

The Workbench

An eBook for designers.

C O N T E N T S

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F O R W A R D

Shipping is hard. Four months of work has built up to what you're reading now.

Shipping stuff is really hard, so I think the only thing I can say is thank you.

I, like lots of us designers out there, have absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

With the help of lots of incredibly talented people, The Workbench has come together. It's been a lot of hard work, lots of long nights, but eventually completely worth it.

Thank you.

D A N E D E N

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Has there ever been a choice you've made in your career that seemed a big mistake, but has now gone on to benefit your work and process?

Some time ago, I was contacted about a job opportunity at one of my favourite organisations, over in the states. It was pretty much a dream come true for me. At the time, however, I was in the middle of a work placement, and still over a year away from graduating. I decided to turn down the opportunity.

At the time, I figured that I'd already sunk 2 years and a lot of money into my University education. It would be a shame to drop it all, I told myself. Not a day goes by I don't consider what would have happened if I'd taken it. But now, I'm glad I made that choice. It drove me to work harder; see who else I could impress. And I think it's going to pay off. Maybe I can still take them up on that offer once I graduate!

Do you feel you've learnt and gained more from the highlights or the lowlights of your career so far?

This is kind of a tough question because I'm relatively new to web design (I've only been designing for 4 years).

I've definitely had my fair share of mistakes, some of which are pretty common and should almost be a rite of passage upon entry into the design industry. I greatly undervalued my services as a student, and worked with clients without contracts or money up-front. I don't necessarily think these are a bad thing, after all, almost all designers I know have made these mistakes at least once, even if they don't like to admit it.

The important thing is to learn from these mistakes. I'm convinced that you learn best from your mistakes. Take risks even if you think you might be wrong, ask questions and get feedback from designers who are better than you. These mistakes have taught me what not to do to become more successful, more effective and better at my craft.

What I'm trying to say, is that regardless of the highlights or lowlights of your career, the web is a great industry to get into because there is so much work and opportunity. If you work hard, are nice to others and establish connections early on, it will prove to be invaluable for you on your journey as a designer.

How do you feel your process and style differs from when you're working on personal projects to when you're doing client work?

I think the biggest difference between the two would be how my process adapts. When working on personal projects, I don't set hard deadlines or goals as I prefer to let the project guide itself to a point where I'm happy to release it. Climacons was a perfect example of this: I didn't set out to make an icon pack at all. I was at home one evening checking the weather forecast for the weekend on the BBC website. I love their weather icons - so this was in no way an attempt to reimagine or improve them - but I wanted to try to make some of my own, just for the heck of it. I posted the initial few on Dribbble and decided to keep going based on the awesome response I got. Over the next few evenings after work I designed more until I reached a point I was happy to stop. After posting the final set on Dribbble the Climacons site went live. The response to, and the uptake of, these icons still blows me away today.

When it comes to client work, deadlines are always involved one way or another. They aren't always hard deadlines, but the client likes to have a delivery date, and I like to know when I'm getting paid. From the outset of the project, I chat to the clients daily to make sure they feel comfortable with the progress of the project, even if I don't have much to show I will still email or Skype them to catch up. I've found doing this not only keeps things honest and open, but also more often than not grants me an extension should I need it. Things crop up.

In terms of style, it's completely project dependant. I would like to think I have a certain, personal style but at the end of the day I need to work with the client to realise their vision and needs. I'm hired to work with them, not as my own agent just to deliver what I think is the best looking solution. I've had to make design compromises in the past, but being okay with that makes things much easier. When it comes to my own projects though, anything goes. I use personal projects as a way to explore new styles and design methods as much as possible.

I don't take on much freelance work these days as I work full time for a company that keeps me extremely busy and, most importantly, creatively satisfied. Any freelance work that I do agree to take on is based purely on the potential to enjoy and have fun with the project.

adamwhitcroft.com/climacons

drbl.in/dQqB

F R A S E R D A V I D S O N

@frasdav • Designer & Animator • fraserdavidson.co.uk

With design around the web, what one thing irritates you the most?

