



**1 Blender.** Finally, America has a music magazine that unites the zippy, irreverent writing of the best British music press with the serious reporting and terrific profiles that can still occasionally be found in the depleted Rolling Stone. Blender's exhaustive piece on the shooting of Pantera's Dimebag Darrell, for instance, was definitive. And when it comes to top-notch froth, well, it's the mag to beat. The features on divas such as Jennifer Lopez and Mariah Carey were not just deee-liciously dishy, they were brilliantly crafted. Plus, Blender's reviews are well-informed, fun to read and mercifully free of the rock-crit blather designed to impress other critics.

**2 National Geographic Traveler.** The new motto ("All Travel, All the Time") of this offspring of that other magazine with a yellow border takes a not-so-subtle dig at certain upscale competitors. No Rolex ads or anorexic models lounging in dugout canoes here. NGT devotes itself to one thing, travel — and nobody does it better. Beautifully written and meticulously edited, with photos that stop you in your tracks (wonder where they got that concept), its stories and features explore a world of practical possibilities without forgetting our impossible dreams.

**3 Vanity Fair.** If ever there were a book to not judge by its cover, it is Vanity Fair. Sultry A-list cover girls such as Angelina Jolie are mere gift-wrapping for what's inside: some of the best magazine journalism in the country. The features range from superb corruption, harassed government whistle-blowers and the high jinks of the rich and famous read like well-written suspense novels. Dominick Dunne's diary chronicles international society's most delicious tidbits, while movie, book, music and art news keep readers culturally astute.

**4 Wired.** This mag hasn't missed a trick in the past year. It kicked off a huge debate about some in the green community giving nuclear power a second look — a controversy The New York Times picked up on months later. An essential combination of well-informed tech guide, bomb-throwing opinion pieces and terrific reporting (the article on the barrio kids who created a submersible robot was a high point), even its glitzy movie tie-ins have legs to them.

**5 Cook's Illustrated.** We like to know how and why things work, so we're suckers for a magazine that tests things such as Julianne peelers or non-stick skillet and explains — with diagrams! — why one kind is better than another. Same goes for recipes: the folks in "America's Test Kitchen" will try out all sorts of techniques like, say, braising, tell us what works best and give us a recipe. Who cares if we never julienne a potato or braise a brisket? Knowledge is power.

**6 New York.** This magazine is New York. The style, the energy, the elbow in your side that says, "Get over my way." The cover stories are genuinely provocative: everything from an essay calling for New York to secede to a searing account of a doomed friendship between two well-known writers. The gossip is geographically limited but first-rate. Features such as "Ask a Shop Clerk" and "The Look Book" bring us New York in all its brazen, foul-mouthed glory. These people really get "gritty," and they really get "glitzy." A winning combination.

**7 People.** Admit it: You read it. Oh, maybe not in your home, but in the doctor's office. At your friend's house. People has plenty of competition these days in the "celebrity news" department, but good, old-fashioned reporting skills, genuine restraint in the airing of dirty laundry and fast-paced storytelling keep us coming back for more.

**8 Vogue.** There's nothing girlish about editor Anna Wintour's approach to the world of fashion, which makes her the queen bee year after year. And if you don't want to admit you buy it for the gorgeous pictures (Arthur Elgort, Steven Meisel, Mario Testino, Irving Penn), you can say you read the articles and maintain

plenty of intellectual credibility. John Powers is back as movie critic; Joan Juliet Buck is always on the mark with TV — and we always love anything by Julia Reed, Robert Sullivan, Jeffrey Steingarten. We could go on and on. The cover stories are often as well-reported as books, and the shorter features can showcase a staff that can also be surprisingly nimble and playful. The photos alone are worth the price of admission.

**9 People en Español.** Most entertainment magazines for the Hispanic reader in the U.S. are Americanized versions of Latin-American editions. PES not only surpasses its competitors without forgetting our possible dreams.

