

LOS ANGELES

Circulation: 151,000

Date of Birth: 1961

Frequency: Monthly

Price: \$3.95

Natural Habitat: At the checkout line in Gelson's grocery store

BY MAGGIE FRANK

Everyone I know who has spent a week or less in Los Angeles has hated it. The freeways, the smog, the rows of cookie-cutter houses. They recognize the home of the evil masterminds behind urban sprawl and can't wait to leave. It's those of us who have stuck around who have been able to find the charm and the soul—yes, soul—that make the city the most complex urban area in the United States. *Los Angeles* the magazine requires a similar level of patience. Flip through it casually, and you'll see what you might expect from a place nicknamed "Lala land." But give it a little more time and you'll find solid reporting and an insightful portrayal of the changing landscape of the city.

Month after month, the covers of *Los Angeles* reflect the very image of Los Angeles that has lodged itself in the national imagination. They are glossy, superficial and a little silly. Each cover illustrates the magazine's theme for the month with a strong visual image. The cover for "Cheap Eats" month had a big picture of a hot dog. "Pets" month was a sad-eyed beagle. Cover lines play up flashy stories about celebrities with plenty of exclamation points. Nevertheless, most months you'll find a few real reporting gems resting atop a comfy pillow of puff pieces and advertorials.

A touching profile of actor Chris Cooper, part of a package of "Movie Issue" stories, took me beyond the tired celeb-journalism formula. After spending the requisite number of column inches kissing Cooper's newly minted A-list ass, reporter Steve Oney uses old-fashioned reporting techniques to give us an intimate, unsentimentalized portrait of Cooper and his wife Marianne's grief over the recent loss of their 17-year-old son, who had suffered through illness his entire life. Too bad Oney made me wait until the jump page to find the most original part of the story.

I have also found quirky portraits of Angelenos that take the reader miles east of the typical celebrity journal's coverage zone. One was the story of a weather-obsessed retired Cal Poly professor insisting from his Covina home that the 2004-2005 winter broke only the third-wettest winter record, not the second-wettest.

Although Editor-in-Chief Kit Rachlis did not grow up in Los Angeles, he has lived

there since the 1980s and edited the alternative *L.A. Weekly* during the riots in 1992. Perhaps as a result of his experience, Rachlis has made the magazine a publication keenly aware of the ethnic diversity that defines the heart of the city more than its blighted landscape or Hollywood image ever could. In a June Mediabistro.com article, Rachlis talks about *Los Angeles* as "the diary of a great city" and "the magazine that tries to explain L.A. to itself." *Los Angeles*' owner, Emmis, which owns four other regional publications, including the venerated *Texas Monthly*, has given Rachlis the freedom to publish reporting on the significance of L.A.'s diverse cultural influences, influences that give Los Angeles the heart and soul for which it rarely receives credit.

The first reader letter printed in the Feb-



ruary issue illustrates the editorial staff's pre-occupation with diversity. The letter critiques the magazine's "disgusting" exclusion of non-white women on the cover of its December shopping issue, which included pictures of Robertson Boulevard frequenters like Lindsay Lohan, Nicole Richie and Jessica Simpson: the "cover would suggest that in spite of abundant L.A. shopping representation of 'Young Hollywood' actresses of Latin, Asian, and African American descent, only our Anglo, blond-haired actresses were worthy of exclusive front-cover exposure."

The editors aren't attempting simply to be politically correct here. Rather, they are demonstrating the duty they feel to report and reflect L.A.'s dominant Latino and Asian influences. Sometimes, the magazine appears to bend over backwards to reflect its awareness, as with this letter, the only printed response to the December cover story. Other times, the reflection comes naturally, as with

"Reluctant Princess," an article in the same issue about Yolanda Pérez, a Mexican-American *jaripeo* singer who grew up in San Bernardino County and fuses traditional northern Mexican music with West Coast rap. That article is an example of the magazine trying to "explain L.A. to itself."

The rest of the country might want to listen in on the explanation. "Ethnic diversity" may be a politically correct catch phrase, but it is also reality in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces throughout L.A., and it is fast becoming real to citizens in the rest of the country. Latino and Asian immigration is breathing new life into cities across the United States, and Angelenos have had decades of experience adapting to it.

The magazine presents individual, localized portraits of the nation's historic shift from a European-dominated culture. It takes its readers off the freeways, out of their cars, for a walk around the quaint and bustling neighborhoods that are their real homes. But, like inching ahead on L.A.'s infamous grid-locked freeways, you have to waste a lot of time plowing through *Los Angeles*' pages before you get to the really good parts.

2600: THE HACKER QUARTERLY

Circulation: 80,000

Date of Birth: 1984

Frequency: Quarterly

Price: \$5.50

Native Habitat: On a workbench—hidden from view—next to a modified Radio Shack frequency scanner and a laptop running Gentoo Linux.

BY ASA FITCH

During the halcyon days of hacking in the late 1990s, corporate brass would often wake to find political screeds, pornography and d1g1Tal-speak shout-outs marring their homepages. It was in the era preceding and during this boom time, before the Feds started throwing hackers in jail and before Internet security was anything more than laughable, that *2600: The Hacker Quarterly* found its audience.

Clearly, the current climate is far less hospitable to hackers, and the hacking community—and *2600*—now finds itself in something of an identity crisis. Some hackers have gone the turncoat route, taking jobs with Internet security firms. Others have moved on to new careers or found other hobbies. Still others are in jail. These changes presented *2600*, the self-appointed voice of hacking, with a challenge: how to speak to the new hacker while not abandon-

ing the edge-of-legality spirit that made it such a compelling read.