The homogeneity of the design. Web design is in a category that seems to lend itself to a yeoman-like design philosophy.

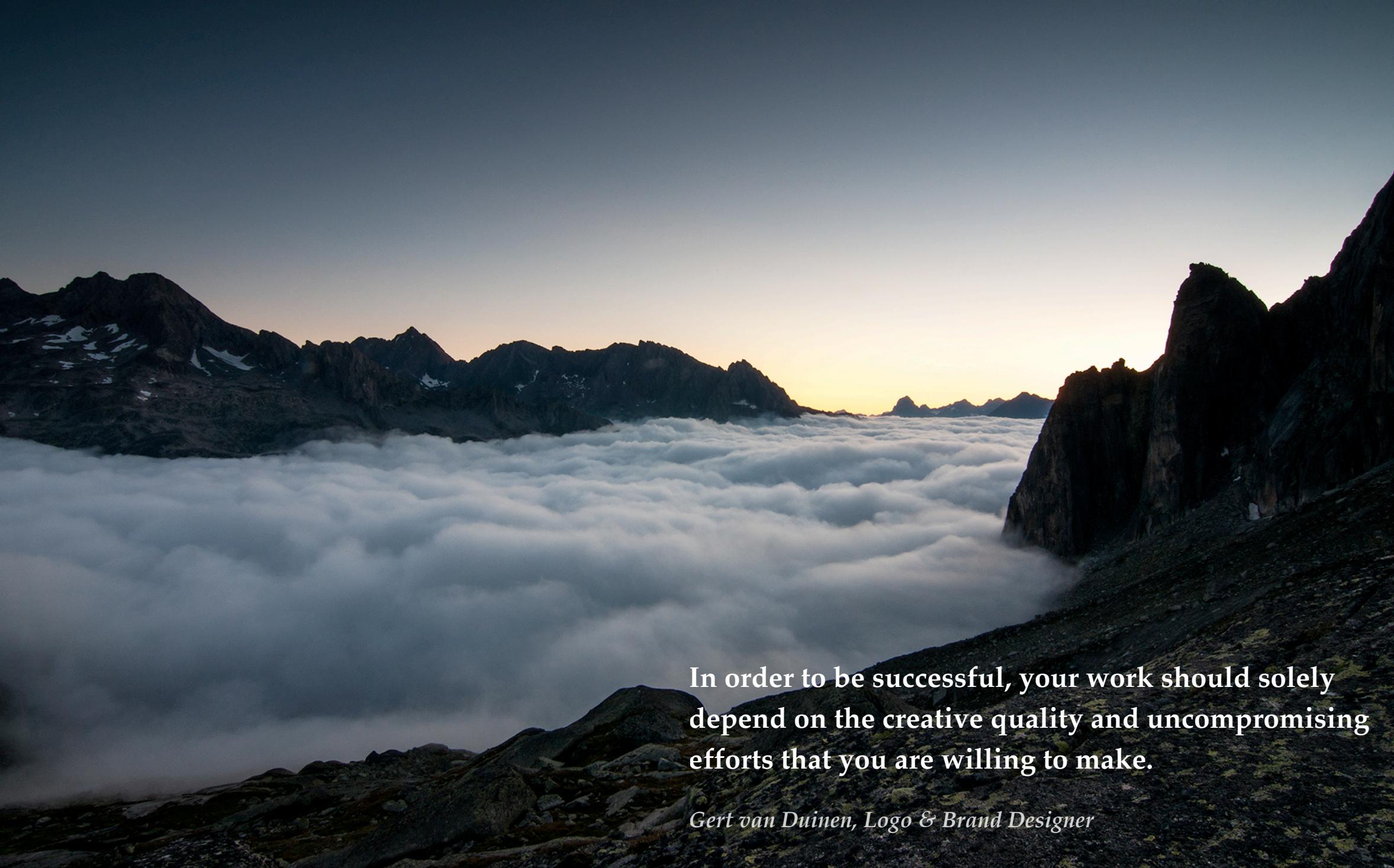
User Interfaces contain slight variations of icons, tabs and buttons that all feel the same. Im not sure why there seems to be a general lack of considered design in the field, but it may be the more technical (and less creative) direction from which interface designers come. Im not keen on skeuomorphism either.

