DESIGN PHILOSOPHY
of the Mercury News

Effective newspaper design must be familiar to the regular reader, inviting to the occasional reader and useful to all.

Design is an element of the editing process. The essence of news judgment is deciding what readers want to know and ought to know. Effective newspaper design underscores that judgment. Many elements are designed to capture the attention of readers, but these devices must be selected and used not just to decorate but to communicate.

The purpose of creating a cohesive design is to give some structure to the chaos of the day's news.

A well-designed newspaper must be organized in an understandable way, with standing features anchored at all times.

Design is discipline. To provide contrast and variety, discipline is essential. Without it, readers can't distinguish what's more important from what is merely important.

An outstanding design is not enough to make a great newspaper. But no newspaper can be consistently outstanding without a thoughtful, consistent and disciplined design.

A front page from the developmental stages of the Mercury News redesign.

KEY PRINCIPLES

of the Mercury News

These are the key principles of
the Mercury News' design:
- modular makeup
- contrast
- balance
- precision

Modular makeup

The concept of modular design is
fundamental to the design of the
Mercury News. The modular
approach helps organize the page
for the reader and ensures sim-
plicity.

Stories or packages should be
"squared off," or designed in
rectangles. Dogleg wraps of type
around unrelated stories or pho-
tos should be avoided. Heads
should not be placed over unre-
lated photos or stories. Legs of
type within stories should be the
same length, unless the story is
wrapping around a picture or
graphic packaged with the story.
No story should have legs of type
with more than two different
lengths on one page.

This modular approach is taken
on all pages. On inside pages with
ads, try to square stories with ads
if that can be done without evis-
cerating stories or warping play.

**Stories and
other page
elements
should be
squared off.**

The Page Two news summary from the
first prototype of the redesign of the
Mercury News.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Contrast between elements

Contrast

Contrast is needed to differentiate the importance of elements on a page. The simplest way to provide contrast is by varying the sizes of photos, headlines and stories.

Elements can contrast in size, shape, color, weight and texture.

Contrasting sizes are necessary to provide variety and to tell the reader what is most important. For this reason, every news page should have one story that is clearly the most important, evident by its placement on the page and the relative weight of headlines on that page. While the progression of headline sizes can be subtle, running a number of heads of the same size on the same page should be avoided.

Varying the size of headlines, photos and other display elements is one way to create contrast on a page.

Just as headlines of similar size compete with each other for a reader's attention, so do photos. The use of a dominant photo, illustration or graphic on display pages is an essential element of the Mercury News' design. A dominant image should be noticeably larger than secondary images.

Contrast in shapes is also important. Avoid the monotonous look that can result from piling horizontal blocks of type of approximately the same size and shape on top of each other. Use vertical elements to balance the design so it isn't overwhelmingly horizontal.

Examples of a few section front flags.

KEY PRINCIPLES
Balance and Precision

Balance
One key element of a well-designed page is balance. When several photos run on one page and are all placed on one side or the other, or all at the top or bottom, or when too many small headlines are crammed together, the imbalance can be distracting. Care must be taken to avoid crowding a number of small stories in one portion of the page while the rest of the page is devoted to the display of only one or two stories.

Precision
Precision in design and in page makeup is critical to a clean look. Every element on a well-designed page must be straight and aligned with its companion elements on the grid. Vertical gutters between legs of type and horizontal spacing must be consistent and exact everywhere on a page, and throughout the paper. Attention to detail is essential. (See **Spacing Guidelines**, page 3–4)

It is the responsibility of the page editor to make sure spacing guidelines are followed. No cheating!

Examples of a few inside open page flags.