

GREENWICH BUSINESS



There's a Franchise for Just About Anything

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Inside the Loop of Luxury Homes

The Modern Estate Bridges Professionals with an Educated Consumer

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Linda C. Donnelly, publisher and editor of *The Modern Estate*, refers to the discount designer clothing store Syms' tagline "an educated consumer is our best customer" when approaching an issue of her magazine.

The quarterly magazine, which published its premier issue this month, aims to serve as a resource for luxury homeowners, educating them on what is available in the home market place, while serving as a source to luxury home professionals for the most up-to-date advancements in their field.

Donnelly calls it a "hybrid" publication. It crosses the lines between what is a trade publication and what is a consumer publication while appealing to both.

"This is something that isn't being done," said Donnelly, 40, from her office desk overlooking Greenwich Avenue.

The magazine is like a trade publication in that it covers similar topics a trade would, but at the same time it serves as consumer publication that is looking to hire top professionals to bring the best product into their homes.

Donnelly explains that her readership is not the 'do it yourself' or 'how to' homeowner. And she is careful that her editorial isn't presented in that way either. Instead, the homeowner is asking 'who do I hire?' 'What are the basics I need to know about this topic?' And 'how do I find the right professional to realize my vision with my home?'

"This is a part of the market that you really only hear about if you're in the trade," she said.

Her husband, Richard Donnelly, 44, founder of the magazine, is a 20-year luxury homebuilder and owner of a Fairfield County-based company. For him, the magazine serves as a way to connect the trade professional with the client — from his personal experience — a connection that was missing.

"I wanted to create something that didn't just focus on the finished product," he said.

The magazine has carved its own niche in the shelter magazine market, said Linda Donnelly. Where other publications focus on the lifestyle of the homeowner — the restaurants, activities in town and where to vacation — *The Modern Estate* specifically focuses on the home.

Already, the magazine, which targets lower Fairfield County and Westchester County, has been offered two distribution contracts from the nation's leading companies — Source Interlink and Ingram — a rare feat for a magazine on its premier issue. With a distribution contract (Donnelly will have to choose one) *The Modern Estate* would be available at bookstores, including Barnes & Noble, Borders, Waldenbooks and newsstands throughout the two counties.

The magazine is also being featured as Bank of America's Business of the Month for October.

Nationally, Donnelly compares her magazine to *Dwell* and *Architectural Digest*.

But regionally, she said, "I'm trying to break some new ground."

Editorial Approach

Editorially, the magazine features 10 departments — landscape design, architecture, construction, lighting, technology, interior design, green technology, arts and antiques, mechanicals and modern musing.

For each department Donnelly calls on professionals who have their "finger on the pulse" of what's happening in that



GREENWICH CITIZEN photos / Amy Mortensen

Linda Donnelly, editor and publisher of *The Modern Estate*, sits in her Greenwich Avenue office working on the next issue of the magazine. The first-time publisher launched the luxury home magazine this month.



field. In each issue she highlights 10 different professionals to write about the newest aspect of each industry.

"We like the unique concept of having a rotating group of elite professionals in each field to write about what they know best," said the Stamford resident.

Then, professional editors take the copy, polish it, check it for flow, continuity and style, make clarifications and send it back to the writers.

Three to four feature articles appear in the magazine, written by those specializing in a particular field of the luxury home. The premiere issue, for example, featured "Gracious Symmetry" written by Ruth J. Katz, a New York City-based journalist specializing in home, shopping and service topics. She is also a contributing editor to shelter and consumer magazines.

"My mission is to make my editorial as substantive and enjoyable as possible. I don't ever want to be fluffy or redundant," she said.

A first-time publisher, Donnelly, mother of three boys, took on the "daunting" position of editor and publisher, and, in the beginning, any other hat that was needed. Even now, the staff consists of just a handful of full-time employees.

The Duke University graduate with a master's degree in education blended her background in academics (she taught writing for several years) with her fashion industry expertise (she served as a photography agent in Manhattan for 10 years) to form the skills needed to launch the magazine.

Her 10 years of marriage to a luxury homebuilder, with whom she worked on learning the homebuilding business and marketplace, also played a key role in her editorial decisions.

The look of the magazine is matte, on 80-pound stock and perfect bound. Donnelly decided that she wanted to stand out from competitors and she wasn't going to do it with size, so she opted to do it with texture. Against the advice of her printing company, Quebecor, which prints about 300 titles includ-

ing *Elle*, *Time* and *Cosmopolitan*, Donnelly chose matte stock.

"The texture is great, it feels beautiful, I love to hold it," she said. "It's unique and artistic and I think that was a good decision to go against the grain with the paper choice... That was a renegade choice that I am really proud of."

She recently hired a layout and design firm, Big Designs of New Jersey, to take the magazine to the next level. In the past year, the graphics design firm has launched new titles for Condé Nast, NY Time, Ziff-Davis and AOL/Time Warner.

The size of the magazine will change to a nine-inch trim size, which Donnelly says will open up the design possibilities and mimic the style of *Elle Décor*.

On the inside back page, Donnelly added one last touch for readers — a bit of comic relief. There is a compilation of *The New Yorker* cartoons that she hand selects after searching the cartoon base to correlate with the editorial content for that issue.

"It's such a great destination point to have people want look for that every issue," she said.

Looking Forward

The print run for the premiere issue was 22,000, which were sent to "qualified readers" — 15,000 luxury homeowners with a minimum of a \$2 million value, 500 American Institute of Architects (AIA) registered architects in Connecticut, 750 registered builders, 2,000 "gifts" from contributors and 200 interior designers. The remaining issues are being used as inventory.

With the new distribution contract, the circulation will increase to 25,000, and Donnelly hopes the numbers will increase by 10 percent each quarter.

In addition to printed copies of the magazine, Donnelly decided to put the entire publication online. The Web site, www.themodernestate.com, which was concurrently launched with the magazine, is searchable, readable and printable.

Eventually, Donnelly hopes to add an interactive element to the Web site where the homeowner can ask a question about technology or construction, renovation or design, directly to an expert.

"One of my biggest goals," said Donnelly, "is to make the Web site a resource directory for homeowners, architects, builders and interior designers, so homeowners and professionals would turn to us as their first read, their first look, when starting a project or need advice."