



# Patrick McCarthy Dies at 67; Ran a Fashion Publishing Empire

Patrick McCarthy, chairman and editorial director of Fairchild Publications, at a fashion show in New York in 2006. “Patrick always seemed to have a cool head,” Anna Wintour said. Peter Kramer/Getty Images

By [Richard Sandomir](#)

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Patrick McCarthy, who spent his entire glamorous reporting and editing career at the Fairchild media company — known for the fashion industry bible Women’s Wear Daily and W magazine — and who succeeded his mentor, John Fairchild, as its chairman and editorial director, died on Sunday in Manhattan. He was 67.

Anne Marie Gustin, his sister and only survivor, confirmed the death but gave no cause.

Impeccably dressed in Armani suits, Mr. McCarthy successfully led the company for 13 years without being as famously [irascible and capricious](#) as Mr. Fairchild, whose family had founded the business. Where Mr. Fairchild had feuded with designers, Mr. McCarthy was calmer.

But he shared his patron’s competitive fire — especially if WWD did not get a story first. And he did not shrink from criticizing people in the industry.

“I will kill for a story, and if I don’t have it, I will get angry,” Mr. McCarthy said in a [profile of him](#) in New York magazine in 1997. He conceded that he could be arbitrary in punishing designers, big and small.

“Bite the hand that feeds you,” he said, perhaps impishly. “Never stop biting it. And you know what? It will feed you more.”

Nonetheless, Michael Gross, who wrote the New York article, said that Mr. McCarthy’s anger had less bite and was more subtle than Mr. Fairchild’s.

“He made WWD kinder and gentler,” Mr. Gross said in a telephone interview, adding that Mr. McCarthy “ran the pre-eminent outlet for fashion news, inheriting it from a founder who was profoundly controversial and kept the boat steady when that founder departed.”

Mr. McCarthy was a stylish writer who knew little about fashion when he started reporting for WWD from London in the late 1970s.

But he adapted. He impressed Mr. Fairchild with a cover story about the London socialite [Lady Diana Cooper](#), which led soon to his appointment as Paris bureau chief in 1980. He got to know designers like Karl Lagerfeld ([who died on Feb. 19](#)) and Claude Montana, dived into the city’s social whirl and covered the industry with assurance, pungency and a greater sense of fairness

than the disputatious Mr. Fairchild had exhibited.

“Patrick was a real newsman who had a tremendous sense of the cultural moment,” [Bridget Foley](#), the executive editor of WWD, said in a telephone interview. “He understood and knew fashion, but I never got the impression that he *loved* fashion. He was more interested in its role in the culture. I never saw him swoon over a dress. He’d make fun of fashion intellectuals who swooned.”

Issues of Fairchild’s flagship publications, WWD and W, in 2010. Mr. McCarthy was named editor and then executive editor of both before becoming an executive vice president of the parent company. *Patricia Wall/The New York Times*

Patrick Joseph McCarthy III was born on June 6, 1951, in Boston to Patrick Jr. and Katharine (Ellis) McCarthy. After receiving a bachelor’s degree from Boston University, where he studied history, and traveling around Europe, he earned a master’s in journalism at Stanford University.

“I’ve always been serious,” he told New York in the 1997 article. “I mean, one frolics, but I’ve always been work-oriented; I get defined by my work. I probably think about work more than anything else in my life. I was goal-oriented when I was 10.”

His first job at Fairchild Publications had little or no connection to fashion. Reporting for the Fairchild News Service from Washington, he covered legislation and regulation for Fairchild trade publications that covered the supermarket, electronic and energy industries. But eager to return to Europe, he was transferred to the London bureau, where he wrote about fashion for WWD.

“I’ve never been to a fashion show!” he recalled telling Etta Froio, WWD’s fashion editor. “I don’t know what to do.”

As Paris bureau chief, he became Mr. Fairchild’s regular companion at fashion shows and dinners. Mr. McCarthy ordered duck so often that Mr. Fairchild once sent him a live duck at the WWD office, [his obituary in WWD](#) said.

With Mr. Fairchild’s blessing, Mr. McCarthy rose quickly at the publishing company. He was named editor of WWD and W in 1985, executive editor of both publications in 1988 and executive vice president, editorial, of Fairchild Publications in 1992.

One of his signature achievements as executive vice president was his 1993 makeover of W, transforming it from a broadsheet newspaper into a glossy, celebrity-focused magazine.

“People couldn’t tell if W was a newspaper or a magazine, and it was confusing at the newsstand for some people,” Mr. McCarthy told The New York Times in 1993. “We came out every two weeks and didn’t fit into anything else they had in the category.”

And when Mr. Fairchild retired in 1997, Mr. McCarthy replaced him. [Mr. Fairchild died](#) in 2015 at 87.

“Watching him from the outside,” [Anna Wintour, the editor in chief of Vogue](#), said by telephone, “Patrick always seemed to have a cool head. John was so close to the fashion world, while Patrick was able to step back a little bit more.”

Mr. McCarthy retired in 2010 when Condé Nast, the Fairchild group’s owner, moved W to its consumer magazine group. In 2014, Penske Media acquired Fairchild (which included WWD and Footwear News) for about \$100 million.

At their last dinner together, about a year ago, Ms. Foley was taken aback when Mr. McCarthy met her dressed in a polo shirt and khaki pants.

“I think of Patrick being born in a suit,” she said. “It showed how much he was enjoying retirement.”

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