

COMMUNICATION ARTS

MAY/JUNE 1993 ■ SEVEN DOLLARS





Margo Chase

BY JULIE PRENDIVILLE

SERPENTS, WEREWOLVES, INKY PLASMA, murky swamps and twisted, ancient wrought iron—these are the elements of a Margo Chase design. So much so, one expects to meet a card-carrying member of a coven when calling on her.

Instead you find a warm, pleasant, bright individual who's always ready to laugh. Then again, she's also ready to insert a scowling skull and crossbones in a layout, if need be.

A fan of Edgar Allan Poe, baroque architecture and medieval painting, Chase, 34, has carved herself a niche by servicing clients who appreciate her "darker" side. "I know one of the reasons I'm in this field is because I get a lot of satisfaction out of being able to create unusual imagery," says Chase.

Since 1986, Margo Chase Design, based in Los Angeles, has turned out beautifully intricate, layered, often mythological images in the form of logos, identity programs, editorial, print ads and music packaging. From a sprawling, two-story wooden house in the Silverlake district, Margo, designer Nancy Ogami and studio manager Robert Shore service clients such as Warner Records, Geffen Records, Atlantic Records, Radio Vision, Virgin Records and Harmony Pictures.

Although her work has won wide recognition and numerous awards, including a 1992 Grammy for the special CD package for Paula Abdul's "Spellbound," Chase wasn't even aware of graphic design until she was in college at California Polytechnic State University (San Luis Obispo). In fact, growing up, she always thought she would be a veterinarian. She leaned toward the sciences, although as her mother, Nancy Chase, recalls, "She always drew. Her artistic self was always being explored. Margo played the violin, did Indian beadwork, she sewed—always in minute detail. She wanted to be arty and colorful but the call to her intellectual side was very strong."



Merlyn Rosenberg

Chase served as a veterinary assistant in high school and college during breaks and through summers. "I also worked in a veterinary emergency center and it was great," she says. "But I was impressed by the students in the graphic design department. They dressed weird and they had very cool hair. I had grown up in Santa Barbara where everyone looks normal. Suddenly here were these kids from L.A. who knew everything. I thought, well I

Above: Nancy Ogami, Margo Chase and Robert Shore.

Caption information provided by Margo Chase who, unless otherwise noted, art directed all projects.

Right: The Voices logo was designed for a "garage-style" rock and roll band from San Diego whose members all surfed. "Their direction to me was to design something that would look good on their surfboards." MCA Records, client. Rapidograph pens on drafting film.

The X-pensive Winos logo originally appeared on a wine label designed as a special promotion for Keith's tour. The logo was hand drawn from old engraving references to give it a tattoo appearance. "When Virgin decided to release a live album and video as a limited edition, we used the same logo printed in copper metallic ink over a four-color background created in Photoshop from a black-and-white photo of grapes." Melanie Nissen, Virgin Records, art director; Virgin Records, client.

Logo for Madonna's "Like A Prayer" CD. "The verbal direction from Jeri Heiden at Warner Brothers was to design a logo that looked like East Indian jewelry or a '60s incense package. (Patchouli oil was mixed with the printing ink to give the whole package the smell of incense.)"

"The tarot theme evolved out of several conversations with Cher about 'Love Hurts.' She was unable to do a photo session, so I was forced to use existing Herb Ritts photos of her from a previous release. In order to create the Good Queen/Bad Queen image, Merlyn Rosenberg photographed a body model in two poses. All the image manipulation and assembly was done in Photoshop. Geffen Records liked the final cover enough to do a special edition foil-stamped wooden box containing a set of twelve Tarot cards and the CD. Each card has a Photoshop illustration on the front and song lyrics on the back." Margo Chase, art director/illustrator/collage; Margo Chase/Nancy Ogami, designers.



David Provost

can become a vet, dress in jeans the rest of my life and spend a lot of time with my hands in strange places, or I can do something really cool."

That was around 1982. She left graduate school at the University of California at San Francisco, after completing one year of the medical illustration masters program, and moved to Los Angeles to work as a free-lance designer. One of her first projects was for Rosebud Books. "It was a book design project, and I didn't know the first thing about it," she recalls. "I bought books on typesetting, book design and layout. I'd try to figure out why a certain type treatment looked the way it did. It was a process of experimentation and I made a lot of mistakes, but it was one of those situations where I was fortunate to be working for somebody who didn't mind or didn't notice."

