

INTERVIEW

Janine Furness was the launch editor of FX 25 years ago. Here she looks back and remembers...

What was it like in the run up to the launch issue?

Extraordinary. FX was the first magazine published by ETP. The young, and independent small product-card advertising agency working in the design, architectural, and product sectors. Within its short life it was already winning business from the large, established publishing houses.

The founders were ballsy, out-of-the-box thinkers with sharp commercial instinct, hands on magazine advertising experience, knowledge of the industry, and were impressively creative on tight budgets. With characteristic verve and bloody-minded confidence, and against all the economic odds, ETP decided to take on the big publishers by launching a new design and architecture magazine. So, within the context of many industry magazines having folded, a highly competitive target advertising base, and considerable degree of cynicism held by the design/architecture community and suppliers towards their magazines, FX was born.

We had just five months to employ our editorial and design team, create the full design concept, develop working templates, outline all the editorial content, decide on the articles, research news stories, conduct interviews, set up discussion groups, commission and write the features, and send it to the printers. At the same time the advertising team was going out to sell an unknown publication to potential, hard-straped advertisers with a media pack that couldn't cite any figures on readership or measurability of successful campaigns, let alone illustrations of existing editorial.

What is significant to remember is that at its launch the level of technology was a million miles away from what it is today; we were one of the first editorial and art teams to design and produce a magazine on Apple Mac with 40MB of memory (!) using Quark Xpress for the first time. There was no Photoshop, no



unrelenting and explosive combination of excitement, high creativity, perpetual analysis, heated debate, pumping adrenalin, deep stress, and long hours... and, thankfully, enormous mutual great respect, loyalty, and humour within the team.

To develop and evolve a whole new concept and approach in a very short time was only possible thanks to the talent and drive of a brilliant and rather fearless team, and most importantly, a truly shared clarity of vision of what FX had to be. We hit the deadline. Just.

Why did you think there was a market for another design and architecture magazine? And what would make it different?

Given that various design magazines had folded, any investment by potential clients in design required much persuasion, and it was a risky, perhaps bordering on insane, thing to do. But alongside being fuelled by our youthful idealism we fervently believed that so much wasn't being written about the power and full scope of design, and with a voice that was both critical and championing. And with equal importance, an editorial focus that was driven by the end-user rather than only by designers and architects.

At the time there was a range of very good publications for the industry, each with its own niche focusing largely on showcasing new projects. The gap in the market that we saw was 'anti-niche' - why wasn't there a magazine which identified and discussed the impact of design on every element of people's lives, from how they worked, how they shopped, how they played, and significantly - what role design could have in the public sector from hospitals to prisons to schools? Why wasn't there a design magazine devoted to the voices and opinions of end-users, business analysts, trend forecasters and clients? At risk of being a contender for Pseudis Corner, we wanted to write about design >

So, what was it like in the run-up? Given this context - as you can imagine - an

digital photography, no email nor the all pervasive world wide web [few companies then had their own websites]. We were saving features on to floppy discs and having to top discs and copy.

The learning curve was mammoth. Total credit to our amazing art directors in that they learned the brand-new technology, a whole new way of designing, at breakneck speed alongside producing a launch publication. To add to these challenges, as the company was based out of London and my team based in London (at different locations), we had to work 'remotely', again a first at the time. And, to up the level of stress further, our art director had just given birth to her first child (my goddaughter, who helped me write my first leader while dribbling on my lap). While at times a logistical nightmare in this pre-email era, with hundreds of miles going on the clock of my car, it enabled a certain freedom of how, when and where creatives were able to work (and in particular new mothers!). All hardly radical now, but then - it was all completely new.

'Every year, without fail, the FX Awards fall the night before I have a big project presentation. Suffice it to say, the next morning's presentation has always been somewhat of a challenge - the sign of a good time with some great people! Happy Birthday FX!'