And what work are you most proud of to date?

Setting up our own company I suppose. In terms of work, it would be my Bill Maher piece, or the Richard Feynman animation.

sweetcrude.tv/Bill-Maher

sweetcrude.tv/Richard-Feynman

A wide-angle photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, rocky mountain slopes are visible. A thick layer of white clouds fills the middle ground, stretching across a valley. In the background, a range of mountains rises against a sky transitioning from deep blue to warm orange and yellow near the horizon.

In order to be successful, your work should solely depend on the creative quality and uncompromising efforts that you are willing to make.

Gert van Duinen, Logo & Brand Designer

J A R E D E R O N D U

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Have you ever regretted shipping a project at a specific time, rather than saving it for a later date or when it's been more polished?

As a writer, I experience this on a weekly basis. But in the editorial sense. "Shipping" here simply means publishing. As a designer, all the time.

However, I can definitely say that at no point has shipping early hurt me. You see, there's a benefit to it. Often times, when working on a project, we want to see its most polished version out there in the wild. And that's a good thing. It means we value quality.

But there's a problem with this approach. It's unreachable. Because the more time you spend gazing at a seemingly uncomplete project, the more problems you'll discover. And sometimes they'll be problems that don't really exist. And at that rate, you'll never ship.

Therefore, my advise is to get your product to the point where it works well enough. It may not be 100% polished, refined, or even tested in the wild, but so long as it works, it's ready. Get it out there and see how it stands up against the heavy usage. Ship.

I've gone this route on numerous occasions. And like I said earlier, sometimes I wished I had spent an extra day or two. But in the end, my decision reaped more reward than damage. Once again, ship.

F I L D U N S K Y

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What have you been most proud to produce to date?

Actually, *nothing yet*. I'd rather not to be proud of anything yet and keep working to do better.

F A B I O B A S I L E

@*fffabs* • *Interface Designer* • *fffabs.com*

How do you feel your style has changed over your career, and what has been the biggest influence on that?

My style has changed a lot since my early days as a designer, even though I have only been designing professionally for less than 3 years. Something that not many people actually know is that I graduated as a software engineer specialising in computer games development and rendering engines. As I

started to tweak UIs for interactive applications , and I got more interested in user experience and design.

