EBULLIENT YEREVAN SHOWCASES ARMENIANS

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Magazine review by Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 1 September 2012

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YEREVAN pitches high-end—also known as “carriage trade” in the magazine industry. Seventeen percent of the glamorous, effervescent magazine’s readers earn a minimum of $250,000; 63% earn between $100,000 and $250,000, says the publisher. The magazine is a sister publication of the Russian and Armenian versions which bear the same name. The English version is published by Ethnopress USA.

Although I am not familiar with all the Armenian magazines published around the globe, I would go on a limb and say YEREVAN is at the top of the heap. It’s a luxurious package which is hard to match in quality and quantity (pages).

While the magazine covers a broad range of topics (all with an Armenian angle), its main thrust is the uplifting personality profile: the leaders, innovators and newsmakers of the nation and the community. As much as two-thirds of the content is about successful Armenians—contemporary and in the past, in California, in the United States, in Armenia and elsewhere.

A high percentage of the people featured are artists, entertainers and creative people. This is understandable: people are always interested in successful entertainers and artists, Armenians are

naturally interested in successful Armenian artists, entertainers and creative people. The other reason for the profusion of profiles of Armenian artists is perhaps because we traditionally excel in the arts.

The magazine hails well-known artists (painter Aivazovsky to film director Henri Verneuil) and up-and-coming creative people such as Hollywood actress Anne Bedian. YEREVAN even goes back millennia to dig the history of King Ardavazt II (son of Tigran the Great) who was a dramatist, poet and historian. Another pleasure of these profiles is the discovery of unknown Armenians such as film editor Glenn Farr ("The Right Stuff") and comic-book illustrator/modernist Arthur Pinajian.

YEREVAN's Russian-language version was launched in Moscow in 2005. Three years later came the English version, first as a quarterly and since 2011 as bi-monthly. There's an Armenian version in Armenia and an electronic version in French. The company plans to launch Arabic and Spanish versions. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, some 60,000 Armenians have settled in Spain. As well, of course, there are large Armenian communities in Argentina and Uruguay.

Along with the profiles, YEREVAN publishes articles on science/technology, business, sports, history, fashion, travel… covering most of the bases for a leisure magazine. It fact, it has three travel sections: journeys in Armenia; mini-stories about popular destinations around the world; and full-scale travel pieces about famous international tourist sites. But whether the destination is Rio, Monaco or Chicago, the writers always find reason to introduce an Armenian angle into the story. The magazine has a large roster of columns—from events to food (recipe for khoshaf, ishli kufta, dolma, etc.).

The magazine has no political content—Armenian or international. However, its inclination is predictably for free enterprise, individualism, the accessibility of the yellow brick road and the "American Dream"—financial, spiritual or creative. The closest it comes to addressing issues is the two-page Forum where people—Armenian and odar—are asked their opinion on topics of universal interest ("individualism versus collectivism" in April/May 2012.) In the past year the only political content was one-page coverage of the Armenian National Committee's Western Region's inaugural Grass Roots meeting. The gathering was about formulating a new course for the advocacy of the Armenian Cause.

YEREVAN also covers charitable topics such as the Armenian Children's Fund and Armenia Tree Project. Each issue has a theme. In the past year sports, business, and a celebration of the night, film makers, and the automobile have been the themes.

There's much to like in YEREVAN. Ironically, one short-coming is the length of certain articles which go on and on. A travel piece on Lor, Armenia gets 12 pages, the one about Cilicia—the ship which sailed around the world—gets 10 pages. A profile of a California restaurateur-club owner covers eight pages. Also, too many of the profiles are in the question-and-answer format. One suspects the questions are emailed to the subject who then polishes his reply after careful deliberation. This

might be an efficient method to produce a profile, but lacks authenticity and spontaneity. As well, the carefully-crafted replies can be self-aggrandizing. Some of the column names are ambiguous, interchangeable and perhaps arbitrary. We are referring to Ambiance, Legacy, Autograph, Nation, and Gallery.

But the above are minor quibbles for a magazine which lifts the soul of the Armenian reader. As the publisher says, YEREVAN wants to engage, educate, entertain and empower the reader.

One of the more interesting columns is "Alphabet". It's about the history and design of our glorious alphabet. The June/July issue had reached the letter "ts" (Ձ/ձ). There are still 21 letters to go before the series is completed.

YEREVAN has attracted major advertisers (MGM Resorts, Armavia, Marriott Hotels, Ararat Brandy) in addition to California businesses (legal, real estate, clubs etc.) often owned/managed by Armenians. Talking about advertising, the editors (apparently always in a reader-friendly mood) have grouped the ads at the beginning and at the end of the magazine, thus the reader is offered a seamless editorial continuity, without the annoying "turn to page XYZ" guide. Advertorials (some magazines make no effort to differentiate--typographically or in layout—editorials from advertising) are clearly identified as such. And in keeping with the editorial generosity, YEREVAN dedicates three full pages to its contents page—even the highly lucrative "Vanity Fair" limits itself to two pages.

YEREVAN is professionally written and edited, although there's the occasional misspelling or typo. But in light of its profligate pluses, these are mere cavils.

Finally, you learn many unknown and hard-to-come-by facts: Russian ballet diva Tamara Toumanova was Armenian; filmmaker Henri Verneuil's children reverted to their Malakyan family name, Google has 14,000 articles on Armenians… Well done, YEREVAN.