Matthew Kobylar
Director of Interiors and
workplace strategy at
Arney Fender Katsalidis



'I've been involved in one way or another with FX since the beginning, and worked with every editor - from the first, Janine Furness, who with her extraordinary passion and energy created the foundations and core philosophy of the magazine, through to current editor Theresa Dowling, who continues that vision of thought-provoking, inquiring and intelligent editorial.

Mark Major
Partner Speirs + Major

'Fond memories of awards... Bill Bailey - every moment of that one. Stephen Fry to an award recipient - 'Sir, you looks as happy as a vicar with a hot buttered choir boy.'



The early days were memorable with two of the all-female team working from home, primarily that of original designer Jane Davies. Few would have guessed that behind the slick, award-winning result (Business Launch of the Year) lay a frequently fretful baby, two accident-prone cats and the repetitive notes of a violin as Jane's husband practised for his next concert. Out of this noise and occasional chaos the creative commitment of all concerned shone through.

In the ephemeral world of publishing, particularly in the age of the internet, to not only survive a quarter of a century but to flourish is a remarkable achievement.'

Jill Entwistle
Editor, author
and contributor



'FX kicked off back in the early Nineties while I was a wide-eyed, however ambitious, student at Design School studying furniture and product design. I clearly remember discovering FX magazine in the university library for the first time and it filled me with dreams of moving to London where the streets are paved with gold and the interiors were dripping with Philippe Starck and Ron Arad furniture. FX has been and continues to be part of my own creative journey in this amazing industry.'

Alasdair Lennox
Executive creative director EMEA FITCH

'Red wine, white wine, beer and port is not the kind of cocktail that you might choose to order but this was my first-ever experience of the FX Awards ceremony as a young lad. Always a great night mixing with people other than architects, but you must leave plenty of time for your stomach and liver to recover.'

John McLean
Director ORMIS
architecture



'The look of FX was fundamental to expressing our point of difference and our focus. It was bold, experimental – such a strong use of typeface weights and sizes was actually radical then...

within its cultural, social and economic context and highlight its tangible impact beyond aesthetics through a series of debates, with many questioning opinions. We wanted to produce a magazine that would stimulate debate and, significantly, provide a vital platform for discussion between the industry and its clients/end-users. Also significant was creating a magazine to examine areas of design that at that time were not being addressed – environmentally friendly design, design for the disabled, the design policies (or lack of them) of political parties.

What specifically made it different in terms of format? Firstly, the overarching breadth of sector coverage – three sections devoted to specific design areas: Retail, Leisure, Public and Work, each with their own business and product sections. This broadened both editorial coverage, and of course, our target advertising base. They provided a framework within which to include regular articles written by an end-user, a manufacturer, a business analyst, a client and, of course, designers and architects.

The look of FX was fundamental to expressing our point of difference and our focus. It was bold, brave, experimental (such a strong use of typeface weights and sizes was actually radical then): our covers never took the traditional approach of showcasing a specific new building or interior but were 'abstract and symbolic', for want of a better description. Our launch issue cover, for example, was a full-page bleed close-up of an eye. The whole design approach mirrored and highlighted the tone of the editorial – questioning, off-beat, and bold. The main headline of that first cover was 'Critical Eye, forging a new design agenda' (hence the image) with the sub headlines 'Verdict' and 'Swindle' running below. Regular features would run with huge bold headlines such as 'Did they get it right?' or 'Discrimination by Design' and 'Are we being served?'

Did you know it would have such an impact on our community? What was the initial feedback?

In my dreams I hoped that we would create a magazine that was wanted and needed by the industry. That we would both serve and engage well with the industry, and that it would respond to our constant invitations to

become involved – to want to be part of the debates and discussions. Initial feedback and interest was good, thank god; the wave of relief all round was palpable. I do remember that we did have one letter of complaint about a page we did on Philippe Starck's orange squeezer with the sub head 'fully squeezed... or taking the pith'. It was a deliberately tongue-in-cheek piece but with an underlying comment of form over function, as not one tester had succeeded in producing anything more than a quarter glass of juice with it or survived the experience without a change of shirt. The tenor of the letter of complaint was 'why include an ironic piece of design only to criticise it, even if it wasn't perfectly functional?'. This validated so much of why we set up the magazine.

