

'SPY' ON SI-AND TINA

During Graydon Carter's reign at *Spy* (October 1986 to July 1991), the magazine had many unflattering things to say about Tina Brown, the

"pun-obsessed staff" of "brat magazine" *Vanity Fair*, and "Condé Nast runt" Si Newhouse—the man who is now Carter's boss.

ON CONDÉ NAST

"... a corporation that knows how to treat its workers right (waiting until they are on vacation, for example, to fire them)..."

January 1990

ON SI

"Jasper Johns maniac and IRS litigant S. I. Newhouse has been able to use his enormous wealth to engineer proximity to all kinds of fascinating, soigné, really, really classy people."

April 1989

"Is Si Newhouse a shrewd publisher or a zany one, a virtuous man or a contemptible one? None of us care, as long as we feel we're inside."

June 1990

"One recent evening, after he had spent another busy, up-at-4:00-a.m. workday dismembering prestigious but unprofitable divisions of Random House, Newhouse glumly trudged over to the Metropolitan Club, where he elicited suspicious stares from the staff by wandering around the lobby for several minutes in apparent confusion. The slightly rumped, earth-tone-clad magnate finally approached an attendant, explaining that he had been invited to a party at the club... but couldn't recall what, or whom, it was for."

June 1990

"His famous aversions to leisure and interaction with other human beings notwithstanding, billionaire monopolist S. I. Newhouse Jr. does, on occasion, put on hard-soled shoes and a collared shirt [to entertain] at his private residence. At one such dinner party, Newhouse's guests fell all over one another complimenting him on the extravagance and deliciousness of the meal. Newhouse then informed the group that he had decided to send his cook back to culinary school. *Why?* his baffled guests wanted to know. *It's not that the food isn't good,* replied Newhouse, unwittingly articulating the

Knopf editor-in-chief Sonny Mehta, and *Vogue's* Anna Wintour.

"They represent international chic," the writer says. "They are people whose sense of the world is eighteen cities, not one place or tone or ethnic group. Their generation has been kept out of power for ten years by old folks. Robert Gottlieb, [former *New York Times* executive editor] A. M. Rosenthal, [Random House editorial director] Jason Epstein, [*New York Review of Books* co-editor] Robert Silvers—they're great people and they've done great work, but they've left their institutions badly attuned to contemporary circumstances."

Or, to put it more simply, in a world where Leningrad becomes St. Petersburg overnight, why can't Tina Brown edit *The New Yorker*?

NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY WHEN SI NEWHOUSE GOT THE IDEA TO juggle his editors. He isn't saying. Indeed, most people involved—writers and editors who don't want to risk anything in

credo of his magazine empire, it's the presentation that needs work."

December 1990

ON VANITY FAIR

"*Vanity Fair* is a pioneer in the field of advertiser promotion... Last May, *Vanity Fair* dou-

bles on offering chummy, pointlessly inside accounts of life as it is lived by the stars (journalist has lunch with star, journalist goes shopping with star, journalist wipes star's nose after a teary confession, they bond)—have found themselves over a barrel: in order to win the stars' necessary cooperation, the magazines have been obliged to cede editorial control to the very people on whom they are supposed to be reporting." *Spy* then reprinted Tina Brown's famously fawning letter to Creative Artists Agency head Mike Ovitz (amply annotated in the magazine) that begged him "to cooperate with a major profile." "*Vanity Fair's* de facto Hollywood bureau chief" turned her down.

August 1990

ON TINA BROWN

"Tina Brown heralds *Vanity Fair's* arrival [in her monthly editor's notes] with Sacher torte prose—her favorite words are *rich* and *richly*—and soufflé sensibility. Brown's confections are eagerly awaited at Condé Nast, where her monthly preening provokes hoots of laughter."

March 1987

"In January, Brown changed her Editor's Letter photo to reflect her recent weight change. The old head-on one was dignified and attractive. The new one, a three-quarter profile shot, shows Brown looking all morning-after and tousle-haired and, curiously, serves only to highlight her nose, a proboscis that photographs much larger than it actually is."

April 1987

"He was the rakish editor of London's *Sunday Times*. ... She was a bright, bosomy Oxford coed with a facility for cultivating close friendships with influential older men in the publishing world. At age 22 she had camped outside [Harry] Evans's office door, groupie-style, and hadn't budged until he'd agreed to see her. Four years later, Evans divorced his wife and married Brown."

April 1990

an already risky media world—wouldn't talk on the record. But one thing quickly became clear. With his usual boldness (and a bit more finesse than he's typically exhibited), Newhouse has rendered their professional maps instantly obsolete.

In a conversation with me about *Vogue* in April, Newhouse spoke at length about running his magazines. "Nothing is ever sudden, but every change appears abrupt," he said, choosing each word slowly. "A magazine exists in many different worlds and has to function in these different worlds... creative, artists and contributors, circulation, advertising, and competition are all part of what's going on... and when you sense a weakening in a magazine, you try to correct the problem. And if you can't and the problem starts to spill over and affect many different areas, pretty soon, or whenever you are able to think about it in an orderly way, if it gets to be a really bad situation and no other solution seems to work, then you make a change at the top."

By all accounts, Newhouse was knee-deep in just such a situa-



A 'SPY' DART FROM THE CAREFREE CARTER YEARS.

bled its usual quota of half a dozen monthly Calvin Klein ads by publishing a billet-doux of its own to him and his young, very loving bride, Kelly Rector, written by André Leon Talley—six and a half pages of gushy promotional copy that curiously ended up as a cover story. This from a magazine that promises potential advertisers' articles... reflect[ing] an other than obvious approach."

December 1987

"The magazine... has an almost fetishistic dedication to printing disturbing photos of Helmut Newton's wife's breasts."

December 1987

"In *Vanity Fair* it's sometimes difficult to tell who is slurping whom."

December 1988

"Certain glossy magazines—which pride them-