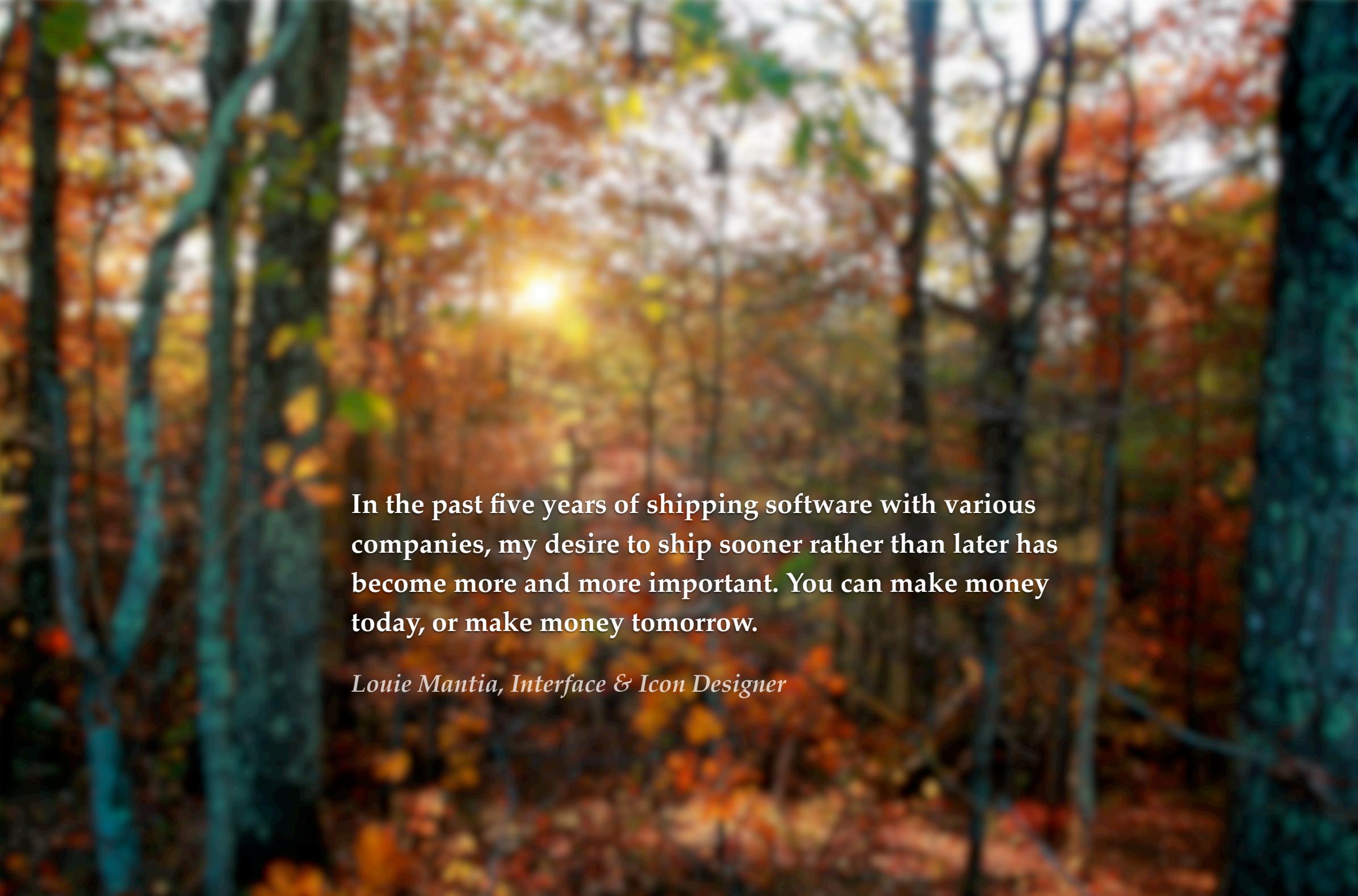
When I started, my designs were very much 'programmers art', I didn't really know the basics of design and I never thought of becoming a professional designer and earning money this way. So originally it was mostly an inspiration-driven process, I would look at existing designs (before Dribbble even existed) and base my own style on them. Gradually I started to get more and more requests by various programmers to help styling their interfaces or websites and I managed to purchase various books and started learning that way.

With the advent of Dribbble I got more and more into design to a point of completely switching my career and going freelance for two whole years and making great progress on the back of contract jobs,

learning as I went along.

I get asked this question a lot.Ffor this reason I have left most of my original designs on Dribbble, the earlier work was much simpler as I didn't have a full understanding of Photoshop's myriad of tools; and sometimes a bit too close to other peoples' work. Over the years, designs from magazines, game interfaces and applications have changed a lot. So has my style. It has been a gradual process with its downsides, although I have always been a fan of clean and simple interfaces and right now this is where I concentrate most of my efforts;

usable and polished UIs. I dislike heavy use of gloss and gradient and skeuomorphic elements in my interfaces, I don't like adhering to standard UIs and some of my work could be seen as a mixture of iOS and Android love, picking the best from both platforms.



In the past five years of shipping software with various companies, my desire to ship sooner rather than later has become more and more important. You can make money today, or make money tomorrow.

Louie Mantia, Interface & Icon Designer

J O R D R I E K W E L

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Shapes are a big part of your work - in everyday life, are there any objects or tools you use that inspire you and transfer into your work?

I have a love for sturdy tools of good quality, that lack unnecessary features and details. They don't have to be expensive (they often aren't), and using them will tell me that they are made by people with a love and passion for creating the very best product possible.