What was the contract industry like at the time of FX launching, and what was researching editorial for the first issue like? At the time it was still comparatively embryonic in terms of buy-in from its target audience across many sectors, with the exception of retail. Understanding its tangible impact beyond the cosmetic, its true value in terms of improving people's lives, and the measurable return in investment it could achieve still had such a long way to go. The role of design was not fully integrated into our culture as an essential foundation and driving force to the concept and building of many environments. Research for the first issue? Because of the scope of our remit – four market sectors – and the array of questions we wanted to raise, and the voices within and outside the industry that we wanted to provide a platform for, the challenge was not finding editorial content but what to exclude.

Are you surprised that it's still going strong after 25 years?

I'm just so pleased. Longevity of any magazine within fast-changing markets and audiences is a challenge, and particularly rare in this sector. Alongside this is the economic context of an industry particularly vulnerable to the state of the economy. Plus, of course, the constant changing tides of the publishing industry itself with take-overs, highly different commercial focuses, and in turn different editorial strategies. So it's a great credit to all those involved from the start to now that it has

evolved with the market it serves and continues successfully.

The whole experience gave me so very important lessons – the legacy of which have remained with me throughout my career: Be fearless of creativity, be absolutely clear and communicative of visions and goals, and empower and serve your team.

Describe for us the behind-the-scenes of the first Design Discussion. No one had done this before had they?

The fact that no one had done this before was a driving factor to do it, and at times we did realise why it hadn't been done before!

There was no social media then – no interactive space for shared opinions, so magazines played a far more essential role, and we wanted to raise the stakes on how influential and important they could be. But to provide a platform for discussion between clients, designers, architects and manufacturers and then try to 'reproduce' those animated discussions within the 'static' pages of hard copy was a tall task. Choosing and getting industry leaders to participate wasn't difficult, getting them all to speak passionately also wasn't difficult, but mirroring that energy and editing the discussions was a real challenge. The Q&A format provided both the editorial and design structure to help the text 'come alive', as did a vast amount of editing.

Beyond the scenes? An informal space, me chairing with a list of very tailored questions in the vain hope of keeping the discussions structured and without too much digression, and two microphones recording on to tapes (!) for our amazing sub editor Nicky Trevett to transcribe, dissect and edit down into 'seamless' text. Thankfully, it worked – our great participants loved their subject, and were knowledgeable and vocal.

How did FX find you for the launch effort?

I had a call from their headhunter. Up until a few months before the call I was the deputy editor of Interior Design magazine and previously a news journalist and an arts assistant on the Independent, so I presume they thought I had relevant experience. At the time I had just been asked to join Associated Newspapers as the design editor of Metropolitan Home. So I found myself

'The thing that stands out about 25 years of FX is that it is so much more than an interiors magazine – it is a design magazine. It manages to encompass many different aspects of the design world, and as such it communicates what so many of us feel: that we are all designers first and foremost, whether that is a door handle or an apartment interior or facade to a 75-storey tower, it is all the same thing. FX has managed to inspire a generation of designers over the past 25 years; long may it continue.'

Henry Squire
Partner, Squire and Partners



'FX has been a part of my life ever since I graduated! For me, the awards nights will always be a highlight of the design calendar.'

Gurvinder Khurana
Director and co-founder, Align



'FX is a fantastic showcase of all that's great in our industry, thanks to their incredible editorial team.'

Keesa Lambert
Marketing Director
UK and Eire Interface

Sean Weston
Project director, Astudio

'Congratulations to Theresa and the team at FX on 25 fantastic years. At Astudio we've been reading FX magazine for a long time and enjoy the news on international projects and products and the carefully considered and comprehensive contributions and opinion pieces communicating the thoughts and theories driving contemporary design. In sharing these new developments with readers around the world, FX drives innovation and nurtures discussion and debate within the design industry. We look forward to the next 25 years!'

