

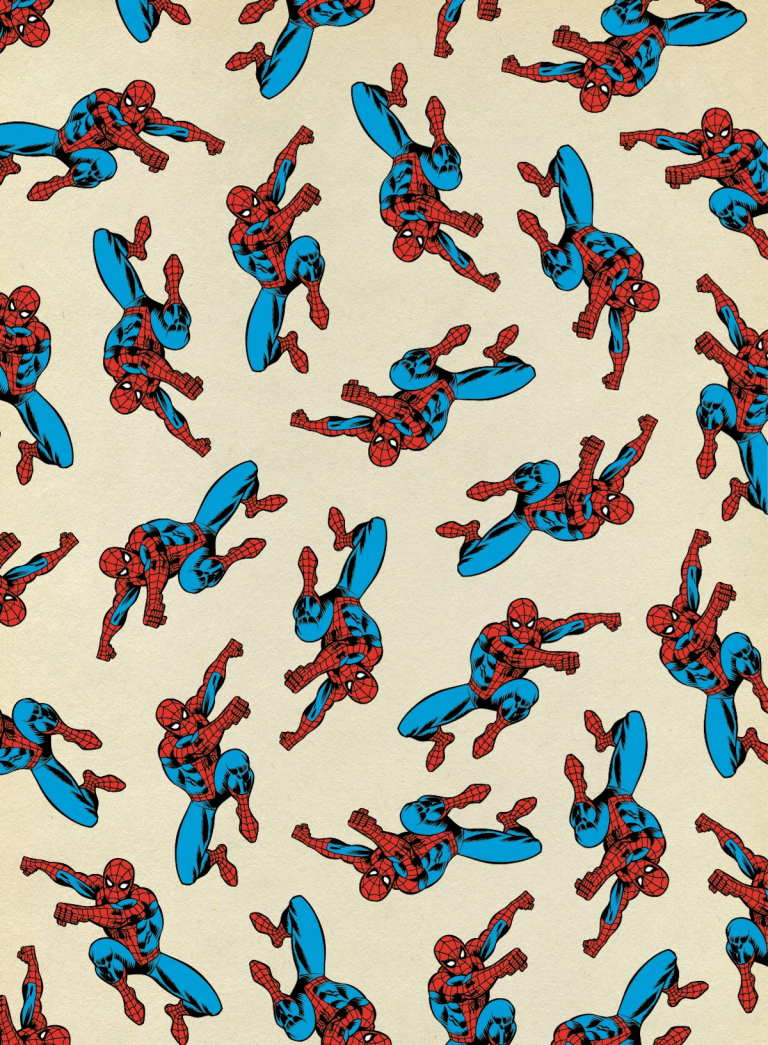


MARVEL

SPIDER-MAN MUSEUM

THE STORY OF A
COMIC BOOK ICON





SPIDER-MAN MUSEUM

SECTION 2

GREAT POWERS



Creator Spotlight: John Romita Sr and John Romita Jr

Peter Parker's Home Life

Friendly Neighbourhood Spider-Man

Spider-Man's Relationships

The Daily Bugle

CREATOR SPOTLIGHT:

JOHN ROMITA SR AND JOHN ROMITA JR

If there's one name that has become synonymous with Spider-Man's art, it's Romita. Starting with *Amazing Spider-Man* #38 in 1966, John Romita Sr was responsible for shaping the look of a whole generation of Marvel comics. As Stan Lee put it at the time, "John Romita Sr is certifiably as talented and legendary as any creative genius who ever left a giant imprint in the hallowed halls of Marvel!"⁴ His son, John Romita Jr, started working in comics in 1977, with his first story in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #11, and has been an industry-changing force in comics ever since, revolutionising the look of Spider-Man again and again.

Taking over the reins of *Amazing Spider-Man* from Steve Ditko was a daunting prospect, but Romita Sr slowly built in his own art style over the issues, continuing to shape Peter Parker's world. The key to his success was his storytelling, imbuing every story with the drama, pathos and emotion that made Spider-Man a hit. "I told the story the way [Stan] liked it," remembered Romita Sr. "We saw eye to eye on that. Where the stories come first, the characters come first. Not the artwork. [...] My philosophy is that when the artwork gets to be too obvious, and it's done for sensationalism... when it starts to become more important than the story, you're really defeating yourself."⁵

"The characters we rolled out during my years on *Amazing Spider-Man* were my

pride and joy," said Romita Sr. "Stan would leave an index card tacked to my board before each plotting meeting with a name on it... no description or powers... just names such as 'Shocker', 'Rhino', 'the Kingpin', 'the Prowler' and others over the years. He let the names evoke their distinct abilities and behaviours."⁶

Romita Jr was always aware of his father's connection to Spider-Man. "Ever since my father told my brother and me that Spider-Man/Peter Parker lived close to our home in Queens, NYC, we were hooked!" he explains. "We talked Spider-Man on long drives to family get-togethers, and it was as if we had an extra family member!"⁷

Romita Jr brought a breath of fresh air to Spider-Man, with his unparalleled skill in composition and pacing. His Spider-Man stories are brilliantly dynamic and visually impactful, giving the wall crawler levels of energy never before seen. Romita Jr remembers the pressure of following such hallowed footsteps. "As luck would also have it, I was able to watch the greatest Spider-Man artist, my father, John, work with the greatest Spider-Man writer, Stan, on the greatest character of all time. Fortunately, after joining the comic book universe, I was given a chance to work on this great character, the *Amazing Spider-Man*. I was terrified! How do I follow my father? How do I follow any of the previous Spidey artists? I had no idea, but I stuck it out and got lucky!"⁸

KEY TO PLATE

1: Sketch of Mary Jane Watson

The first ever sketch of Mary Jane Watson by John Romita Sr.

