

DESIGN BACKGROUND

“The world is an ugly garbage can... But it doesn’t have to be that way. It’s up to us to make it better.”

From a young age, Richie Stewart was surrounded by art. His mother was a commercial artist who worked in her studio at home, and as a child, he was fascinated with what she was making. When he wasn’t at school, his mother constantly encouraged him to make things with his hands. Often, he would copy letters and drawings out of her personal sketchbooks. Looking back, he openly admits how child-like and disproportional his renderings were — but he fell in love with the process of sketching.

His father, on the other hand, was a tradesman and took a job building bio-domes for scientists in Antarctica. While it was a dangerous job, his father worked tirelessly at it. He brought that same work ethic to everything he did, whether it was fixing something around the house or washing a car. Perhaps the largest lesson he learned from his father was to take pride in the work you do, and to do things the *right* way.

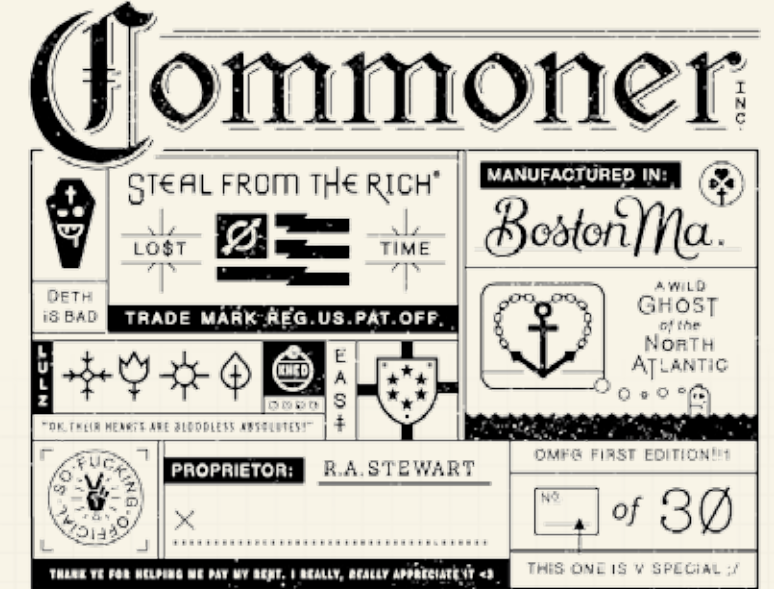
When Richie was about eleven years old, he discovered the world of punk rock and skateboarding, which is evident in the grungy, black-and-white style that is prominent in his work. When he was young, he saw Do It Yourself (DIY) projects as intrinsic in both punk rock and skateboarding. He would cut stencils out of cardboard and spray paint shirts with his friends. His hands were always making things.

Today, Richie sees that ‘DIY mentality’ as an opportunity for endless potential. When it is up to *you* to get something done, the only person holding you back is yourself. As a kid, Richie embraced the idea of jumping into projects on his own. Waiting for someone else or using someone else’s failings as an excuse simply wasn’t on his radar.

After high school, Richie attended the New England Institute of Art in Boston, Massachusetts. Soon after graduating, he



A hand-carved stamp for his studio, Commoner, Inc. The stamp image was flipped by the artist for readability.



opened a design studio, Commoner, Inc., with his wife Brook. Since 2011, they have worked with local clients such as Johnny Cupcakes and Rat City Beer Co., as well as much larger, national clients such as CNN and ESPN.

The foundation of his work and what his clients are drawn to is his hands-on, analog approach. Rather than immediately using a design application such as Adobe Illustrator, Richie sees the true value in a hands-on approach to both drawing and lettering. While some designers seek clean lines and flat areas of color, Richie embraces the small details that give away its hand-craftedness: the unevenness of ink from a stamp, the scanner’s imperfections, and the barely-uneven calligraphic line.

LAKE BROS. BEER CO.

CLIENT WORK



Clean lines, stark black and white contrast, fine details (as in the text line-shadow) and hand-drawn typography are Richie’s signature.



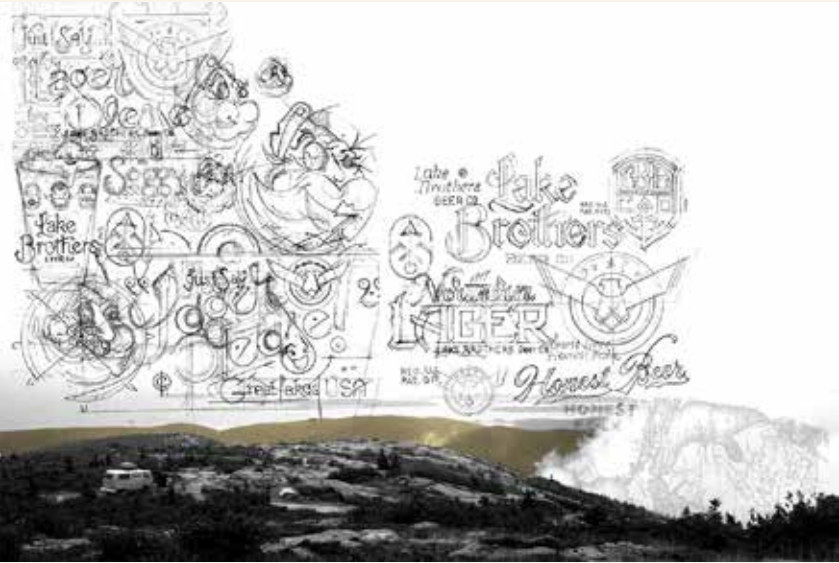
Based in Chicago, Illinois, Lake Brothers Beer Co. contracted Richie through his studio to create their identity and package design. Based on the tag line of ‘Honest Beer, Honest Folk,’ Richie’s attitude of designing things the hard way shows through in his sketches and, of course, his hand-lettered typography.