**10 Metropolis.** In these days of sexed-up, hipped-up design magazines, Metropolis is the quiet, smart one in the good suit with the wire glasses. This is the design magazine for adults who would rather read intelligent prose about "daylighting" in our buildings, green roofs, the birth of a high-tech chair and the latest adventures of Florence Knoll than try to figure out what all those bare naked people are doing in the advertisements.

**11 Shop Etc.** Distinguishing itself with three departments — fashion, home and beauty — Shop Etc. has quickly become one style tome worth a cover-to-cover tour. Always, we discover something that (a) we love (b) can afford and (c) can achieve without support staff. Shop Etc. is not too uptight to do an "everything under \$100" issue, and it manages to make even big busters for the yard and at-home hair removal look pretty. All while remaining mercifully celebrity-free.

**12 Make.** This new quarterly hopes to turn digital living from a spectator sport to a participant sport. The first two issues captured the do-it-yourself-as-entertainment vibe with another great year for building a kite that takes bird's-eye view pictures of your neighborhood and another for creating a cheap camera-corder stand that takes the jumpiness out of fast-moving home videos. Even those of us who aren't tech-inclined can appreciate the clear photos and step-by-step directions that meld Popular Mechanics magazine with a Sharper Image catalog.

**13 Newsweek/Time.** These old warhorses — which, after years of competition, have gotten to look more and more alike — aren't perfect, as Newsweek's recent bobble of the Koran story covered. But, week in, week out, they show the world, from Ariel Sharon to Sharon Stone, from Philip Roth to Karl Rove, from Baghdad to Las Vegas. While not as glitzy or as flip as the host of niche magazines with which they contend, these two do their jobs with wit, intelligence, zest and earnestness.

**14 Top Gear.** Hail, Britannia. Our former landlords don't just rule the waves — they also rule the world of cheezy car magazines. Now that Car & Driver has abdicated the "fun and fun to drive" crown, a trio of stunners from across the pond — Car, Evo and Top Gear — vie for best in the world. By a hair, Top Gear takes the crown, doing for-real wit and humor along with gobs of information on cars that you only wish you could drive. A p r i l ' s "Segway vs. Flybar" contained more hilarity in fewer words than anything since "Take my wife... please!"

**15 National Geographic.** It's smart. It's beautiful. It really cares about the Csango people of Romania. In a world where most magazines are the literary equivalent of a great date, National Geographic is true marriage material. The cover stories are often as well-reported as books, and the shorter features can showcase a staff that can also be surprisingly nimble and playful. The photos alone are worth the price of admission.

**16 Fine Gardening.** There are many gardening magazines, but this one always is worth the time spent reading instead of weeding. The monthly column of tips from readers has light bulb ideas. Design principles are explained clearly, with photos dissected in plant-by-plant and point-by-point captions. Plants are considered not just for looks but for how they work in a garden. Nuts-and-bolts articles go into the why and not just the how. This isn't the most lavish-looking garden magazine out there, but it shows a high level of respect for the skills and intelligence of its audience. A year's subscription is an education.

**17 The Atlantic Monthly.** From the average turmoil of everyday political wrangling, this magazine takes a refreshing step back. As it disentangles foreign and domestic priorities as complicated as war, immigration and Social Security, the Atlantic filters volumes of chaotic nonsense into clear, insightful and even lyrical commentary on the nation's most critical concerns. A lively literary section also offers poetry, artwork and illuminating book reviews.

**18 Entertainment Weekly.** We love "ask a critic." We love Lisa Schwarzbaum. We love Joel Stein — whoops, he doesn't work there anymore. OK, so Entertainment Weekly isn't perfect — Stephen King, he's not a columnist — but it's the best magazine out there for those of us who want/need a weekly pop culture fix.

**19 Esquire.** A January cover devoted to "Enlightenment • Illumination • Sandwiches" best sums up our appreciation for Esquire. It's a magazine full of beautiful contradictions, the kind that can drool over Scarlett Johansson's lips in one spread and then, a mere 20 pages later, sincerely prod President Bush to sound advice for creating "a future worth living." Smart and savvy with fine writing and design, it's a book that plies humor, style and sexuality without any of the strip-club obviousness that laddie magazines so love.

