

# Promoting your company's brand and values through corporate photography

by Ken Haas

Haas Editions

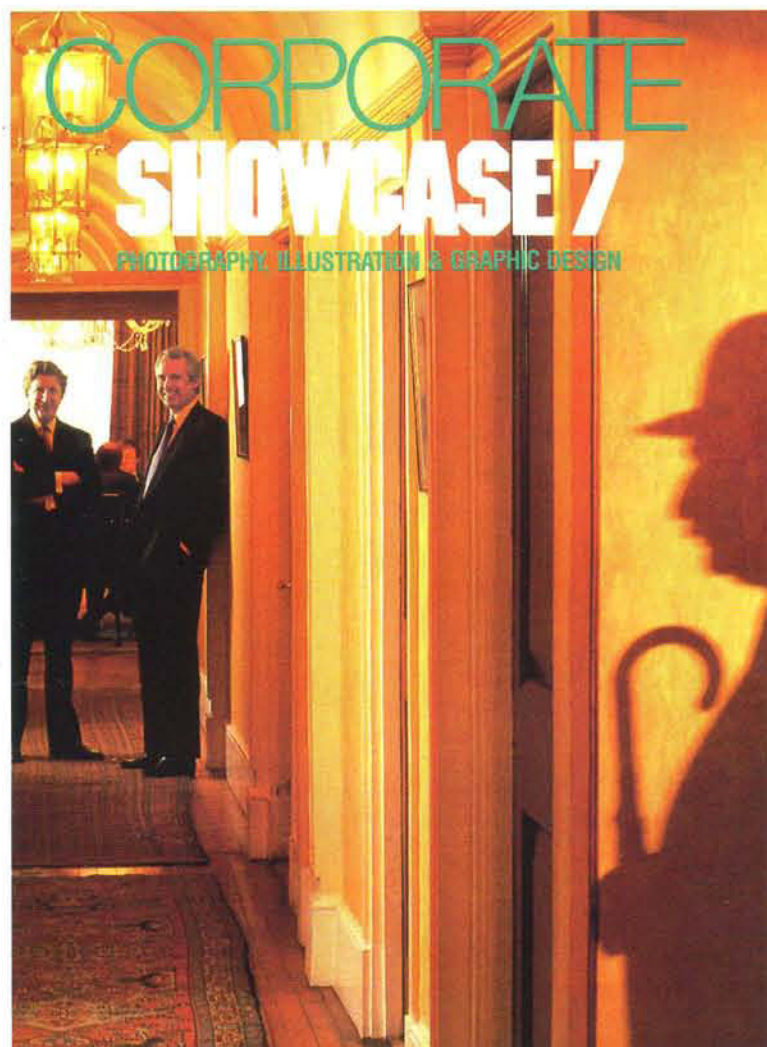
The use of sophisticated photography to tell a company's story began some 40 years ago. Enterprising graphic designers and corporate managers discovered that well-illustrated financial reports provided an opportunity to excite shareholders about the companies they owned in ways that dry figures and accounting notes alone did not.

Understandably, the first impulse was to picture the company's assets and activities. It was a natural assumption that the role of photographs in an annual report was to document the firm's latest multimillion dollar injection molding machine. Yet do shareholders and the public need to know what such a device looks like, especially when the work it performs is often hidden within? Is this piece of hardware really what a company is about?

