

Aaron Draplin/

finding inspiration in dead stuff

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Cake Decoration

Getting away with
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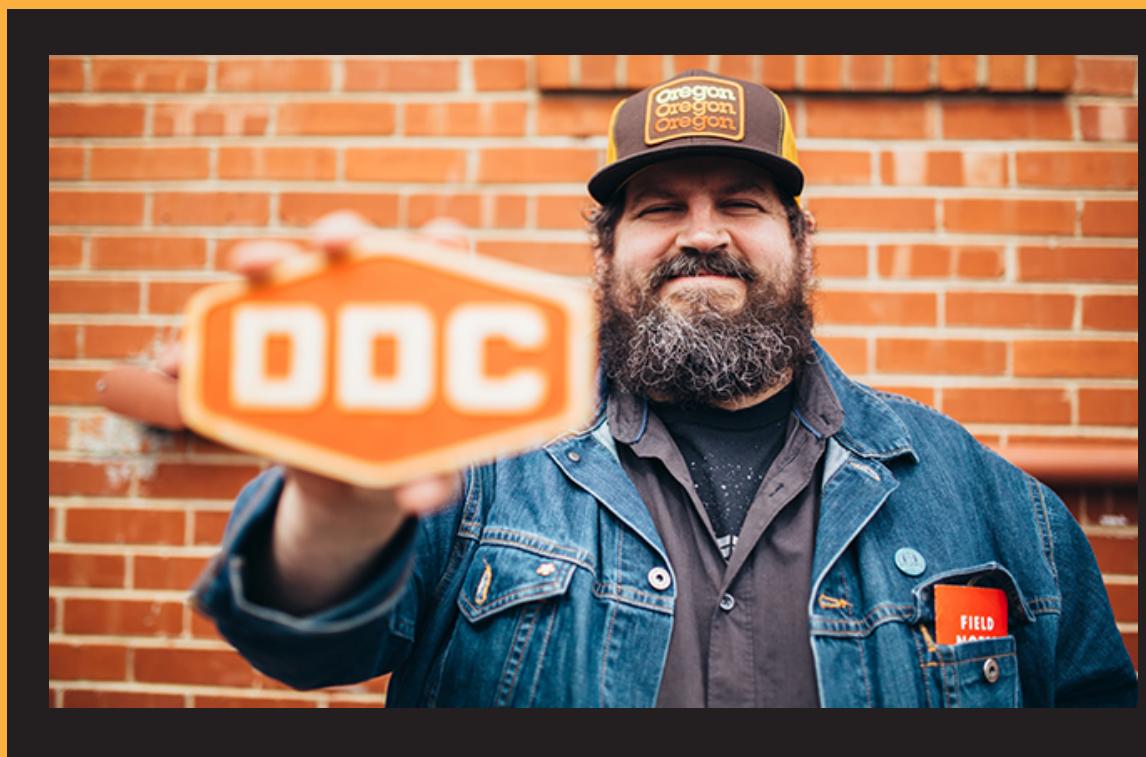
Favorite
Designers

Aaron James Draplin of Draplin Design Co., is working solo in the mighty Pacific Northwest (US) where he rolls up his sleeves to work on graphic design projects for companies like Nike, Patagonia, Target, Ford Motor Company, and even the Obama Administration.

Aaron has hit design stardom for both his high level of craftsmanship and his honest and sharp talks commenting on the lives of designers and the state of the design industry.

In the following interview we asked Aaron to share his creative journey and views on what it takes to make it in the graphic design industry

Do you think design is important to culture?



YES. When a family is emigrating, and they fill the paperwork out--that is graphic design. And if the designers can think that through and make that smarter--that's where design helps real people. Someone getting their license plate. They fill out the paperwork; that's graphic design. So I'm really interested in that kind of stuff. Yes, design is crucial because it can make the little things in our lives...better. "

At the same time, Aaron understands that a lot of design can also be just for show, even though he puts the emphasis on function in design, but he's still grateful to have the design career he has.

"...but a lot of it is cake decoration. And I understand that. I'm lucky to be a part of that, so I know my place, you know. I understand that we are really lucky to have these jobs, to get away with it, to do this work."

Tell us about your talk at How Design Live.



"It's just sorta my "Tall Tales from a Large Man" lecture, but really it's about getting away with a little life in design. Talking about some of the weird jobs I've had...coz, it's not always about making the cash. Sometimes, the jobs that made me no money still feel the best."

Aaron points that sometimes working an unpaid job serves as a gateway to success.

"Interesting enough, some of those jobs I made no money off, become the things that people see, and I get hired for the real money."

Although Aaron gained great success and recognition in his creative journey, he preserves a very modest and down to earth attitude that centers around the joy graphic design gives him.