'Every debate I've enjoyed with Theresa involves wine. The more wine, the greater the debate, on a self-perpetuating basis. #FUN #GAMECHANGERS.'

Levi Penson
CEO, Penson Group



'Looking back at the content now, the questions that FX posed and the areas it examined remain resonant and important'

debating between accepting a post for a well-established publishing house on a major magazine with a track record, or taking up my first editorship for a relatively unknown company which had never published a magazine and wanted to launch one in a highly competitive marketplace within six months. My answer is implicit, and never regretted.

Looking back at the first issue, how does the content seem to you now? With hindsight would you have done anything differently? Looking back at the first issue my first reaction is one of pure disbelief. How on earth did we do it? The tight deadlines, the new technology then, the lack of today's technology, the different locations, the small teams, the competition, and I still can't answer the question! I still feel immense pride in the whole team – their nerve, commitment and talent. Others may disagree, but looking back at the content now, the questions that I posed and areas that I examined remain resonant and important.

As an editor you always look at each and every issue with a high degree of self-flagellation. With each page turn, questions flood into your head – are those the best cover lines? Is the pace right? Does the balance of editorial work? Could that feature have been more or less expensive? Was that really the best headline? Looking back at the first few issues of FX there are things I may have done differently of course – perhaps the pagination, the allocation of content, but given the life-cycling time that it took up the utter dedication of one and all, the sheer scope of editorial focus and contents, I don't think we could have done much more, and I certainly could not have asked for more from my team.

What's your best memory from FX, not just the first issue but throughout your tenure? And your worst? Without a doubt the best memory, which remains vivid, was being nominated for the Press Awards (based on just our first two issues) for Best Magazine Launch of the Year. To hear presenter John Brown of John Brown Publishing at the awards ceremony announcing "The winner of this year's Best Magazine Launch of the Year is... FX" and to witness the eruption of sheer joy of the whole team was such a wondrous moment of pure pride. It was so validating. It proved that we'd identified a gap in the market for which we'd created a new concept, a new editorial and

design approach, and which had proved to be right and viable. And yes, this was a 'David and Goliath' story of a new, small company succeeding against the big guys. A creatively impassioned and brave team that had given its all was recognised.

We went on to win other awards over the next couple of years for Best Magazine Design of the Year (to the total credit of our unrelentingly creative art director Jane Davies) and for Best Editorial Team of the Year, which was again so validating of the talent, total commitment and creativity of a team I had the privilege to lead (when they let me). In fact, the legacy of truly understanding that the best teams are ones that are totally a sum of all their parts – with each member having ownership and co-driving a very clear vision – remains vivid in me throughout my career.

Best continual memories? The amazing and dedicated people we interviewed, visiting an array of stunning and considered projects that positively changed people's lives, introducing a range of new writers, photographers and illustrators, watching the team develop, and hoping that on some level we made a difference.

The worse moment? Waiting on my own in the office for a late delivery from the printers of the first issue, dreading seeing any mistakes from typos to wrong credits, poor reproduction, misplaced images et cetera and then taking it round to the local pub where a very nervous team was waiting for me to hand it to them.

How big was the editorial and sales team 25 years ago?

Big they were not. Initially, the editorial and art team included art directors Jane Davies and Jim McClure, chief cub editor Nicky Trevelin, product researcher Nicky Churchill, and myself. The original sales team comprised six, which included the two highly driven founders Lee Newton and Terry Moutter.

What does FX stand for? And here's the leading question – what do you think of FX now? It was chosen before I came on board – it's an 'abbreviation' of 'special effects'. Typographically it was strong, and as it became a 'brand' we didn't question what it stood for, it just was FX.

For it will be here today, serving an industry and market that has gone through so many changes – culturally, globally, and technologically – says it all.