Although she chose to become an artist, her scientific side is always present—starting with a fixation for detail. Photographer Merlyn Rosenberg, who has shot many projects with Margo, remembers the painstaking work Chase did for a Geffen Records project. "She was designing a cover for 'I, Napoleon.' She could have illustrated it, easily, then shot it. But she actually got the stone and carved the logo into it. I went over to her studio every night for a long time and I would say, 'Are you charging for that?' She wouldn't even have thought of that."

When Radio Vision, a television production and distribution company, wanted to change the look of their logo, they hired Chase. Chairman Kevin Wall says, "We needed a logo that would work with everything from press kits to consumer and trade merchandising items. Plus, since we're on TV with specials like Michael Jackson for HBO, we needed to have something that would animate. Margo thought the whole thing through. Her logo and work were applicable in all areas. And, she was able to bring us what we were looking for fairly quickly."

When asked to speak at colleges and seminars, she brings a slide show called "Germs," where she shows inspiration and final product. "People always ask me how I get my ideas," Chase explains. "So I thought I should show some sources. For example, when we were in Paris, outside my hotel there was a wrought iron fence that had Art Nouveau curves. I thought I might be able to use them for something so I took a picture of the fence." Those same curves appear in a logo for Jody Watley.

Margo's project research includes going to her own vast library of books, new and old, housed in floor-to-ceiling bookcases on both floors of her studio. "If I'm stuck and I can't come up with an idea," she says, "I'll combine two weird things together. It ends up stirring the pot. You add something new and see if a chemical reaction happens."

Having done her research, Margo and staff designer Nancy Ogami, who began working at Margo Chase Design right out of school three years ago, spend time discussing possible solutions. "It's crucial to have somebody to discuss ideas with. Nancy and I can bounce ideas off of each other because we each have our own style and point-of-view. Nancy can look at something I give her and say, 'I don't like that.' Or, 'Yeah, I like that, but what if we do this?'"

Marcia Mosko, sales representative at Westland Graphics in Los Angeles, works with Margo on many projects. "Margo didn't have the traditional design background that puts boundaries on your work," Mosko says. "Having been a designer myself, I can see that she has an idea in mind, but often the things she comes up with, can't be visualized."

Let's say she's printing a four-color process on top of a solid metallic. There's no way to know what that's going to look like until it's on press. Margo will stand there just looking at it, and I can tell she's merging the end product with what she visualized. She takes her creative process right into the pressroom. That's what happened with her stationery. Who knew what that would look like?"

Created out of make-readies, Chase's stationery is a layering of muted, metallic images, collected mostly from her own projects. (See CA-90 Design Annual) "A make-ready might run through the press four or five times to get the ink levels up," Mosko explains, "and the same make-readies might be used for Warner Brothers, First Interstate and the Getty Museum. Many times, a designer will want the papers to hang on their wall, or to use as wrapping paper. But Margo wanted it as stationery. So she selected a paper and we basically did made-to-order make-ready. Most of the images were from jobs she printed, but one image was a medical insurance form."

A constant in Margo's designs is custom-designed type, and in 1990, she and Nancy began working with computers. To help her design her workstations, Chase conferred with a number of consultants. She finally settled on James Bradley, a value added reseller who specializes in design workstations. He started Margo with Adobe Illustrator, training her on her system once a week until she learned it. "She could do logos and custom lettering, and then we went to Quark," Bradley recalls. "It's great not to have to re-ink a logo if you don't have to."

Nancy remembers when the studio went computerized. "Margo got fast on the computer really quickly. She worked on it for hours and hours and hours. Now we do these huge jobs straight to film. Things move through the studio fast." Just like they move through Margo's brain.