Using and looking at great designed products gives me a pleasant stirring feeling in my gut; it is something magical that is hard to explain. It is the right combination of how it looks, how it feels in your hands, and how easy it is to achieve its purpose, that makes an object or tool a joy to use. In sweating the small details the producers of these products have made something extraordinary, that has become an essential tool in my life. As Steve Jobs once said: "Design is not just what it looks and feels like. Design is how it works."

My Pentel GraphGear 1000 mechanical pencil is a great tool. It is made of sturdy aluminum and it has just the perfect heavy weight, great for sketching logos. The massive pocket clip at the end can be pressed, which activates a spring loaded retraction system that retracts the tip of the pencil, to stop it from getting damaged when traveling. Clicking the pocket clip feels and sounds very pleasant. I guess I am one of those people that enjoys pushing, switching, and turning knobs and buttons just because they sound and feel nice.

I have a Sweden-made Rapid 1 plier stapler, and it is a beast: made from heavy chrome plated metal, and staples up to 50 sheets at a time. It looks and feels like an industrial tool from the 40's. No unnecessary fluff, just bare essentials. It seriously makes me want to staple stuff all day.

Then there is my iPhone 4 (*yes, I should upgrade*). The design is just perfect: a pleasant shape, no unnecessary details, and buttons that feel great to use. The glass and aluminum make the phone a pleasure to hold, and it just looks so much better than those feeble plastic phones the competitors make. But the phone is also great to use, the Retina screen is amazing, I will never want something else. The software is very user-friendly, my daughter has been using my iPhone and iPad all by herself since she was one and a half years old.

As a logo designer, I don't make something that is touched or physically used everyday. However, I aim to make my logos meaningful, sturdy, and simple, hoping for that same magical feeling for those that look at it. I hope my logos give people a feeling of joy and appreciation because they are well designed. Whatever the brand and target group, just the design of the logo itself should make people think: "Dang, that is clever and it looks great".

J E A N - M A R C D E N I S

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If you weren't working as a designer, what other profession could you see yourself in?

My mother always used to cook some great recipes. It was always a joyful moment when my family was tasting and sharing them.

I think I can see myself in a position where creativity is a big part of the job. Cooking is one of them and being French could help me get some experience from great chefs. I find cooking for the people you love is really fulfilling and satisfying.

JONATAN CASTRO

@jonatan • *Interface & Icon Designer* • midtonedesign.com

What physical product do you feel is most useful to your everyday working life?

Definitively the old, but good, pen and paper.

There isn't anything similar in comfort, usability and flexibility nowadays that can beat it in comparison with any other digital tool.

M I C H A E L F L A R U P

@flarup • *Interface & Icon Designer* • pixelresort.com

Do you ever doubt your work as you preview it to the world?

All the time.

I'm constantly mulling over details, squinting my eyes, tipping my head and judging every little component of my design. This evaluation doesn't end when I stop working on a design and have to show it to the world. It's truly a curse, but I believe it's a necessary one.

I think most designers are like this, we're our own worst critics. It's not that we lack confidence, but the constant evaluation is such a big part of the iterative process that it's hard to let go of that healthy skepticism once we decide that a product is "done".

The very essence of designing something is a bold statement. When you're putting something into the world you're proposing a solution to a vision you've had for everyone to see and judge. Through that execution and the multitude of choices you make underway, you put a little bit of yourself in there. I don't think a lot of people could, or should, be doing this without a little bit of doubt or hesitation - to me, it's a natural part of the process.