3: *Amazing Spider-Man* Annual #5

Artist Marie Peverin poses playful fun at the work-practices of Stan Lee, John Romita and Stan's brother Larry Lieber.

4: *ASM Annual* #5

The creators having a friendly disagreement!

2: *Marvel Age* #111

Marvel's magazine celebrates the impact of John Romita Sr.



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PETER PARKER'S HOME LIFE

Part of the enduring appeal of Spider-Man is the everyman nature of Peter Parker. Readers find it easy to empathise with this regular Joe who just can't seem to catch a break. Stan Lee would shrewdly later comment, "You can practically measure a hero's popularity by the amount of trouble he manages to get himself into." Peter Parker wasn't a millionaire playboy, a strapping super soldier or a Norse God of Thunder, he was a gawky teenager from Queens who was ostracised by his peers. While the Fantastic Four were wrestling with world-devouring monsters from the Negative Zone, Peter was asking girls out for dates and being rejected. Stan knew exactly what he was doing, describing him in his first appearance as "The World's most amazing teenager Spider-Man, the super hero who could be you!"

A sadness haunts Peter – his story hints at tragedy before it even starts. He lives with his Uncle Ben and Aunt May, not his parents, implying that a catastrophe has taken place before we've even met Peter. His parents, Richard and Mary Parker, would not be discussed until 1968's *Spider-Man Annual #5*. Peter's suburban home in Queens is modest and unassuming, clearly influenced by Steve Ditko's midwestern upbringing. In fact, many of the vistas, scenes and buildings (including Peter's Midtown High School), are referenced from Steve's hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

The supporting cast of characters were types that would be well known to Spider-Man's teenage audience. The awkward Peter is mocked by jocks, rejected by girls and laughed at by his classmates. Many of Peter's classmates became permanent fixtures within expanding and evolving narratives. Decades later, high school bully Flash Thompson became Spider-Man's ally, Agent Anti-Venom, a super soldier with a symbiotic alien suit. Thwarted love interest Liz Allan married Peter's college friend Harry Osborn and later became CEO of megacorporation Alchemax.

Peter is happiest when he is with his aunt and uncle who dote on him. We are told that his Uncle Ben "thought he was a pretty special lad", while Aunt May "thought the sun rose and set upon her nephew". When disaster strikes and Uncle Ben is killed by a robber, it hits the reader so much harder because we know that this is the only part of Peter's life where he was truly content.

Peter's life after Uncle Ben's death is a complicated web of tangled responsibilities, one that would be very relatable to Spider-Man's audience. Peter is worried about affording medicine for his sickly Aunt May, frets about his schoolwork and shies away from social engagements with his classmates – all of this before he even starts thinking about his super hero secret identity.



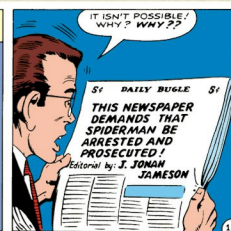
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KEY TO PLATE

1: *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1*
A typical scene in Peter Parker's science class

2: *ASM Annual #1*
Peter's house, located on a quiet street in the Forest Hills section of New York, where he lives with his doting Aunt May.

3: *The ASM #1*
Part of the appeal of Peter Parker is that he could never catch a break.

FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD SPIDER-MAN

Peter Parker got his powers when he was bitten by a radioactive spider at a science exhibition, which gave him the proportional strength, speed and endurance of a spider. He was also able to devise a formula for his webbing, a thin, glue-like substance that is strong enough to tie up his enemies and allow him to swing through New York, but which also dissolves after an hour. And his Spider-Sense, that warns of danger, allows him to stay one step ahead of his very large roster of villains.

Steve Ditko's design for the Spider-Man costume is brilliant in its simplicity, and it's a testament to his work that the design has barely changed in 60 years. Spider-Man is identifiable from almost any part of his costume because of his bold and striking design, and the fact that the costume covers him completely means that readers can identify with him, as it could be anyone wearing the suit.

Spider-Man's early adventures are characterised by exciting battles with dangerous, experienced villains who contrast with Peter's youth and naivety. Spider-Man's priorities are different from other super heroes. In *Amazing Spider-Man #1* he is primarily concerned with making money to pay for medicine for Aunt May. After finding it impossible to cash a cheque for his TV appearances made out to "Spider-Man", he tries to join the Fantastic Four before finding out that the FF do not pay a salary.

One of the reasons that Spider-Man is so relatable is that we spend so much time in the hero's head. Stan Lee said, "one of the things that has, over the years, set Spidey apart from other super heroes is the fact that he so often agonises over the hand that fate has dealt him [...] The ol' wall-crawler is considered by many to be the Hamlet of super-herodom. In fact, people always ask what made me decide to give Spider-Man so many thought balloons, as we all call them in comic-book land, because it seems nobody ever used thought balloons quite that way until Aunt May's neurotic nephew made the scene. Well, the reason is quite simple, really. In novels, a reader is usually privy to the protagonist's thoughts. That's what helps make characters come alive in our imagination; it makes us feel we know them. Likewise, in stage plays, and in comics as well, we can gain great insights into the characters by their conversation. But Spidey, alas, is a loner. When he's out wall-crawling or web-slinging [...] he's all by himself. He has no one to talk to at such times."¹⁰

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Amazing Spider-Man #4*

Peter Parker realises that with great power comes great responsibility.

2: *The ASM #1*

Spider-Man soon got his own comic, which guest-starred the Fantastic Four in the first issue.

3: *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1*

Steve Ditko exhibits his iconic style in all its glory, showing off Spidey's impressive abilities.