The magazine responded by attempting to redefine the hacker ethic. Once a digital miscreant of vaguely Robin Hoodesque sensibilities, the new hacker is viewed as a hobbyist who likes tinkering—harmlessly, we're told—with telecommunications systems, the Internet, gadgets and, well, the world in general.

The redefinition is manifest in *2600*'s pages. A writer known as "mirrorshades"—all writers in *2600* use handles—complained in a recent issue that "the media tells you that 'hackers' are either unsupervised teenagers who break into computer systems and steal credit card numbers to use at pornographic websites, or scum-of-the-earth anarchist rebels who write viruses designed to destroy ATM networks and shut down the 'evil corporate system.' The truth is that 'hacker,' as a title, is dead."

"Hacking" may indeed be dead, but *2600* is far from abandoning the term, or, for that matter, any of its questionable associations. Granted, many of the articles in *2600* these days are standard nerd-magazine fare (how to get rid of spyware, novel ways of programming your remote control), but the choicer bits still verge on the illegal. One recent article, for example, told readers how to navigate the touch-screen menus of an automatic DVD rental machine in such a way that you might—just might—be able to retrieve credit card numbers. Another article, "A Peek Inside a Simple ATM Machine" might be useful to thieves.

Yet another, helpfully titled "Forging an Identity," gives out tips on how to fabricate birth certificates and Social Security cards to get photo IDs. To really do it right, "SistemRoot" tells us, forgers "would need to find information on a person who was born around the same time as they were and died under the age of six months or passed away in a different state from their birthplace. Because of this, there wouldn't be any state or work records of them being deceased. This information can be found at the library's newspaper archives under the obituary section." Thanks, SistemRoot!

Eric Corley, a hacker whose specialty is phone systems, started *2600* in 1984 and runs it from Middle Island, N.Y. Corley is credited on the masthead as Editor-in-Chief "Emmanuel Goldstein," a reference to the reactionary leader of that name in Orwell's "1984." The magazine's name came from phreakers—telephone hackers, basically—who discovered in the 1970s that broadcasting a 2600-hertz tone over a special long-



distance line gave the caller access to a powerful "operator mode."

Under Corley's direction, *2600* clings to a decidedly underground aesthetic: page after page of small print and an apparent ignorance of graphic design. The cover is glossy and in color, but the inside pages look as if they were composed by a math geek using a clunky open-source version of PrintShop. No ads grace *2600*'s pages, but the magazine manages to stay afloat on a \$5.50 cover price and the production economies of a smaller-than-usual size—about 5-by-8 inches.

One of the funniest parts of the magazine is its "Marketplace" section, in which people sell and ask for goods and services, some of which are probably illegal. "Need some assistance removing negative items off credit reports," one ad says. "Will pay. All agencies." "LEARN LOCK PICKING," another begins. "It's EASY with our book and new video." Then there are the "personals," most of which are pleas from hackers in jail for letters. "Known as Alphabits, busted for hacking a few banks and unauthorized wire transfers," one reads. "I'm extremely bored and in desperate need for stimulation."

The personals, not to mention the tone and content of the magazine, tell us that *2600* remains unwilling to disinfect the air of cool that still surrounds illegal hacking. There are caveats—in the article on DVD rental machines, the author piously pronounces that "Companies need to be more diligent in securing machines that process sensitive information before leaving them in a public place. ..." But such sentences ring a little hollow given what a hacker could do with the substance of the article.

If free speech is the main legacy of the American experiment, magazines like *2600* might be called its difficult stepchildren. Like the infamous *Anarchist Cookbook*

of times past, *2600* occupies an uncertain ethical space—somewhere between recipe for crime and cry of freedom. The magazine revels in this limbo, and in doing so places itself in the chorus of fringe voices that Americans have tolerated, sometimes grudgingly, for centuries. Certainly, the magazine shouldn't be ordered out of existence or sued for what readers do with its content, as *Soldier of Fortune* was in 1989 after it published an ad for a mercenary whom a reader hired to kill his wife. The magazine's right to exist, however, does nothing to counter the moral argument against it. *2600* is an interesting read mainly because it deals in taboo subject matter, and arguably it will remain interesting only as long as it stays that way. As long as it does, though, there is little moral justification for it.

MENTAL_FLOSS

Circulation: 80,000

Date of Birth: June 2001

Frequency: Bimonthly

Price: \$4.99

Natural Habitat: On a history-major-turned-corporate-professional's coffee table, chit-chatting with *The New York Times*, *National Geographic* and a library copy of "Exodus," with an occasional glance toward "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" on the sizeable flat-screen TV.

BY DIKLA KADOSH

Even more than a brilliant smile, I've always wanted a shining intellect. I didn't get braces until I was 22, but after two years of throbbing pain, food in liquid form and the embarrassment of being mistaken for a 14-year-old, I have accomplished the first goal. And, after four years of college and a year at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, I don't think it's terribly arrogant to say I have acquired a minty mind.

To keep my teeth, now worth \$6,000, in great condition, I brush, floss and gargle regularly. Well, almost. To keep my brain, now worth \$184,000, in equally good shape, I should read *The New York Times*, *The Economist* and *The New Yorker*, watch "Jeopardy!" and the History Channel, and read a novel a week. But who the hell has time to do all that? I certainly don't, and apparently there are 80,000 other people in 17 countries with the same dilemma, because they are all subscribing to or regularly buying *mental_floss*, which is like continuing your liberal arts education in convenient monthly installments.

The January/February issue touches on