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Crafters Reflect on the Closure of Martha Stewart Living Magazine

by Clark Tate | Nov 20, 2022

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The announcement in June that Martha Stewart Living was shuttering has many crafters reflecting on the magazine's impact on their creative life.

“I love physical magazines,” Rachel Mae Smith of The Crafted Life says. “There’s something so lovely about flipping through pages, or tearing out inspiration or a recipe.” Many of us can relate, finding joy in the carefully curated scenes and aspirational tips and tricks that magazines compile. Sadly, the days of the thick print magazine feel numbered. This past June, another giant joined the long list of publications no longer in print, *Martha Stewart Living*.

The magazine debuted in the winter of 1990 as a holiday issue. Martha Stewart Weddings had already launched as an annual publication in 1994, and Martha Stewart’s Everyday line of goods in Kmart debuted in 1997. For a time, the brand felt unstoppable. Martha Stewart Kids ran from 2001 to 2006, and in 2003 Martha Stewart’s company published the first issue of Everyday Food Magazine. In 2007, the Martha Stewart Crafts line launched at Michael’s and *Martha Stewart’s Encyclopedia*

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the mail. When October arrived, something felt off. Cerruti, who grew up in what she describes as a Halloween household and looked forward to the fresh round of spooky crafts and recipes from the magazine every year, wondered where the issue was.

“I realized I hadn’t seen it,” says Cerruti. Afraid that her subscription had lapsed, she looked for it in stores. It wasn’t there either. So she asked Google and learned that the last physical Martha Stewart Living Magazine was printed in May. “I was just honestly shocked.” She’s not the only one.

As of 2021, the magazine still had over 2 million subscribers, [according to the Des Moines Register](#). Rebecca Ringquist, an artist and the owner of Dropcloth Sampler, has been one of them since high school. She also recorded Stewart’s show on VHS every day.

“I’d come home from school and watch it and learn how to make perfect chicken stock and how to make my bed,” says Ringquist. “I just I love Martha Stewart, and I loved that magazine.”

“It feels like the end of an era,” said both Ringquist and Cerruti on separate phone calls.

The Magazine as Craft Material

For many in the craft community, the pages of Martha Stewart Living proved to be not just instructional, but also inspirational. Tearing them out and putting them on your bulletin board was Pinterest before Pinterest.

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Sugared egg and violets cover for Martha Stewart Living Magazine in April of 1997.

Credit: Gently and Hyers

“As a consumer, as somebody who loves those little snippets of daily wisdom or

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Artist [Lisa Solomon](#) also mourns the loss of the physical pages. “I’d be lying if I didn’t say a part of me is really sad,” she says. “Because I feel like we’re losing so many tangible things. There’s something beautiful about turning pages and tearing things out.”

Sure, you can vision board digitally says Tan, but it’s not the same, especially for an artist and author who got her start scrapbooking. “I think there’s a different beauty that unlocks in us when we have something physical to hold in our hands.” Tan has a special tie to Martha Stewart Living because she was interviewed for an article that appeared in its pages. She likes the idea that the article, which is about preserving memories, is a physical artifact. As magazine’s like Living fade out, Tan fills the void by clipping images from catalogs, mailers, and travel brochures. She likes the brochures best, since they’re inherently aspirational.

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The Magazine as Craft Instruction

Living really raised the bar when it comes to craft projects. “Martha will forever be a crafting legend and she really has inspired generations of makers, myself included,” says Rachel Mae Smith of the craft and lifestyle blog [The Crafted Life](#).

“She gave us proof that you don't have to buy new to have something pretty, that making it can look polished and professional.”

From the crafts to the photographs to the styling, the magazine was a consistent source of inspiration for Smith and her business. “I loved seeing how the magazine covered holidays, Valentine’s Day and Christmas in particular. Somehow, year after year, they always delivered interesting and new ideas,” she says. “You can tell a project is from Martha Stewart just based on the photography alone. That’s something that I strive for.”

Tan feels like the magazine’s DIY crafts always balanced a feeling of accessibility and aspiration. “They had a great way of making the DIY feel like you could actually do it right. They empowered you.” Tan especially appreciated Stewart’s line of craft supplies and paints at Michaels, which helped her find the right supplies for a project. It was “coincidence or kismet” that Tan had her own line of crafting supplies around the same time with [American Crafts](#).

For Cerruti at Creativebug, the tutorials featured in Living went above and beyond anything she’d seen elsewhere. “I don’t know, who else would spend the time and the energy to service these kinds of craft tutorials, with the attention to detail and design,” says Cerruti. “Their approach to the content was much more comprehensive. There used to be, like, a six page article on basket weaving or something. I mean, nobody’s doing that now. It’s like a 10 second video that’s been

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doing it. Nobody was doing that,” says Solomon. “So I think that’s why a lot of people in my age group, like I’ve talked to other people, and we’re always like, ‘we secretly like Martha Stewart.’”

“She’s definitely in my life,” Solomon says, “whether I like it or not. Every time I make stuffing, it’s basically her recipe that I’ve, you know, changed a little bit over the years, but it came from her.”

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Cranberry wreath cover for Martha Stewart Living Magazine in December of 1995.

Credit: William Abranowicz

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Spring tulips on an iron tree stand cover for Martha Stewart Living Magazine in March of 2018.

Credit: José Picayo

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A Crafting Legacy

Martha Stewart Living wasn't afraid to revive old-fashioned crafts, showing them in modern colors with beautiful photography in a way that was instantly appealing to modern readers.

"I feel like she was so sort of revolutionary in the craft world, bringing historic craft to the forefront and getting the average artist or homemaker interested in these specific crafting tools, history, methodologies," says Cerruti.