"I've tricked graphic design into hiring me. That's just weird... I've been able to get away with a great life...saving money...paying off my house...doing work for no money...doing work for big, big jobs...doing work for some movie stars...doing work for the president. I'm not supposed to be doing that kinda stuff, and if that never happened, I'd still be happy making design with my friends."

Tell us about your creative journey..



"I'm from the Midwest. As a youngster at 19 years old, got out of there after getting a tiny, little associate's degree. Went out west with my buddies to be a snowboarder."

Instead of going to college, Aaron and his buddies rode around the west.

"So for five years I did that--I lived like an animal. Was painting and drawing...going to Alaska to get my first computer. That was '96. Got my computer from washing dishes!"

After Alaska, Aaron returned to Oregon to work for a couple of winters, and finally went back to school at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

However, things didn't work out immediately after finishing school. He moved to LA for two unhappy years, until he found himself back in Oregon, once again.

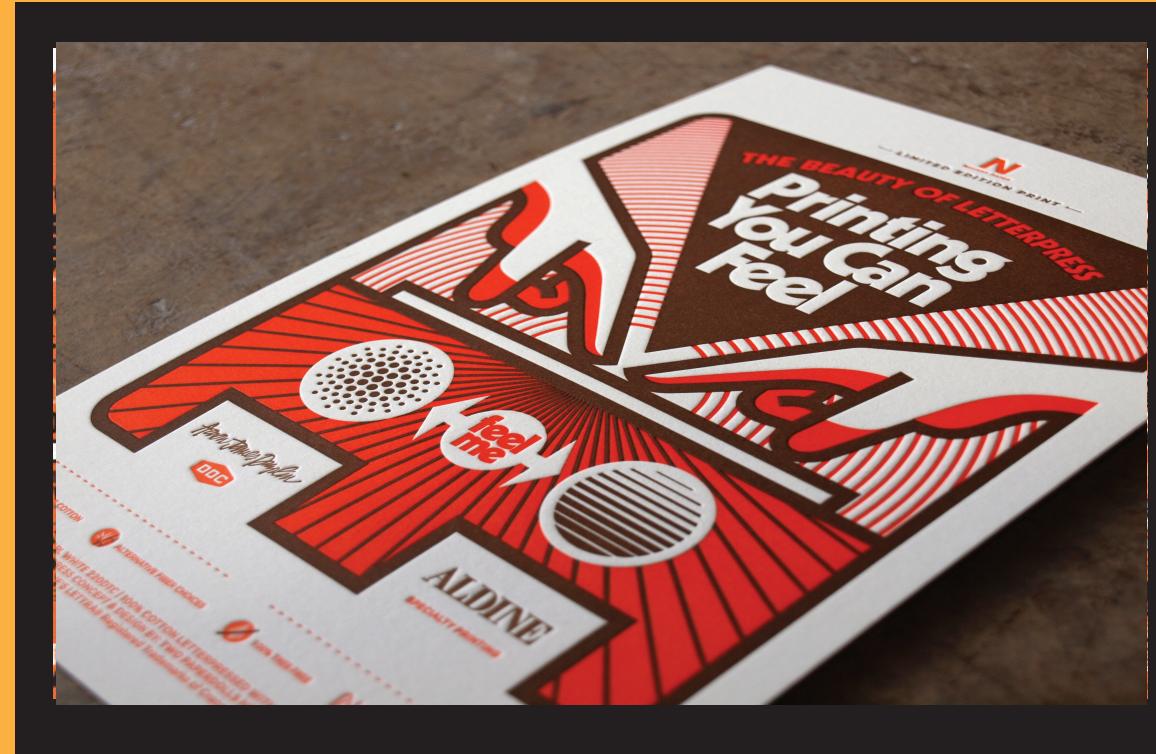
"I've been in Oregon for 13 years; it's been great! Making logos, posters, field notes...kinda whatever."

What do you think about the role of designers in web creation?



"Well, I think that you better get a grasp of it because, if you don't do it, understand how to hang with those people, and talk their language--they're gonna inherit the Earth. Everything is being coded, everything is an app, everything is on a phone, but they need a little sprinkle of design so it feels good in your hand...or it feels good when you look at it...or it feels good when you play with it."

Where do you find inspiration?



"Goin junkin' all over the nation, you know, functional things like a pair of blue jeans that are like 501s, just the simple ones. That to me is beautiful because it's worked for 75 years or a 100 years. So those things that still work today--that's impressive to me."

Aaron's also a huge fan of rummaging through what he calls "dead stuff" for his inspiration.

"But really I love going into like dead places, junk drawers and estate sales and antique malls and going junkin' and finding dead stuff and making new life out of it. It might just be color, type, design, whatever, but I can find such great beauties in one afternoon of dead stuff. It's really interesting to me."

Creating a system to retain all this visual information and sources of inspiration is as important as finding the items that might inspire future work --

"I kinda know how to look and then how to collect it. I make notes and draw. That's how I was trained. So when I see something cool, I take a photo. I write down where I can find it."