Nels Israelson



Merlyn Rosenberg



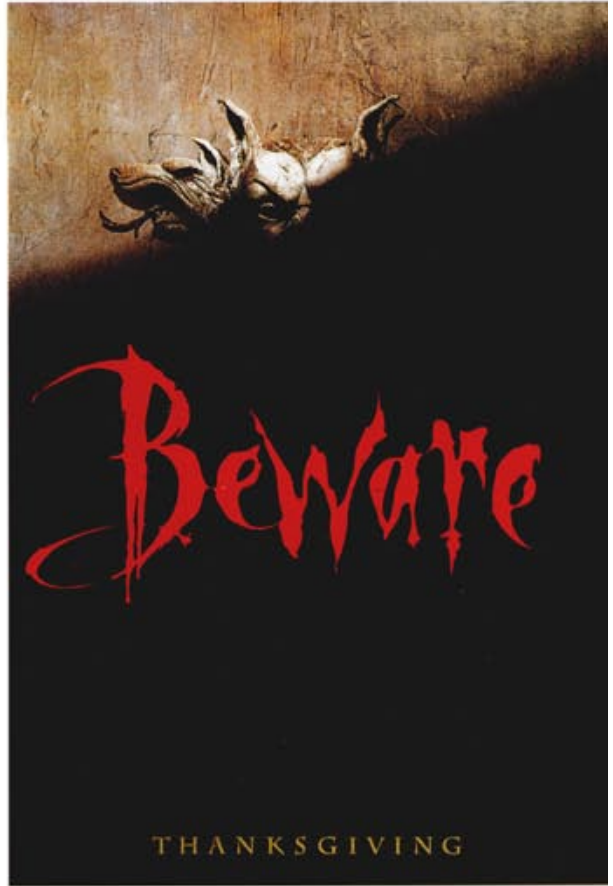
Sidney Cooper

Left: Logo for Buttleman Leopold, an artist's management company, Margo Chase/Alan Disparte, designers; Doug Buttleman, client.

This page: "Both Wilson Phillips' Management and EMI Entertainment wanted a glamorous, grown-up feeling for this release. To emphasize the idea of a girl group, we used a reproduction of Boticelli's *Three Graces* as art behind the monogram. The title lettering and the monogram use custom letterforms built in Illustrator." Henry Marquez, EMI, art director; Herb Ritts/Sidney Cooper, photographers.

"This line of packaging was created for a designer clothing store on trendy Melrose Avenue in L.A. The street facade featured roof-high deconstructed letters in rusted metal. We designed the logo and packaging in raw materials and simple shapes to continue their already powerful image. Unfortunately, ECRU has become another victim of the recession." Elaine Kim, ECRU, client.

R.W. Garcia, a Santa Cruz, California manufacturer of gourmet blue tortilla chips, required a new package design to help expand their market into Southern California. Ellie Just, the original package designer approached Chase. "I felt that creating a color palette using earthy secondary colors and metallic inks would create a gourmet look that would help set them apart. All the artwork was created in Adobe Illustrator and printed with water-based ink formulas in keeping with the client's environmental conscience." Margo Chase/Ellie Just, art directors.





MARGO CHASE DESIGN



Left: "Since the advent of the CD disk, many record companies have begun re-releasing back catalog material in the new format. Renaissance was a group with a large following in their heyday (the '70s). The group still has a cult following in spite of the fact that they're no longer together. Since there was no group to photograph or to oversee the project, the design possibilities were endless. The idea for the final cover images happened one night when I couldn't sleep. I was playing around with a slide projector and some film positives of Adam and Eve but I didn't have the right kind of film. I shot the test layout using 35mm color Polaroid film which shifted to become a weird orange. When I showed this funky image to art director Kim Champagne at Warner's she was enthusiastic so I hired Sidney Cooper to shoot the final two still-life set-ups based on this first image. We spent a lot of time with colored gels and different lights, trying to repeat the results I had first gotten by accident."