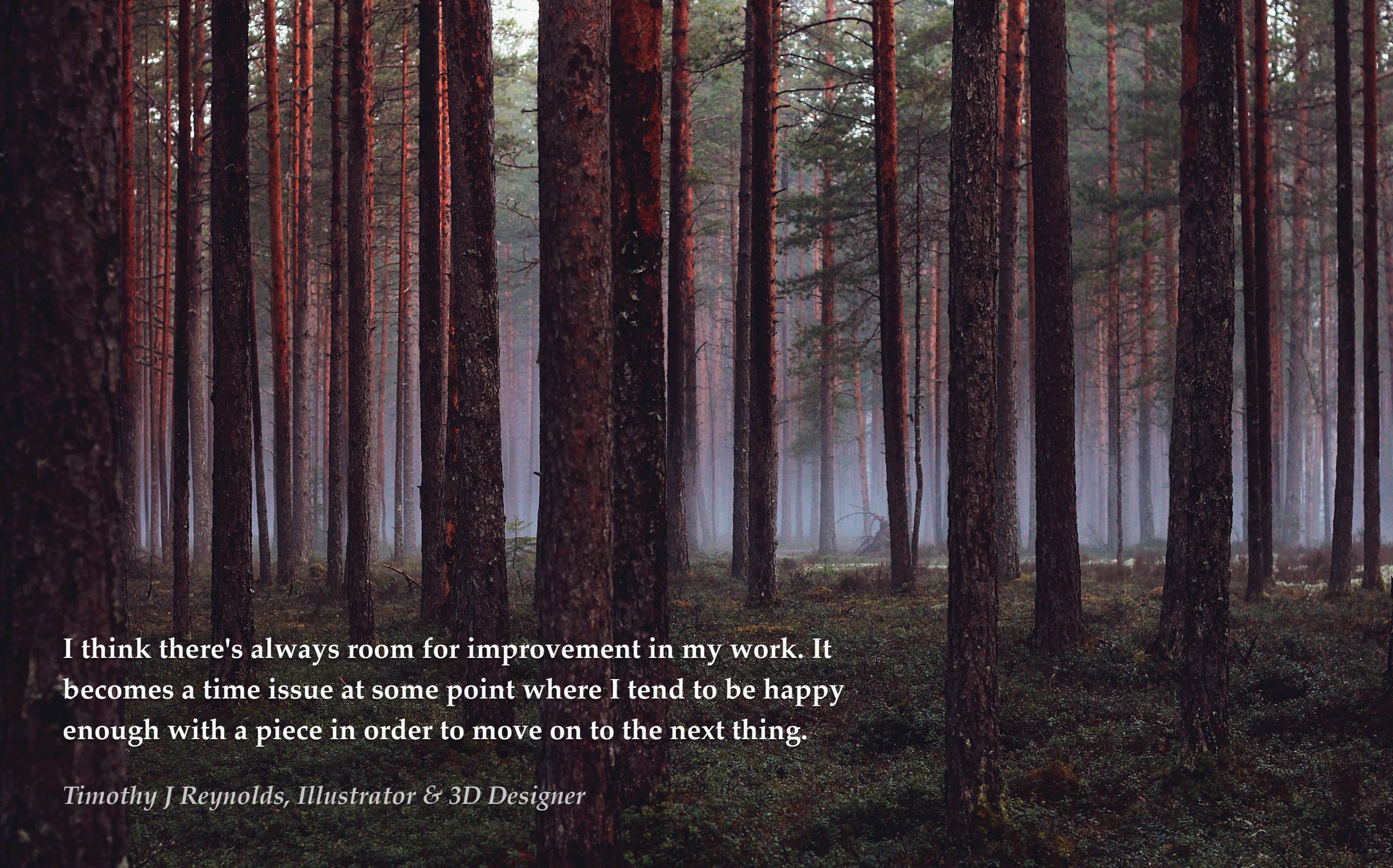
T Y M N A R M S T R O N G

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Is there any place or city in the world that you think has affected how and why you're working?

Living in Florida has affected my career.

There are so very few good design firms this far south, which forced me to go out on my own. I used to think it was an impediment to my career but over time realized that it helped me become a better designer in many ways.

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, there is a dark, wet ground covered with small plants and moss. Behind it, a dense stand of tall, thin trees with dark brown trunks and bright red-brown bark at the top reaches up towards a hazy sky. The lighting is low, creating a moody and atmospheric feel.

I think there's always room for improvement in my work. It becomes a time issue at some point where I tend to be happy enough with a piece in order to move on to the next thing.

Timothy J Reynolds, Illustrator & 3D Designer

G L E N N T H O M A S

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If you weren't illustrating, is there another area of design, such as UI work, that you could see yourself in, and why?

It would definitely be a heavy something in a 3D, Animation or Video Game world.

Storytelling is the favourite part of my current job, and just love the idea of being able to push that further in a Animated or Game world.

