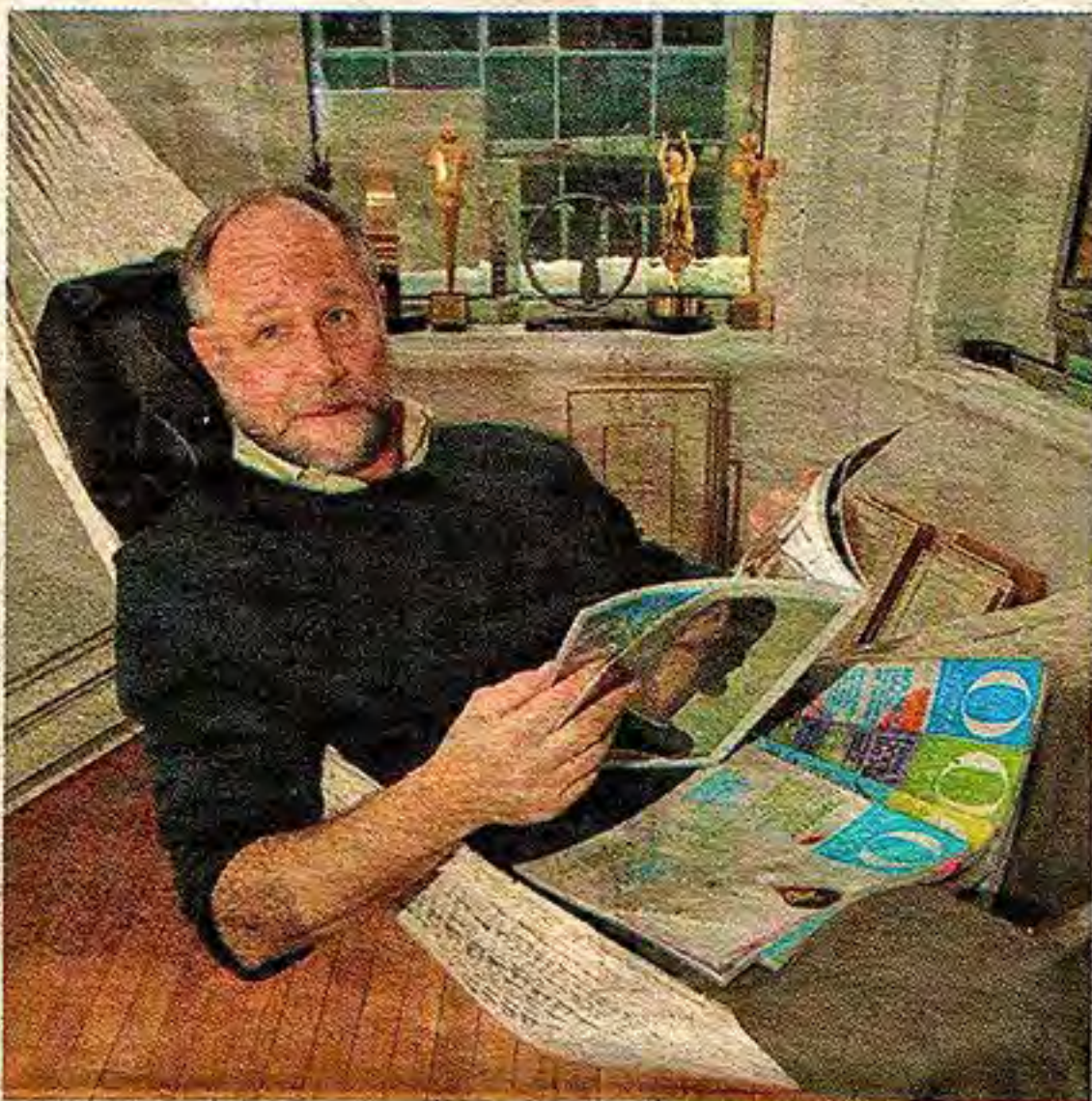


## Good reading

Documentary filmmaker Abbey Neidik peers *Inside the Great Magazines*



MAG MAN: Neidik

by MATTHEW HAYS

Fittingly, Abbey Neidik must interrupt a reading session to grant this interview. He's right in the middle of reading a science magazine: "One of my great interests, along with religion," he explains. "I read a lot of magazines on those topics, as well as general interest ones."

Neidik's interest in magazines has led the filmmaker to co-direct and produce (with his partner Irene Angelico) *Inside the Great Maga-*

*zines*, an exhaustive, three-part documentary miniseries about a vast array of famous magazines. With titles as divergent as *Ebony*, *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, *Ms.*, *National Geographic*, *The New Yorker*, *Life* and *The Advocate*—to name but a few—Neidik had his organizational work cut out for him.

The doc series begins by going back to the beginnings of the print press, and the connection that printing had to do with the advancement both of democracy

and capitalism. But the miniseries, which will air on Global this spring, then delves into the specific individual stories of magazines and their beginnings. The connection between the African-American civil rights struggle and *Ebony* magazine is a highlight, while the feminist movement and the gay liberation movement are also represented by *Ms.* and *The Advocate*, respectively.

"We tried to focus on those magazines that were turning points in terms of social, political or cultural history," says Neidik. There were also general turning points for the magazine industry, like when photography could be readily reproduced in their pages.

Neidik says he also found some of the competing narratives and ideologies of magazines fascinating. While *Cosmopolitan* was touting the philosophies of Helen Gurley Brown's groundbreaking book *Sex and the Single Girl*, *Playboy* was promoting Hugh Hefner's concept of sexual liberation. Gloria Steinem, founder of *Ms.*, denounces them both as anything but feminist: Gurley Brown is given the chance to rebut Steinem's claims: "She's full of S-H-I-T," says the maverick, too polite to actually utter the word.

Neidik says that as their research continued and they began piecing the documentary together, other larger shifts in the nature of magazines became apparent. "Magazines often reflected who people were, or what the world was to them. But with advertising pressures, magazines began to tell you who you should be."

As well, the effects of corporate ownership are also examined. "The strength of magazines are their editors, writers, photographers and researchers. Corporate owners don't always recognize that, and realize there are often simpler ways of grabbing readers' attention, by simply putting a celebrity on their cover." ★