

DESIGNING the REDESIGN

Approaching the Reinvention of **Chronogram** Magazine
by David Clark Perry and Brian K. Mahoney

Chronogram was launched in 1993 with a simple premise: Provide readers with a guide to cultural events in New York's Hudson Valley.

In the 24 years since, *Chronogram* has evolved from a flimsy zine launched by a couple of 20-somethings into Luminary Media, a multimedia company with four in-house titles and custom publishing, event, and marketing agency divisions. Our work now includes social media management, marketing communications, and business consulting — specialties we never could have foreseen ourselves offering a decade ago. But what's fueled this growth is the brand equity of *Chronogram*. The publication's authentic voice and role as trusted curator of the Hudson Valley lifestyle extends like a halo over all of our projects with readers and clients.

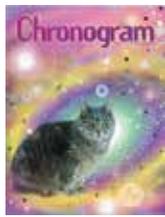
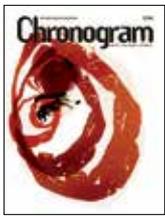


As we started considering redesigning our flagship publication, we were faced with a daunting question:

How do we freshen the design of *Chronogram* — creating a more readable, relevant, and useful reader experience in print — without losing our idiosyncratic voice and unorthodox design, the key attributes that have defined us?

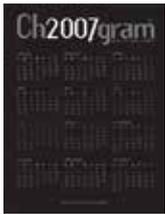
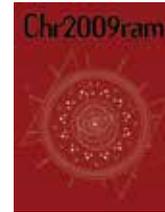
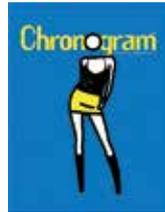
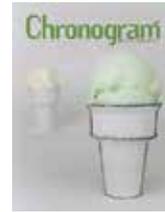
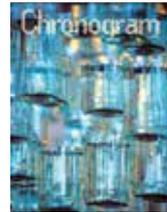
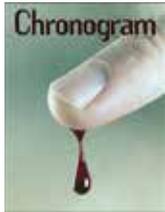
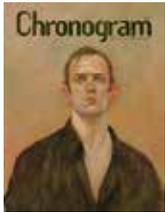
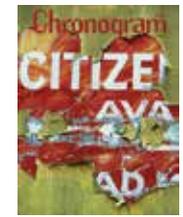
Above: A street performer at the *Chronogram* Block Party.
Left: The Rosendale Improvement Society Brass Band leading the parade at the *Chronogram* Block Party.
Opposite: *Chronogram* has featured the work of hundreds of local artists on its covers.

Photos by Tamme Stitt



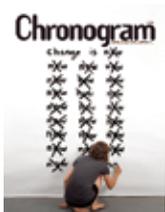
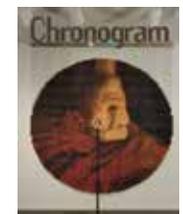
“Chronogram somehow hit the right note of aesthetic, cultural sophistication and practical usefulness.”

— Stephen Larsen,
Joseph Campbell biographer



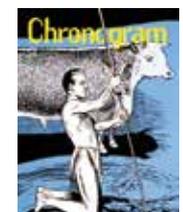
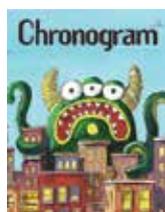
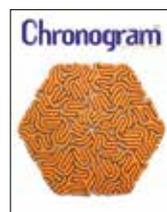
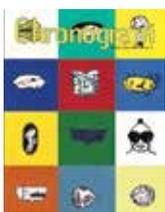
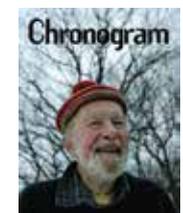
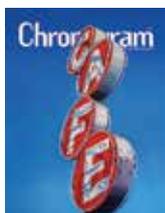
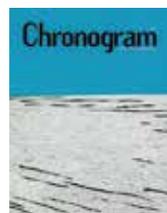
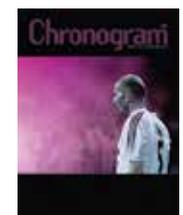
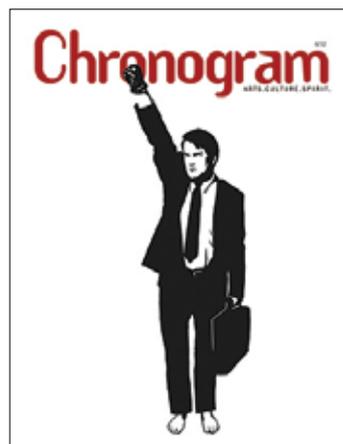
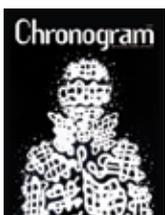
“Chronogram has helped us to forge a regional identity.”

— Natalie Merchant,
local resident and musician



“An extraordinary mix of what is new and upcoming in music, art, poetry, politics, and the environment.”

— Stuart Bigley, Unison Arts Center



The *Chronogram* Block Party is an annual event celebrating the art and culture of the Hudson Valley and the magazine's community of readers. The day features musical and spoken word performances, art installations, food trucks, DIY art tent, and street performers. Held in front of Luminary Media's offices in Kingston, New York, more than 5,000 people attend each year.





Chronogram has evolved through many small iterations. The first issue, in October/November 1993, was a Mad Libs-style flip book on newsprint. It was 72 pages, plus covers, and a compact 8 inches by 5 inches. (A size, one reader noted, that fits equally well in your back pocket or on the back of your toilet.) A year later, it morphed into a medium-sized book with a glossy cover, and then in 1999, into an oversized 10-inch by 13-inch full-color glossy. Since converting to this small tabloid format, we've made dozens of adjustments, changing a department layout here, a headline style there — constantly reevaluating and tinkering with the details.



Left to right: The first issue of *Chronogram*, from October/November '93, was printed in a flip-book format and contained mostly event listings. The second iteration of the magazine was still small enough to fit in the back pocket of readers — or on the back of their toilets! In 1999, our new oversized format allowed room for dynamic layouts and photo spreads.

So why mess with a good thing?

We love what *Chronogram* has become: a storyteller about a particularly robust and evolving region full of artists, entrepreneurs, thinkers, and doers. And our reader surveys consistently indicate that the magazine's design and editorial are well-aligned with our readers and a kind of calling card for the region. A typical reader comment we get: "I was hesitant about moving out of Manhattan, but when I saw a copy of *Chronogram*, I knew I could live here."

We might have sat back and just read and reread our fan mail, but we got the itch to mess with a good thing. For the last year, we've been talking in earnest about a redesign — and not just tinkering. We've been envisioning and incubating a wholesale, start-from-scratch, throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater redesign. And this is the single question that has driven us: "How do we tell more stories, more engagingly?"

In the early stages of our process, all options were open. Would we create a new logo? Change the column grid? Throw out long-running departments? Eliminate the calendar listings, the foundation of the magazine for 24 years? Ideas we would never have considered even a few years ago now seemed plausible, even exciting. Here are several of the changes we landed on and implemented that have significantly impacted our magazine's look and feel.