Y U M M Y G U M

@yummygum • *Interface & Icon Designers* • yummygum.com

Working as a pair is a relatively uncommon setup for a studio - but how do you feel working together has benefited you two as designers?

We both have a different background, Leon has a background in Communication and Vince has an IT-background. This has proven to be a great mix for collaboration as we both have our own insights. Vince often thinks more structured while Leon can easily think outside the box.

When you work on a design too long, a fresh pair of eyes is something that can make all the difference.

JONATHAN OGDEN

@ogvidius • Web Designer • ogvidius.com

Are there any typefaces that you feel really match up with your design style?

It really depends on the project. Different projects require different styles to give it the right "voice", and choosing the right typeface is all part of that.

I have a few favourites that I come back to often, such as Knockout, Futura, Sentinel and Baskerville but, like everything, it changes on a project to project basis.

L U K E B E A R D

@lukesbeard • Interface & Web Designer • luke.so

Are there any lessons you learnt early on as a designer that you still go by today?

The most valuable lesson I learned during my first few years of my design career was that you must understand the technology and methodology of the medium you are designing for.

Understanding how your designs will be implemented makes you a better designer from several perspectives. One of which is that you are able to comprehend the effort that goes into turning your designs in a physical product. Secondly, it makes you a much more valuable designer if you are planning to work for companies rather than freelance. The ability to work closely with developers and engineers is a trait that all designers should have.

If you are designing for the web I urge you to learn HTML & CSS. It was the best decision I ever made. Same applies for iPhone and mobile apps. Learn some basic Objective C and dig into X-code, if you don't want to do that get hold of someone who can and watch them work for a little bit, It's fascinating watching a design come to life.

Ask a lot of questions and get some understanding.

S A C H A G R E I F

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What has been your key to staying focused as your jump from project to project?

I'm going to have to side-step your question a little here. As you said, I've been jumping from project to project a lot, which definitely makes it hard to stay focused. So I've more or less given up on focus until I can afford to give all my attention to a single project.

In the meantime, what I'm doing is making sure all my different projects work together. So for example, I'm working on Telescope, which I am also using to power Sidebar. And I use Patternify and The Toolbox to drive traffic to Sidebar, while I can rely on my mailing list and blog to promote all these projects as well.

So it's not quite "focus"; maybe "structured chaos" would be a more fitting description?

What aspects of the current web design world do you love, and what aspects do you hate?

What I really love about the web design world is how easy it is to create something. You can have a simple landing page up and running in a matter of hours, and thanks to social networks like Twitter and Dribbble you can tell the whole world about it in a day.

What I hate is how hard it is to create something good. If you want to create truly great web design, you'll be facing a steep uphill climb. Simply put, we need better web-specific design tools and standards. Things like SASS and CodeKit are a great start, and I'm hoping the coming years will bring even more innovation in this field.

ANDREAS UBBE DALL

@ubbedall • Web Designer • ubbedall.dk

Have you ever feel you've needed to shut off from the design world for a while to be able to improve your work?

The short answer is *yes*.

The slightly longer answer is: I think we all have to leave our work for some time, so we don't get stuck in a rut.

A huge part of design, for me, is understanding the context in which it exists. Going out and meeting people or observing users, is a great way to gain new insights and inspiration, when you've been staring at your screen for too long.

M A R T B I E M A N S

@martbiemans • Illustrator • martbiemans.com

How do you feel community sites have effected you as a designer?

They have greatly effected me, without them I wouldn't be where I am now.

It makes it very easy to expose yourself and have your work seen by a wider audience, but it also helps clients to find you.

The only downside is the amount of time it takes to keep them all updated in order to get the most out of it.

S A R A H P A R M E N T E R

@sazzy • *Interface Designer & Speaker* • sazzy.co.uk

How do you feel speaking and writing has changed the way you approach your design work now, in comparison to the beginnings of your career?

I don't feel writing and speaking has changed the way I approach design work other than I try and document everything in intervals along the way, I'm far more aware that I'm likely to want to share something about the process with the wider community, including any shortcomings.

