

# Critique

THE  
MAGAZINE  
OF  
GRAPHIC  
DESIGN  
THINKING



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THE PROGRESSIVE CORPORATION *client*

Critic's Award | **The Progressive Corporation 1997 annual report** | Selected and reviewed by Kerry Leimer

**A**t this level, one of my main criteria for annual reports is that they have coherence: the CEO's message and the graphics must speak with the same voice throughout the book. I'd like to distinguish coherence from theme-themed books can be gimmicky, distract attention from the text and the numbers, and make an immature impression.

The Progressive annual shows mature artistry, and makes a confident presentation of the client's financial performance. And, compared to the other books in this category, it has a more difficult job to do: to come across aesthetically while representing an abstract financial service company.

The Progressive message is that the company is made up of real, straightforward, honest people who are profoundly involved with their customers and their

business. The way the text, the illustrations, and the structure carry this message goes beyond the norm for the insurance industry.

The standard way to visualize "real people" is to use warm photographs—a smiling granny, a distraught teen. Instead, each story is illustrated by a different artist, each working in a personal, quirky style. Respect for individuality comes through loud and clear.

The writing is unusually forthright, telling the reader, in clear language, exactly how results measured up to objectives. The typography is correspondingly meaningful and low-key. It supports both visual and textual ideas, is completely legible, and doesn't intrude. In the financials, minimal differences signal hierarchy shifts in the text without interrupting the flow or sacrificing clarity. The color palette is picked up for subheads, carrying the color through the book without getting too decorative.

The structure of the book is innovative, though you don't notice it at first. A variety of information—shareholders' letter, financial statistics, narratives—is carefully integrated from the start. This creates interesting pacing, and makes the different kinds of information interrelate very well.

Color, consistency, and forthrightness of message unify this design; syncopation, variations on the grid, playfulness, and the variety of illustration styles keep it from becoming too predictable. Message supports idea and idea supports execution, cover to cover—complete coherence.