Well done and many congratulations for your 25th anniversary.

You went on to launch and edit a range of magazines and books, set up your own publishing consultancy, then entered the art world as a director at Sotheby's, following which you've moved into the charity sector, and co-founded a new social enterprise venture promoting literacy and reading to schoolchildren, alongside investing in new set-ups – do you think your experience of launching FX as a young editor influenced your future career? Yes, without a doubt. As your readers will know, setting up a project from concept to completion provides such a host of invaluable and vastly varied experience. It's a true test of linear and lateral thinking, and of creative and commercial insight. You have to examine the role of every element of the project, from the ideas, the execution, the project management, the budgets, to the team.

Central to FX's success was the clarity of vision we had for it. We knew what FX should be – how it should look, how it should read, what it should cover, and always remembered who it was for. Its identity and role was very clear. As I've learned since, no project or team can be successful without that clarity or audience focus. **FX**

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JANINE FURNESS BIOGRAPHY

Associate arts reporter, The Independent
Deputy editor, Interior Design Magazine
Launch Editor, FX
Managing editor, Harvey Nichols Magazine
Managing & editorial director, Furness & Associates Publishing Consultants
Launch editor, Party Magazine
Editor, Food & Travel Magazine
Head of business proposals, director, Sotheby's
Head of new business development, director Europe, Sotheby's
Creative consultant, Open Age
Marketing consultant, MuseQuality
Current
Co-founder and mentor of social enterprise charity Book Clubs in Schools
Consultant and Investor, Hole & Corner Magazine
Art board member, Prince's Trust

'A child of its Nineties, FX has all the charisma that made the decade famous, especially its colourful and disruptive thinking. It has gone from strength to strength, and in my 15 years of interior fit-out it's been a reliable source for inspiration – and, of course, a sensational, annual, post-awards headache. If it wasn't for Theresa [Dowling, current editor] I don't believe the magazine's reach would be what it is today; her infectious enthusiasm is certainly evident throughout its pages. Happy birthday FX! Here's to the next 25 years!'

Colin Allan
Managing director, Morgan Lovell

'My memory of FX goes back to the very start. FX was a very different publication from its competitors in our industry at that time, when trade magazines were very dull.

Over the years I have worked closely with all the editors from the founding editor, Janine Furness, to Aidan Walker, Gareth Gardner, Antonia Ward, Garry Mason, and current – and the longest serving editor of all time – the formidable Theresa Dowling.

It has been a great delight to attend the numerous FX Design Forums, held on all types of topics, which have been brought about and chaired by Theresa with such enthusiasm. Anyone who has been near Theresa, prior to the FX awards, knows the anguish she puts herself through to reach the right results.'

Cherril Scheer
Director CSA
Associates



James Burke
Creative director,
Arclizcye

'I was a bright-eyed student when FX launched in the midst of a recession with a nasty bite. Having a new design magazine land on my lap felt like light at the end of a very long tunnel.

FX has always been an excellent magazine for exploring so many aspects of the design world. Being a collaborative design studio, my staff appreciate its broad range of articles – always written with much opinion, which I like.

Don't ask me about the last awards we attended. My colleague tells me there was plenty of drunken dancing. I was clearly having too much of a good time to remember!

Although we've featured in the magazine many times, a recent highlight was our Walthamstow Stadium project making the front cover.

Theresa Dowling is the face and soul of FX magazine. You know a night out with Theresa will be good fun.'



'FX is always a source of reference and delight! It keeps us all up to speed with what's going on and who's doing what (and which projects we wished we had done). One of the great feelings that we had was walking up to receive our Breakthrough Talent award at the FX Awards: it felt amazing. That will always be a great moment for us. And as for comments on the editor, Theresa is always pushing for mad ideas – I love it!'

Tim Bowler-Ridger
Senior Partner | CEO,
Conran+Partners



Congratulations Theresa and team, FXKNLENT.

Alex McCusig
CEO MET Studio