FOURSIXTHREE

London Calling: The London Issue

PETER SAVILLE
ABRAM GAMES
OLLY MOSS

GIACOMETTI AT THE TATE
10 YEARS LATER
HIS EXHIBITION
RETURNS

GOING UNDERGROUND
HARRY BECK AND THE
ICONIC TUBE MAP

KEEP IT SIMPLE
5 BRITISH MASTERS
OF MINIMALISM

NOVEMBER 2017

READER’S POLL
THE 5 BEST ALBUM COVERS EVER

The album cover dates from 1939, when Columbia Records art director Alex Steinweiss decided his label's offerings might find a wider audience with some added visual appeal. Since the very first Steinweiss design, an album of showtunes by Rogers and Hart, album covers have represented the apotheosis and nadir of graphic design, and have touched all points in between. Last weekend we asked our readers to select the best album covers of all time. British bands took four out of five of the top spots. In the age of the digital download, the album cover is sadly a lost art – which probably explains why 90 percent of the albums that readers selected come from the 1960s and the 1970s. Here are the Top 5:

1. The Beatles
Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band
(1967, Apple Records)
Designer: Peter Blake
Total reader votes: 1,202
The cover was originally going to show the Beatles playing in a park.

2. Pink Floyd
Dark Side Of The Moon
(1973, Harvest records)
Designer: Hipgnosis
Total reader votes: 933
Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd's previous albums, with controversial results.

3. Nirvana
‘Nevermind’
(1993, Geffen records)
Designer: Robert Fisher
Total reader votes: 755
Spencer Elden, the naked baby on the cover, said he feels weird about his bizarre role in history. “It’s kind of creepy that many people have seen me naked.”

4. The Beatles
‘Abbey Road’
(1969, Apple Records)
Designer: John Kosh
Total reader votes: 729
Beatles nuts who believed that Paul McCartney died around 1967 and was replaced by a doppleganger found a lot to examine on this cover.

5. The Clash
‘London Calling’
(1979, CBS Records)
Designer: Ray Lowry
Total reader votes: 695
Penne Smith was snapping photos of the Clash when she captured one of the most iconic images in rock history.

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Giacometti at the Tate

Going Underground
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November 2017

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The 5 Best Album Covers Ever

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The tube map almost never made it out of its creator’s notebook. The designer was Harry Beck, a young draughtsman who drew electrical circuits for the Underground. Beck’s biographer, Ken Garland, befriended him in the 1950s, and before the designer’s death in 1974 he uncovered the story behind the creation of what Beck called “the diagram”.

“As a native of a small village in Devon and moving to London to study art, I found the metropolis impossible to navigate,” Garland recalls. “I would get on the tube and see Harry’s diagram. London suddenly made sense, and so I asked people at the college if they knew who the designer was.”
Garland was told that HC Beck could be found at the London College of Printing, where he taught part-time, and he paid him a visit. They soon became friends. Beck first drew his diagram in 1931—a difficult time to be working for the newly established London Transport Passenger Board. With money tight, the board’s employees could be laid off at short notice. Beck, then 29, had been employed as a “temporary” since he first started in 1925. While at work drawing an electrical circuit diagram, he had an idea: a new map that would raise the profile of the tube and attract much-needed new passengers, and that would make the system seem modern, quick, efficient—and, above all, easier to navigate.

At the time, the maps of the network showed individual lines run by different railway companies. It was geographically correct, but impossible to read. The lines snaked all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to pore over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night.

“The diagram,” as Beck insisted it was called, was a lifelong obsession. As new routes were added, Beck would tinker with his design. He was constantly seeking to improve its clarity, and when the publicity department realized they had a hit on their hands, he had to fend off “helpful” suggestions from tube bosses.

**BECK WOULD NOT TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER**

“For the best part of 30 years, his home was turned over to the map,” recalls Garland. “There were sketches all over the place. The public will be really confused by the idea, no one will understand it.’” garland explains: “Harry went one morning to his local station and there on the wall was a diagram that was not done by him. It was devastating. To add to the insult, he thought it was a crude and ineffective version of his own diagram. It was signed by Harold F Hutchison, not a designer but head of the publicity department.”

According to Garland, Beck had become known in the publicity department for being “difficult” when it came to the diagram, and there were moves to remove his stewardship. Beck embarked on a letter-writing campaign to take back control of his life’s work. It was fruitless. London Underground accepted no argument that the current map was influenced by his work, or that it was an inferior design.

Beck’s dismissal— and, above all, easier to navigate. The first map, published in 1908, betrayed the fact that of the network showed individual lines run by different railway companies. It was geographically correct, but impossible to read. The lines snaked all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to pore over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night.

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