



Left a 1968 portrait by Harry Peccinotti. Opposite *Nova* covers from August 1972 and April 1968, and a spread from January 1974



No one could accuse Harri Peccinotti of inflating his own legend. The London-born art director and photographer, who was idolised for his pioneering work on *Nova* magazine when it launched in 1965, says of his capabilities, 'I'm all right at a lot of things.' Now 73, he regards his body of work with a measured contentment. Its highlights – including numerous magazine spreads, images from his two Pirelli calendars, and Penguin book covers – have been gathered in a vibrant volume, *HP*. 'I'm not unhappy with most of it,' he remarks by telephone from his home in Paris, a relaxed smile in his voice.

Peccinotti was one of a number of art directors at advertising agencies such as Crawford's and J Walter Thompson in the early 1960s – London's *Mad Men*, if you will – drawn to the publishing world as the decade began to gain momentum. 'Magazines – like *Show* in America and *Twen* in Germany – were becoming much more graphic and doing better pictures than advertising,' he says. 'For anyone enthusiastic about design and art direction, the obvious thing was to move.' Crawford's Tom

### Peccinotti produced an abstract photo of a woman's crotch: 'I sold it as an underarm'

Wolsey went to the men's title *Town* (owned by Michael Heseltine), Peccinotti, then in his late twenties, to *Flair*, a women's magazine – 'Though I was fired after a huge row with the editor. They used to change things while I was out at lunch.'

He moved to another title, but not long afterwards, in 1965, the same publisher, George Newnes (which became IPC), re-hired him to what would become his defining position – the first art director of *Nova*. The publication was 'a total experiment, to see if there was a market for an intelligent women's magazine', and its team were granted a level of freedom unthinkable by today's standards.

Using the suitably impactful typeface that he had rediscovered among an old stock of wooden printers' blocks owned by his friend the illustrator Ralph Steadman, Peccinotti's designs packed a punch that

## Shock of the new

The art director and photographer Harry Peccinotti was a principal visionary behind the pioneering, sexually liberated magazine *Nova*. A new compilation of his work shows just how ahead of his time he was. By Naomi West



matched editorial content and headlines such as *ULSTER: WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?* and *WHAT A HINT OF MASCARA COULD DO FOR HAROLD WILSON*.

'The articles were easy to illustrate, because they were good enough to interest you,' Peccinotti says. 'The words were always more important than the pictures.' *Nova* published features and fiction by prominent writers such as Norman Mailer that could run to 5,000 words. One of Peccinotti's most memorable covers, from 1966, featured the figure of a little black girl in her Sunday best, dwarfed by vast white space. Below her feet the text read: *YOU MAY THINK I LOOK CUTE BUT WOULD YOU LIVE NEXT DOOR TO MY MUMMY AND DADDY? A later cover (April 1972) shot by Peccinotti was a close-up of the face of a Japanese woman with a rising sun scarf covering her nose and mouth, the line JAPAN: SCHIZOPHRENIC SUPERSTATE between her eyes.*

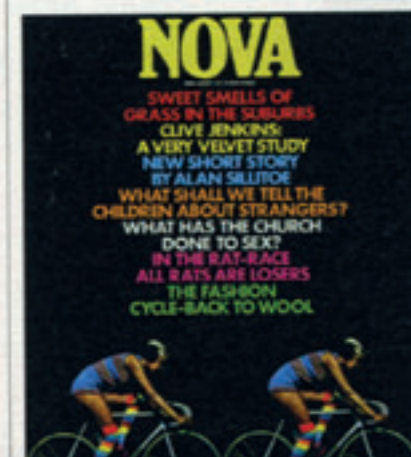
Peccinotti's most important and electric relationship while he was art director was with the editor Dennis Hackett, who replaced the launch editor, Harry Fieldhouse, in September 1965. 'We had fierce arguments,' Peccinotti recalls. 'But Hackett was very good. If you stuck by your ideas, he would say, "If it means that much to you - do it."' Out of this tension they created covers and stories that crackled with wit, sex and politics. Although



Peccinotti describes much of his published work as 'pretty tame', his eye for a potent detail imbued his images with a sexiness that still emanates. For a feature on body hair Peccinotti produced an abstract photo of a woman's crotch. 'I sold it to Hackett by saying it was an underarm. I think he wanted to believe me, just so we could put the picture in.'

With no pressure to please advertisers, or even to cover anything in particular, Peccinotti had a free hand to explore his graphic ideas, especially with the 12 colour pages appearing in a block each issue. He played deftly with double exposures, scale and repetition. The fashions featured were often street clothes, and he frequently cast black models, to the point that his colleagues thought he was obsessed. 'Which may have been true,' he says. The continuing under-representation of non-white models in fashion shows, editorial and advertising four decades on seems inconceivable when you look at Peccinotti's spreads.

His time as art director was relatively brief but even after he stepped down towards the end of 1966 so he could work for other publications, he continued to have a formative influence on the magazine, working with the subsequent art director, David Hillman, on scores of photo shoots. One fashion story featuring models on bicycles clad in the brightest, tightest knitwear came about, 'because



**The intention had been to feature raincoats, but 'we ended up just making the clothes all wet'**

Top a fashion shoot for *Nova* by Peccinotti from April 1971.



Top left 19 magazine, November 1971. Top right a 1982 Peccinotti shot. Left and right a *Nova* fashion shoot from March 1971, an example of Peccinotti's pioneering use of black models.



calendars. **Right** a shoot from 1973. **Below** a spread from *Boulevard* magazine, 1978

CALIFORNIA  
**PIR 1969**

**Peccinotti describes much of his published work as 'pretty tame'**

'I was a cyclist, David Hillman was a cyclist... everybody liked cycling'. A shoot for the April 1971 issue was planned to feature raincoats but 'we ended up just making the clothes all wet'. Peccinotti went on to contribute to a diverse range of publications as photographer and art director - *Elle*, *19*, *Adam*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* - as well as numerous books.

Looking through the new book, it is remarkable quite how many of Peccinotti's images and layouts still feel modern. Perhaps this is partly because countless art directors continue to emulate his work 'even now, at this late date'. Notably he observes, 'I'm still roughly doing the same sort of thing - a bit of everything,' referring to his mixture of fashion shoots, portraits, graphic photography and still lifes. While he recognises that the short, special era in publishing - before advertisers controlled magazines - that saw *Nova* briefly flourish (it closed in 1975) has long since passed, he is 'still enthusiastic. I want to carry on for as long as possible.'

'HP' by Harri Peccinotti is published by Damiani, £34.99



Modeling: T. and P. in  
available at London, Paris  
and New York. Contact: A. and  
the agency, Paris.

How do you know you're  
in love?

1. You know you're in love when you can't stop thinking about the person you love.
2. You know you're in love when you're always smiling.
3. You know you're in love when you're always laughing.
4. You know you're in love when you're always crying.
5. You know you're in love when you're always kissing.
6. You know you're in love when you're always hugging.
7. You know you're in love when you're always holding hands.
8. You know you're in love when you're always looking into each other's eyes.
9. You know you're in love when you're always talking.
10. You know you're in love when you're always listening.