**20 The New Yorker.** Don't get us wrong, we're still devoted to The New Yorker. But this impeccably pedigreed magazine — the shrine at which all writers worth their Dorothy Parker souvenir cocktail shakers worship — has slipped. The "Talk of the Town" barely feels like the talk of the block. The political coverage has been only so-so; witness the recent "Duh" profile of Sen. John McCain. On a happier note, Larissa MacFarquhar's profiles continue to sing — a look at playwright Michael Feyn was a spectacular piece of intellectual journalism — and week after week, Anthony Lane and David Denby still produce the world's best movie criticism. Note to New Yorker editors: We only point out the negatives because we care. Maybe too much.

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**22 Mojo.** If nothing else, this serious British music mag will probably never, ever put a picture of Britney on the cover. Mojo is less about pop tarts and chart-toppers



Each year at the National Magazine Awards, a panel of judges decides which of the nation's 17,500 periodicals that fill newsstands are the best.

But who cares what some publishing-industry poohbahs think? Magazines speak to each of us differently, and those lauded for slick editing and fancy photography aren't always the ones that capture our hearts. The New Yorker is the best magazine? Tell that to the readers of Armchair General.

Thus, the Tempo staff, for the third straight year, has compiled its own list of best magazines — our personal favorites, drawn from the titles that clutter our cubicles, litter our nightstands or just, frankly, fire us up. The ranking is deeply subjective. But we've spent a lot of time seriously mulling a vital and eclectic universe. We proudly present Tempo's 50 Best Magazines, 2005.

decorating and gardening magazine. Favorite feature: "What is it? What's it worth?" — a "Antiques Road Show" approach to valuing items that readers find in their barns or in Granny's parlor.

**23 Consumer Reports.** Looking for the best protective treatment to keep your back-yard deck looking grill-ready this summer? Want to know whether that expensive pomegranate juice is worth the four bucks? Maybe not. But you can bet that if you have a consumer-related question, Consumer Reports has the straight skinny with its shoot-from-the-hip, unbiased style. And let's not forget the Holy Grail, CR's new-car buying guide.

**24 GQ.** Long a sleeping giant, the ever-thick fashion bible has found fresh, vivacious life. Reimagined by a new-ish editor, Gentleman's Quarterly suddenly feels accessible and practical. Can't afford that \$2,500 Armani suit? With choices to fit a number of budgets, stylishness suddenly seems reasonable. But it's not all lapel collars and cuff links — there's terrific writing and criticism too. The Verge — a primer to the hippest in pop culture — might be its best innovation yet, not to mention the magazine's design and photography, which are easily some of the

best of any book on the newsstand. All together, it's a sharp read. Very GQ, indeed.

**25 Armchair General.** This year-old bimonthly is focused to an admirable degree. Its July issue allows readers to strategize the Battle of AI, with you, as Joshua, against the Canaanites, or control tanks at the Battle of Mtsensk. You can read "Blunders and Carnage: The Battle of Waterloo" and tsk-tsk Napoleon too. The audience appears to be hard-core gamers and military history buffs, and who's to say that they don't need love too?

**26 The Economist.** It quickly and easily puts the world's weekly news and economic report at your fingertips. A recent issue highlighted Mayor Richard Daley and Gov. Rod Blagojevich's sagging approval ratings along with taking a stab at explaining the vexing problems within Chile's military establishment. Ever informative, well-written and concise, it is indispensable for those who want to keep abreast of world affairs.

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health, mental well-being and even politics are popular topics, but the staff also knows how to gently poke fun at the stereotypes.

**30 Outside.** OK, most of us are never going to climb giant rock formations in Utah or train for our fifth Tour de France, but it's great to be an armchair extreme sports geek. We love the exhilarating photography and writing, not to mention the fabulous features on gadgets and clothing that will work for those of us whose idea of roughing it involves battling the wind chill in a Bears game. Added bonus: great info on out-of-the-way

**31 Organic Style.** Want to dismiss this mag as a convergence of the yuppie fetish for all things "natural" and the yuppie desire for fluffy lifestyle magazines? Well, first you might want to check out the magazine's extensive, exhaustively reported article on the relative safety of drinking water around the country. Given the number of traditional stores stocking organic items these days, it's good to have a source that can help you navigate all the products that are out there. And as for fluffy, why not an article on fun fake fur? Natural and organic aren't code words for dour and dowdy anymore, and OS gets that.