Cerruti still has a backlog of holiday issues that she references for inspiration. "I think they were very thorough in telling the story of more traditional American craft." Solomon has saved old issues, too, "I still have a stack of them in my studio. I can't get rid of them. I just can't. And it is fun sometimes to be like, 'Oh, what did Martha do for Halloween in whatever year?' And it's still relevant. I think it's still good."

Cerruti doesn't see anyone else coming in to fill the void and is sad to lose that resource, for good. "I guess the secondary level of disappointment was that Martha Stewart doesn't have an online archive of the magazine," she says. "How come the Smithsonian doesn't have this? How come this doesn't exist as a digital archive somewhere?"

"I personally would pay a monthly subscription to have access to her digital archive of magazines," says Cerruti. "I'm just super surprised that it doesn't exist." Cerruti

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decommissioned them. “There are not a lot of online resources for those in archives,” she says. “And so you have to go hunt them down.”

“I think crafting and food especially are, in so many ways, something that people connect across generations, across cultures, through families and Martha Stewart’s magazines facilitated part of that or highlighted part of that. That not being done any more, that’s sad.”

says Cerruti.

So far, it’s not clear if Dashdot Meredith, the media company that [purchased the magazine’s brand](#) in 2014, will continue Stewart’s crafting legacy. Moving forward, they plan to focus on promoting MarthaStewart.com, according to [the Register](#). Then there is Martha.com, which features a flip-through digital magazine experience with its [2022 Holiday Guide](#). It includes links to a few detailed recipes, but no detectable crafts. What it does do is conveniently link featured products to the online store, quickening the connection between inspiration and commerce.

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Stewart's unapologetic appreciation of beauty that made her relatable.

Photo credit: Douglas Friedman

On Martha

“In terms of Martha,” says Solomon. “I was always in awe of her and her team and

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But to Solomon, it was Stewart's unapologetic appreciation of beauty that made her relatable. "I think the thing that was so resonant with me was that she was kind of no holds barred about how challenging some of this stuff could be, and about her aesthetic taste," Solomon explains. "So it was like, this is what I like, this is why I like it. This is important, because aesthetics are important," says Solomon. "I think that's really valuable."

"You know, women's work has always been sort of pushed back," says Cerruti. Martha's work elevated much of the care that goes into creating a lovely home, holiday ceremonies, and nourishing food. She respected and honored our homes and the people, mostly women, who labor there. "I appreciate the fact that she had very strong opinions was not afraid to say what they were," Solomon says. "And that kind of permission is great, right? It's really freeing."

**November 24, 2022: We've corrected the date of the first publication of Martha Stewart Living to 1990.*



Clark Tate

contributor

Clark Tate is a freelance writer and lifelong knitter. After graduating from never-ending scarves to more complex projects, Clark also graduated with a Master's in Environmental Science. She then worked as a restoration ecologist for six years, before moving on to an obsession with braided hats and writing articles about people and the environments they live in. She's written for Hakai Magazine, Summit Daily News, Salt Lake City Weekly, and [GearLab.com](https://gearlab.com). You can find further examples of her work at lclarktate.com.

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10 Comments



Elaine Wolf on November 22, 2022 at 10:03 am

I have issues full years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 & various months through 2013 – if you know of anyone who might be interested. Any help would be appreciated – thanks.

[Reply.](#)



Felicity More on November 27, 2022 at 2:15 am

@Elaine Wolf. I am interested in your back issues, you can contact me at felicity.more@gmail.com

[Reply.](#)



Christina on November 23, 2022 at 12:13 pm

This article says “The magazine debuted in the winter of 2000 as a holiday issue,” but the photos show magazine covers from well before that date. I think that should say “1990” not “2000.” I subscribed for many years and I always found the recipes reliable and the overall art production first rate. A website is just not the same as a physical magazine.

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I might be interested. Please email me at jlutz01s@gmail.com

Thank you!

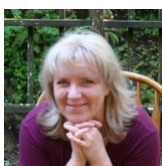
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Janet Perry on November 23, 2022 at 2:44 pm

I dropped my subscription shortly after Meredith bought it. Why? Because that company has a long history of running into the ground magazines it buys. I'm just surprised it took 8 years

[Reply.](#)



Sherri Goodman on November 23, 2022 at 6:41 pm

I also have multi-years of issues I'd collected. I always looked forward to the Halloween and Holiday issues. The article on creating Madeleines was really great and helped me understand my great grandmother's cookie recipe...which I adapted the Madeleine techniques so we get soft fluffy cookies instead of hockey pucks. 😊

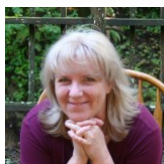
I'm moving now and do need to get rid of the past magazine issues. I'd be happy to hand these off to someone who wants them. I think I have 4-6 boxes full in my garage. **Deadline is December 30, 2022**. Let me know if you want them. I'm in Northern California if you want to drive to get them... probably too expensive to ship, but could arrange if you really want.

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candi jensen on November 23, 2022 at 9:05 pm

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Sherri Goodman on November 24, 2022 at 2:02 am

Hi Candi – I’m in Santa Cruz. Here’s my email:
sherri@goodman-graphics.com – let me know if you
want to trek down the coast to get them. 😊

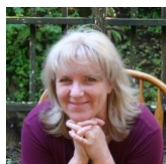
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Shari James on November 23, 2022 at 10:01 pm

I too am in Northern California in Lake County. Sherry Goodman are
you near here? I am interested!

[Reply.](#)



Sherri Goodman on November 24, 2022 at 2:09 am

Hi Shari,

Looks like Candi has first dibs, but if she’s not interested after
all, you’d be next in line. I’m in Santa Cruz. I know that’s a
about a 5 hour trek from Lake County. Can keep in touch –
email me: sherri@goodman-graphics.com

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