

## Cover story

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, but when that picture appears on the front cover of a scientific journal, that estimate is probably a little on the low side.

Having a paper accepted for publication in a reputable journal brings with it a certain number of emotions — most of which are usually positive — but having your work chosen to adorn perhaps the most hallowed piece of real estate in the printed product can be more than just the icing on the cake.

Journal covers provide a convenient focal point for the content that lies inside them and are often used in marketing campaigns — whether in simple adverts, or as posters and calendars. It is not only the publisher that benefits, however, and it is quite common to see journal covers feature prominently on slides during talks or on the walls of offices and corridors in academic institutions. They are a source of pride and may also offer increased exposure to a group of researchers and their work.

Although the era of print might be drawing to a close, the idea of collating articles into manageable portions — whether linked in time or by subject area — is one that may persist for some time. And for as long as it does, there will be a case for grouping such collections

together under a banner of some sort; one that will undoubtedly draw on artwork associated with its content. Paper journals may disappear, but the concept of a cover may not.

Chemistry is, for the most part, quite a visual subject. For example, the language of organic chemists is essentially one of specialized hieroglyphs that would appear somewhat alien to non-chemists; lots of lines — some straight, some wiggly, some curved, some dashed, some wider at one end than the other — drawn at different angles to one another with familiar characters interspersed among them. Beyond that, much of chemistry is concerned with structure, and what better way to describe structure than to show a picture of it? The two interpenetrating face-centred cubic lattices in the structure of sodium chloride can be explained in words, but a picture is much simpler, and probably easier to grasp. Chemistry lends itself well to the production of striking images.

At *Nature Chemistry*, the cover image of a particular issue is generally one of the last few items to be finalized before we go to press. Once we have decided on which articles will go into an issue, we take a closer look at the suggestions sent to us by their authors. Although we do applaud the optimism and/or confidence of those who submit cover art at the time of initial submission of a manuscript, we generally encourage authors to supply us with cover suggestions once we know that their paper will be accepted for publication.

Beauty is, of course, in the eye of the beholder, and what may look like a stunning piece of creative artistry to one individual, might not make others feel the same way. What counts at *Nature Chemistry* is that you impress the editorial and production teams, who all get to have their say — and, in particular, the art editor. It's often best to keep things simple and we encourage those in a position to submit cover art

suggestions to look at the sort of images that we've featured in the past.

Throwing together composite images with lots of different objects styled in different ways on a somewhat arbitrary background just doesn't do it for us. Send us striking images, with no *Nature Chemistry* logo and no cover lines.

While we're on the topic of arbitrary backgrounds, here are a few pointers for what not to do for *Nature Chemistry* covers. Shimmering oceans, rippling pools, starry skies, breathtaking sunsets and other equally romantic visions are lovely, but please refrain from putting this type of imagery in the background of your cover suggestion unless you have a really good reason to do so — such as it being directly related to your work somehow. The one that often baffles, however, is the humble chessboard. Do images look better when placed on a reflective surface of alternating dark and light squares arranged in a grid? There could well be a very interesting and fundamental psychological reason for this, but don't expect to see a chessboard on the cover of this journal any time soon!

Once the cover image is decided, the final step of the process involves the editorial team thinking up some occasionally witty, but always informative, cover lines that will hopefully grab the readers' attention. Occasionally the lines are obvious, others come in a flash of inspiration, and some are a challenge that turns into a lengthy chore that frustrates for hours or days. As with the artwork itself, some turn out to be better than others. Finally, a brief description of the cover art is written by the editor handling the paper that triumphed in the battle to be on the cover, and this finds its way on to the table of contents.

Finally, we'd just like to note that we do not charge for cover images, and nor do we ask for a contribution towards the cost of the cover. Images are chosen for their aesthetic appeal and not on whether an author can afford to pay — after all, we need to put something on the outside cover of the journal! Similarly, the choice to feature a particular article on the cover of the journal does not imply that we think it is better than the other papers in the issue — we believe everything we publish to be outstanding! It really does come down to what we judge to be the most striking image. □