**32 Traditional Home.** Some of us hate midcentury modern furniture and decor. There, we said it — we hate it! All those sleek lines and spare styles leave a lot of us very cold. Give us a cozy library with wood paneling, or a kitchen with a fireplace, some soft, inviting sofas and warm, rich colors. You can find all that in Traditional Home, which showcases a savvy mixture of a slightly controlled look with a dignified yet cozy style. For people who live in homes that feature interiors that would make Mies van der Rohe weep, this is the decor magazine of choice.

**33 Chronicle of Higher Education.** Who'd a think!?

**34 US Weekly.** The just-wanna-have-fun little sister to the more venerable People. And like many scrappy siblings, she sometimes borrows its competition. The mag's signature "Stars — They're Just Like Us" feature epitomizes its tongue-in-cheek approach to the sharpest, most topical intellectual journals around. Incisive, up-to-the-minute essays and terrific investigative pieces on academic practices make this an indispensable read. Because of his brilliant Chronicle essays, Carlin Romano was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize in criticism.

**35 Washington Monthly.** This original and insightful political magazine avoids DC's too-slick spin doctors and steers clear of the pack mentality that infects the journalism establishment. An ever-changing stable of gifted writers, many of whom go on to spots in big-time newspaper and magazine work, provides a provocative and accessible look at complex issues of the day. You don't need to be an insider or political junkie to appreciate it.

**36 Fine Homebuilding.** For serious weekend warriors (the doers, not the dreamers), Fine Homebuilding delivers a fine, how-to helping hand. Stories are written by people who actually know what they're doing. That would be builders and contractors, not journalists. And in addition to tackling popular projects (i.e. installing a pedestal sink), the magazine also takes on more esoteric problems such as how to make your drywall seams disappear and how it's possible to lay hardwood over a concrete slab.

**37 Birds & Blooms.** When a robin cocks its head to the side, what is it doing? When roses are gruffed, can they change color? Do you know the answers to these questions? Do you care? You do if you're a lover of back-yard nature. Birds & Blooms is loaded with all kinds of tips for your flower garden — from building it to maintaining it — and information about the denizens on wing that inhabit that garden.

**38 Twins.** Twins magazine alternates between amateurish and endearing — not a bad combination, actually — and you've got to love the feature in which people send in photos of their kids and you try to figure out which ones are identical/fraternal. You've also got to love that Twins insists on calling the kids "monozygotic" and "dizygotic," not identical/fraternal. OK, these people have their quirks. But in a world of slick prefab parenting magazines, Twins has personality to spare.

**39 Essence.** In celebration of the professional black woman, Essence is the magazine that many women of color rely on to get career advice, read about celebrities, find the hottest new swimsuit or learn how to become financially secure. It also unflinchingly tackles controversial topics such as race and gender issues.

**40 Photo District News.** Ever wonder how photographers make those quirky, beautiful Kohler ads? How a New York Times shooter fared in Fallujah? For professionals and amateurs, anyone who loves photography in all its forms, PDN offers a banquet of information each month — news on how smaller newspapers are covering social issues, the latest digital technology features on unknown-but-gifted photographers on the cusp of discovery, insider gossip on photo's movers and shakers. It's all in there.

**41 The Week.** Essentially a blog on glossy paper, The Week covers, borrows and poaches from other news sources and stitches together a concise, compelling Polaroid of world news. Seldom more than 42 pages, The Week is smart reading for those of us who want our current events lesson to be brisk, to the point and complete in our 30-minute train ride.