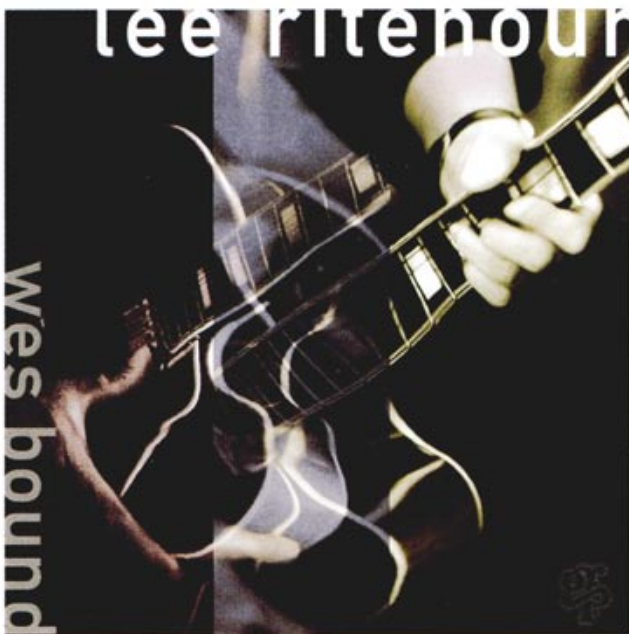
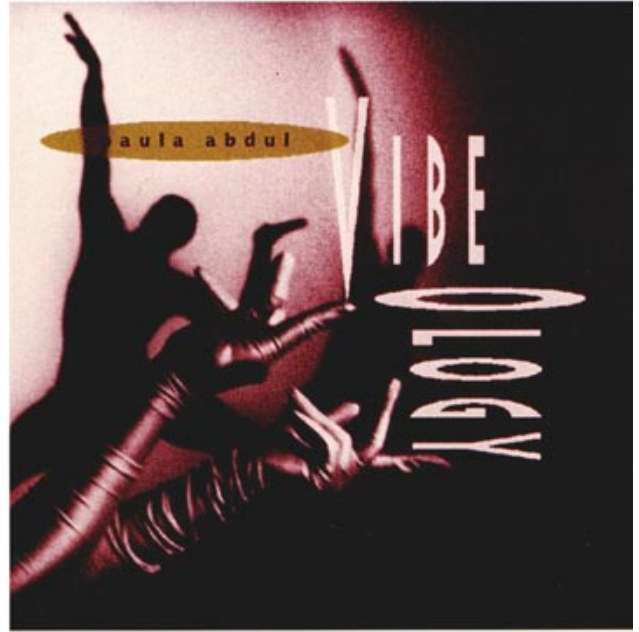
Poster for The Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. "This was designed before the museum's official opening, so photographer Stuart Watson and I were taken to the basement archives and shown their wonderful collection of artifacts and art. The final selection was photographed on top of an old wooden trunk that Stuart found behind a building. The spur image was printed as a four-color sepia tone and the bridle in full four-color. We added two hits of spot gloss varnish to enhance the bridle and printed the type in metallic copper ink."

Poster for Francis Coppola's *Dracula*. "This project was our first foray into the movie advertising world, and it was a grueling experience. We designed the logo first and presented at least 50 ideas before the final was chosen. We had a similar experience with the actual teaser campaign design. The final gargoyle image was among the first designs we presented, but it wasn't until dozens of other ideas were explored and presented in tight comp form that the gargoyle was decided on." John Kehe/Margo Chase, art directors; Margo Chase/Nancy Ogami, designers; Jacqueline Perrault, gargoyle carver; Sidney Cooper, photographer; Columbia Pictures, client.

This page: Identity for Gelinias, a line of hair care products. "We designed the logo as well as all of the packaging, promotional posters and graphics. The whole identity was designed to give the products a rich baroque-but-contemporary look rather than the sterile modern feel that much of the competitor's packaging had. The box shapes are all based on a triangle which reflects the company name, Triune Research. They are printed using a palette of the same six metallic colors arranged in different ways to give each product its own identity within the family." Lorna Stovall/Margo Chase, designers.

Above: Logo for personal stationery. Simone Seydoux, Warner Brothers Records, client.







MARGO CHASE DESIGN

Left: "The band requested a powerful icon that could be used in their video and on tour. The snake image was derived from the lyrics to one of their songs titled, 'Call it Poison.' The band used it on snake bite kits they sent as promotional items." David Provost, photographer; Hit and Run Management/Atlantic Records, client.

Cover of the "Vibeology" single. "The photo was colorized and retouched in Photoshop. The lettering was ghosted into the photo along with the ellipse. The ellipse lettering was added later." Melanie Nissen, Virgin Records, art director; Robert Lobetta, photographer; Virgin Records, client.

"This CD is Ritenour's tribute to Wes Montgomery, one of the great jazz guitar innovators. The concept behind this cover image reflects the classical style of Wes's songs being performed in Lee Ritenour's contemporary technique. (We used a model for Wes's hands.) Both pairs of hands, photographed by John Casado, are reflections in a piece of Mylar. The two photos were colorized and 'blended' in Photoshop." Lee Ritenour/GRP Records, client.



"The Band of Angels's music is pop with a '60s psychedelic flavor, so I decided to do something that would reflect that influence but still look new. The background image is a photo of a cherub statue I altered in Photoshop to give it a psychedelic feel. The logo was drawn in Illustrator, imported into Photoshop and ghosted into the background." Melanie Nissen, Atlantic Records, art director; Margo Chase, designer; Anna Lisa, photographer; Atlantic Records, client.