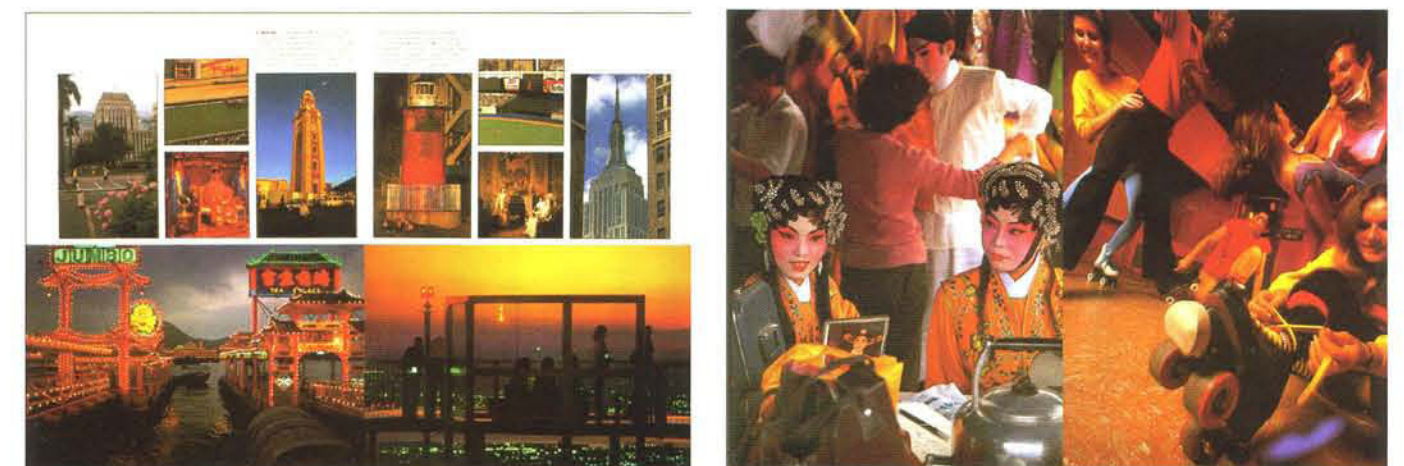
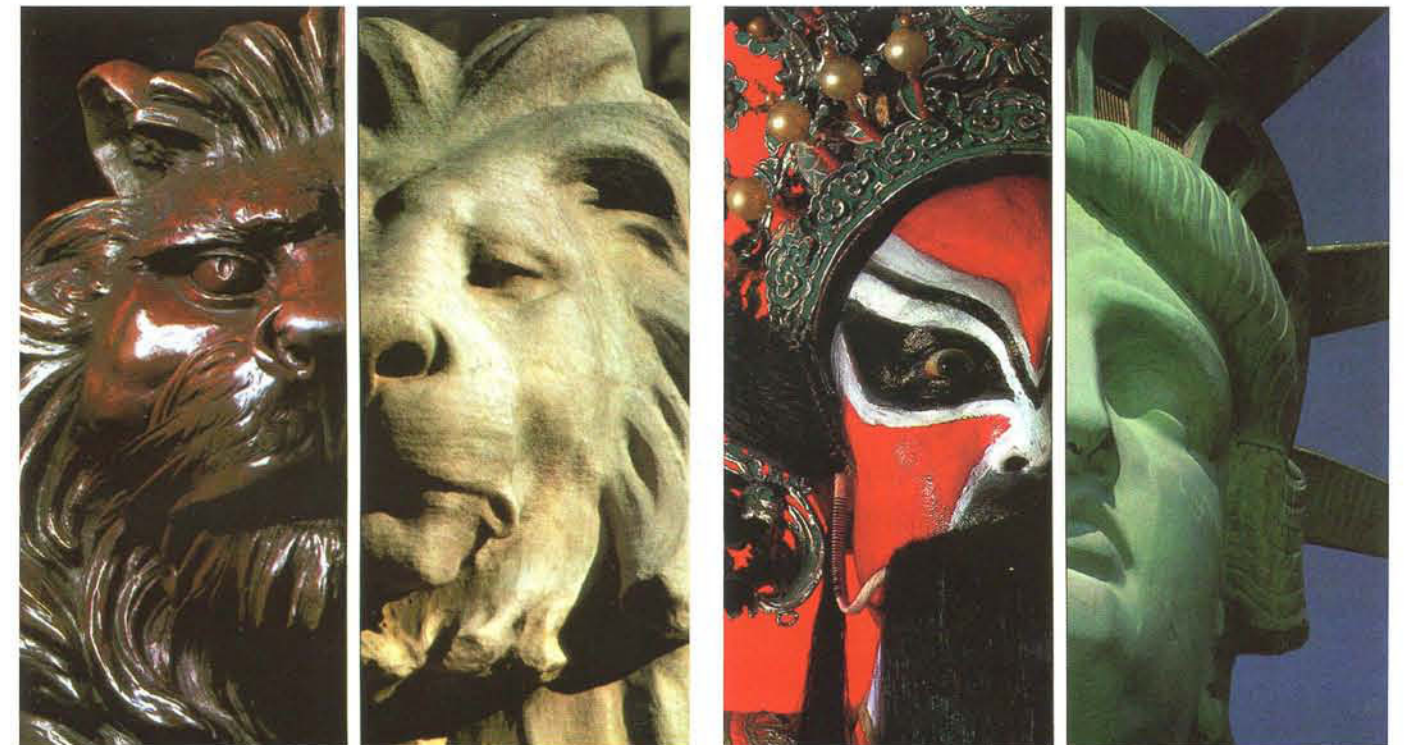
As corporate photography matured, a demand for persuasive and meaningful imagery emerged. Over 18 years, graphic designer Henry Steiner produced annual reports for HSBC that explored subjects related to the bank's growing world presence, from business customs in the countries it served to cartography in commerce. In 1980, we collaborated on a photographic essay that made a striking (and sometimes ironic) comparison of Hong Kong and New York as 'twin cities,' to celebrate the bank's 100th anniversary in America.