**42 Film Comment.** For true cinephiles, Film Comment provides that cherished sweaty-palmed read six times a year. Academic without being sawdust-dry or alienating, the magazine offers pithy, precise profiles and reviews from Amy Taubin, Tribune vet Dave Karger and a host of talented writers. With timely covers and a devotion to international cinema, Film Comment still surprises with thoughtful retrospective interviews with the likes of Dustin Hoffman.

**43 Mad.** Smirk if you like, but where else will you find such unapologetically sophomoric pop cultural satire as 25 Least Powerful People in Sports, "LOTS" (a riff on TV's "Lost"), "Disparate No-Lives" or "Batman/Begone"? And, of course, there's always Spy. Spys, spys, spys of us are still kids at heart, and so we wallow in it.

**44 Chicago.** If you're a true Chicagoan — or want to be — you read Chicago magazine. Its cabal of editors and writers snatches the most intriguing local news headlines and digs deep into them, producing narratives that reveal the inside story on the Pritzker family's high-stakes feuds, for instance, or William Kennedy Smith's latest battle against sexual misconduct charges. Add in exhaustive reviews of suburban and city restaurants plus news you can use service packages ("Weekend Getaways," "The New South Side"), and you've got a city magazine

**45 HELLO!** This Brit-based magazine uses words like "Antipodean" to describe Nicole Kidman, making us feel much less like we're wasting our time on celebrity junk. Then there are the photos you won't find in American magazines, such as ex-Mick Jagger spouse Jerry Hall's cellulite and Elizabeth Hurley's remarkable eye wrinkles. Plus the Brit recipes in the back (toffee banana toasties; super sarnies, whatever they are) are a hoot.

**46 Money.** A recent top-to-bottom overhaul has recast the financial-planning book with a more family-friendly approach. No longer just a get-rich investment guide, the newer, softer Money helps us figure out how to best spend what we've already got. Steeped in dollars and sense, every page is packed with nuggets of the knowledge necessary to get ahead. Well-organized and delectably packaged, this monthly is a read our wallets depend on.

**47 Lincoln Lore.** All Lincoln, all the time. With 1,880 issues over the past 76 years, this is "the longest continuously published periodical devoted exclusively to Abraham Lincoln," its editors at the Lincoln Museum in Ft. Wayne, Ind., brag. A rich treasury of scholarship about the 16th U.S. president — from his clothes the Lore was originally a weekly and is now published quarterly. You can get it by joining Friends of the Lincoln Museum (minimum annual membership: \$30, or for \$5.95 in the museum gift shop.

**48 Whole Dog Journal.** Still the all-around best mix of training tips, products/nutrition advice and balanced, veterinary and holistic health info. Accepts no advertising. We love the series of articles on canine physiology that's taking us on a trip around the pooch.

**49 Absolute.** It's like seeing a gorgeous person across the room at a party, and edging close enough to eavesdrop and then discovering — to your utter surprise — that the hottie has a high IQ. This new magazine looks for all the world like a typically sleek, empty-headed bauble, but the articles are surprisingly sharp and funny. It's also a passion ate about its subject — New York — from its neighborhood to its foodstuffs. The profiles of artists and designers are fascinating, getting well beneath a subject's skin; ditto for the histories of noted New York buildings.

**50 Lake Superior Magazine.** If cactus and arid deserts take your breath away, it's not for you. On the other hand, if pine woods, birch and cold lakes are what you're about, Lake Superior Magazine should be on your reading list. From Duluth to Sault Ste. Marie, from Bay to Grand Marais, the magazine covers everything from restaurants to lodging to travel ideas to best fishing holes and more. Lake Superior tells itself as "the magazine about the world's largest fresh-water lake and the people who visit and live there," and that pretty much sums it up.

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**10 best magazine Web sites**  
(in alphabetical order)

- Ew.com (entertainment weekly)
- FamilyFun.go.com
- Newyorker.com
- People.aol.com/people (People magazine)
- Realsimple.com
- Salon.com\*
- Slate.com\*
- Sportsillustrated.cnn.com
- Tvguide.com
- Wired.com

\*Web-only magazines

YOUR TURN

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