The time and care that goes into brewing craft beer is reflected also in Richie’s design process. He takes great pride in working with a pen and paper. In the same way that a craft brewer takes great pride in his process of fermentation and shows disdain for large factories that brew on a macro-level, so also does Richie take pride in his own process. Why mass-produce Coors when each brew can have its own unique flavor? Why use an existing font for a logo when you can embellish each letter with its own style?

One of the brand’s slogans is “Unparalleled Beauty. Undeniable Grit.” While this was created for the brewing company, it also

fits Richie’s style to a T. The undeniable grit that is evident in his work is what makes it so appealing.

Although the final package design and logo design for Lake Brothers Brewing Co. is clearly vectorized and clean, upon close examination, you can see small imperfections in what would usually be a clean bezier curve. When converting his work to the digital platform, Richie manipulates it to maintain those small variations in stroke to show his own hand. While some designers seek to erase any evidence of ‘imperfection’ and create perfect geometry using the technology available to them, it is those same imperfections that allows the viewer to appreciate the handiwork that goes into his process.



A selection of Richie’s initial sketches for Lake Brothers Beer Co. Juxtaposed on a rustic photo of the Great Lakes by the artist.

SAM'S BARBERS

CLIENT WORK

Similar to Richie's work for Lake Brothers Brewing Co., Sam's Barbers was another client that valued tradition and took great pride in their craft. Advertising themselves as "Time-Honoured Barbers" in Dublin, Ireland, Sam's Barbers is a family-owned company and has been around for more than a century — since 1901. Their website boasts "a professional and exciting barber shop where quality of cutting and styling matters."

Again, a barbershop that values the quality of their work looked to Richie for his ability to hand-letter and pay attention to the smallest of details.

The main calligraphic lettering of the logo is reminiscent of early lettering, contemporary to Sam's Barbers' founding in 1901. The 'S' is embellished with triangular forms that decorate the logo. There is a stark contrast between thick and thin lines, calling attention to the hand-drawn calligraphic nature. The word 'barbers' has squared forms and is obviously secondary to the founder's name. A

sharp triangular form between the two words echoes both the thick and thin strokes of the calligraphy, and forms a sharp point as in the blade a barber would use. The blade itself cuts the space into two parts.

Richie also makes use of the iconic barber's pole in his package design for the Supreme Beard and Stubble Balm. Combining the diagonal stripes and spherical top-piece of the pole within a shield, he combines the idea of a family crest with a well-known symbol for barbers — which is truly at the heart of Sam's. The package also includes custom cursive combined with a more square font below it, similar to the logo, but ornamented with a stylized drop shadow.

While the clean form of the final logo is sharp at first glance, upon further inspection of the upper case 'S', Richie's tell-tale slight variation in line is visible. The tiniest waver indicates the flow of ink from a pen rather than a perfectly straight line as most would draw on a computer.

The influence of Richie's father — the notion that work should be done well — is prevalent in all of his design work. Every detail is important. His tendency to scan his work to achieve the grainy, imperfect look speaks to his desire to do things manually and to make sure others can see the craft that went into it.

When working on a t-shirt design, Richie went to the trouble of finding a printer that would print it in "a human way." While it would have been easy to turn to the first large overnight print manufacturer that he could find online, instead, he sought a printer that would do it by hand. His appreciation for all things well-made is evident in his design and in the clients that he takes on.



While some designers would look to create this distressed effect using any number of Photoshop manipulations, Richie's method is simply scanning his work.



Supreme Beard and Stubble Balm. Products featuring Richie's hand-lettering on the shelf at Sam's Barbers.

CARRIE + RICHIE

Richie’s devotion to designing things ‘the hard way’ is a personal inspiration. Currently, I am taking Typography III, designing my own typeface. I have taken it upon myself to sketch the letters first rather than jumping straight to the computer, and my work-in-progress typeface has benefited already. While my hand-lettering is no where near as finished as his work, and is more of a stepping stone for me rather than the finished product, it is a helpful reminder to myself to start analog.

I have such respect when I see things that are hand-lettered. Not only for their often playful qualities, but also because I understand the difficulty of manipulating the smallest details.

When I look at Richie’s portfolio of work, it is evident that he favors black and white and the harsh contrast between the two. His

devotion to his process is also one of the first things I noticed in his portfolio. When looking at my own portfolio of works, I want others to see that i have a ‘style.’ While I am in the process of developing myself as a designer, having that style that sets you apart from others is something I want to focus on.

In my experience, I tend to use sans-serif fonts and bright colors. I also take any chance I can to illustrate work, and my style of drawing tends to be vector based with a certain level of detail. While some designers I have worked with favor simple, outlined line icons, my illustrations tend to be include more detail. However, I also enjoy illustrating things by hand in a loose pen and watercolor style — Richie might approve of that more. However, I haven’t had the opportunity (yet) to illustrate a design project in this style.

One of Richie’s mantras is that ‘the world is an ugly garbage can.’ While this seems so pessimistic to me, he believes that designers are charged with finding the beauty that lies underneath the trash and sharing it with other people. That sense of purpose is something I admire about him, but I am too much of an optimist to agree that the world is vastly garbage. However, striving to create and uncover beauty everyday in a world that needs it is a sentiment that everyone — not just designers — should pursue.

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Upon researching Richie, I stumbled upon the fact that he worked on Pavement’s signage and branding. My world has already been a part of his without me knowing it.