Today the internet, podcasting, and other electronic media expand the platform for vivid, telling imagery. Here are some tips on how to make photography a powerful tool in communicating both your management goals and your company's values:

- Define the audiences for your communication. Shareholders? Consumers? Business partners? Your employees?
- Be sure that corporate communications reinforce your comprehensive branding, marketing, and corporate identity program.
- Use photographs where they matter—to picture things that are not easy to describe.
- Be sensitive to the cultural implications of images in an increasingly global market: a pediatric nurse patting a child on the head is acceptable in the United States, for example, but touching anyone's head in Thailand is reserved only for intimate relationships.
- Choose a photographer who is not only an artist, but a diplomat and a problem solver. The photographer represents your company when working on your behalf throughout the world. At your facilities, he or she must know how to motivate your employees and how to avoid costly interruptions of your operations. Last minute changes are the norm



Citigroup Investment Bank purchased a brokerage firm in the heart of the City in London. We took a lighthearted approach to emphasize this very British acquisition (the photograph also appeared on the cover of *Corporate Showcase*, an annual devoted to corporate illustration).



A 1980 annual report for HSBC compared Hong Kong and New York as 'twin cities,' in honor of the bank's 100th anniversary in the United States.

for corporate photographers; get one who is decisive and resourceful in the face of unexpected challenges.

Think how you can express common corporate themes in a different way. I've received requests to suggest a company's presence in France, for example, by photographing its executives discussing business in front of the Eiffel Tower (which they never do, of course). I took a different approach to portray Citigroup Investment Bank's acquisition of a British brokerage firm (it also appeared on the cover of *Corporate Showcase*, an annual devoted to corporate illustration).

Illustrating how you carry out your work is relevant, whether it be manufacturing products or delivering services. But it is as compelling as demonstrating how your company influences the lives of its customers and society at large? If you're Johnson & Johnson, I believe it's less about showing how surgical tape is manufactured and more about how much healthier people feel because of your innovations.

Ken Haas has photographed for corporations such as AT&T, Bear Stearns, Citicorp, FedEx, GE, HSBC, IBM, and Merrill Lynch. He wrote the standard textbook for photogra-

phers who work internationally, *The Location Photographer's Handbook*, and is co-author of *Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace*. He is a brand and corporate identity consultant as well. Ken has photographed in Spain and the rest of Europe for many years. His most recent book was *¡Flamenco!* His next will be *Opera in Italy*. Fine art prints of his work can be seen at [www.haaseditions.com](http://www.haaseditions.com). If you have questions or comments about the article, he can be reached at (888) 557-1188, or by email at [kenhaas@haaseditions.com](mailto:kenhaas@haaseditions.com).