This page: "I was experimenting with sandwiching two slides together and printing on a Polaroid slide printer when I saw the dark brown side of the Polaroid and decided that it was better than the color image. Since the Polaroid neg is a fleeting image, I recreated the effect by printing a double exposure of the two original images, toned the print with copper toner and added more color by hand coloring the toned print. Another photo was stripped into a calligraphic script done by Nancy, and then the hand lettered type was ghosted over everything." Margo Chase, art director/photographer; Margo Chase/Nancy Ogami, designers; Blue Note Records, client.

The elaborate picture frame consists of junk collected from swap meets and occult stores. The idea developed from a comment one band member made about the approved cover photo. He said it reminded him of an old daguerreotype, so I decided to do a 'hard rock' interpretation of those gold filigree frames daguerreotypes often come in." Melanie Nissen, Virgin Records, art director; Merlyn Rosenberg/Bela Kertesz-Fischer, photographers; Virgin Records, client.

SMASH
BOX



THE
OTHER
ONES



BLUE ROSE
RECORDS



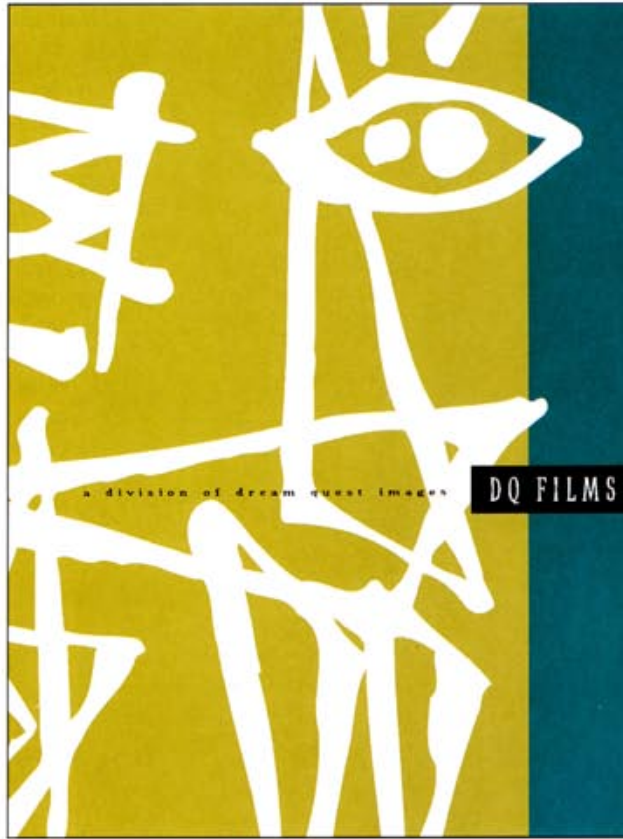
CHRISTOPHER
MAX

C A F E
Cabo



Kitano





MARGO CHASE DESIGN

Left: Logo for a photographic rental studio. The name, Smash Box, is derived from the slang word for the bellows on an old box camera. Philip Weingarten/David Factor, clients.

Logo for a division of MCA that publishes salsa music. MCA Music Publishing, client.

Logo for the Other Ones for a 7" single sleeve. Virgin Records, client.

Logo for Blue Rose Records. A&M Records, client.

Logo for a rhythm and blues singer. EMI Records Group, client.

Logo for Cafe Cabo, a Palm Springs restaurant. Margo Chase/Lorna Stovall, designers; Ron Taft, client.

Logo for Hypersonic Blade, a surfboard manufacturer. Alan Disparte, designer.

Logo for Kitaro. Warner Brothers Records, client.

Proposed logo for Save the Rain Forest, an organization devoted to preserving the world's rain forests. Chris Chaffin, Hal Riney Advertising, client.

This page: Stationery for Dream Quest Images, Inc., creators of special effects for commercials and feature films. "We designed a fantastic griffin-type creature for their logo with the idea of animating it for their promotional reels."

"Westland Graphics is a wonderful printer we do a lot of work with. They asked us to design a Christmas gift for them that would demonstrate their skills in printing and packaging. The idea was to create the feeling of standing outside and looking through a window into a warm Christmasy room. The 'window' is a gloss coated sticker printed four-color and adhered to Speckleton printed with maroon and silver metallic ink." Lorna Stovall, photographer.



Stuart Watson