So I tend to just ensure I'm keeping good track of my notes, and taking lots of pictures of sketches and doodles that helped me arrive at the design decision I came to, rather than the respect gained from speaking and writing changing the way I then speak and write. If that makes any sense. If you think you've made it just because you speak at conferences, this is a very dangerous path to start treading.

S E A N F A R R E L L

@brandclay • *Icon & Branding Designer* • brandclay.com

**As your career started, was there anyone that
hugely inspired you that still does to this day?**

When I first started in design, I didn't know much about the industry or where to get plugged in at.

The first person that drew me in to logo design was David Airey. He was inspiring, and taught me quite a bit. He always did great case studies that showed such a detailed view of his process. I always enjoyed looking at his simplistic style, and the reasons he chose what he did for his clients.

M A R T I N K A R A S E K

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Are you able to work without wireframes/plans etc? Or can you just have an idea and go?

I am able to work without wireframes on small projects, but always feels more comfortable to have them - you're able to grasp a better idea of how navigation and other elements works together on different screens.

Does any industrial design out there influence your UI work?

Yes, *a lot*. Its very interesting for me to look at physical items and study how they work - like buttons and other elements that could be transformed into digital UI's.

A wide-angle photograph of a rugged coastline at twilight. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, with some lighter areas suggesting the setting or rising sun. The sea is a deep blue, with white-capped waves crashing against a rocky shore. In the foreground, large, dark, angular rocks are scattered along the beach. The cliffs rise steeply from the water, their faces showing layers of sedimentary rock. In the distance, a small town or cluster of buildings is visible along the horizon, its lights just beginning to glow.

I feel comfortable both working alone and in a team. Alone, I am normally able to concentrate faster and see the task more clearly because *I know it all depends on me.*

Mike of Creative Mints, Illustrator and Interface Designer

D R E W M E L T O N

@justlucky • Letterer & Graphic Designer • yourjustlucky.com

What was the toughest challenge you faced as your career started gathering pace, that has, in your opinion, shaped you into the designer you are today?

It has certainly been failure.

As cliche as it sounds, learning to face failure directly has had a crucial role in refining my skills as a designer and individual.

Perfecting a craft is hard and you make a lot of mistakes, especially in the beginning. You start out with such high ideals and then you're faced with obstacles (lack of skill, money, patience, etc). If you want to get better you either have to learn to adapt, settle or quit.

J E F F B R O D E R I C K

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Have you found you feel more comfortable working as part of a team or going solo?

Each has their ups and downs. While working on my own I love the freedom of working out of my own house, at my own desk, picking my own clients, but all of this comes at a price. Taxes are way more complicated and managing clients is a full time job, and frankly, quite stressful.

Working with a team solves a lot of the issues I had while on my own. We now have people dedicated to the finances and people dedicated to client communications. Best of all though, the ability to bounce ideas and concepts off team members in real time is something I didn't realize I was missing. It's invaluable.

If I had to pick between working on my own or with a team, I would pick a team. I get to focus on what I care about the most, design, and leave the rest to other members in the team.

CL A I R E C O U L L O N

@op45 • *Letterer & Typographer* • coullon.com

In what major ways has your work process and communication with clients developed throughout your career?

My work process with client projects has changed quite a bit since I started as a result of my focus becoming more specialised, the type of projects I tend to take on and simply experience figuring out what works best. For example, with logo design, while I of course always did rough sketches to begin with, I used to show custom lettered proposals directly as almost finalised vector artwork.

Over time, I've started working on more refined sketches first and progressively started using these as the initial presentation much more often. As well as of course preventing me from spending too long carefully tweaking a digitised concept that might not end up being used, it also allows for a more involved and rewarding process.

Of course, I vary the approach depending on the particular project and individual client, but overall I've found that these changes to my working method have generally also improved client communication as it helps for a better understanding of the process and the work behind the designs. I think people tend to be much more aware and appreciative of the ideas and details once they've followed the progress and we've talked about the different elements and steps along the way.

ELLIOT JAY STOCKS

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How do you feel your speaking and writing have joined together to help you become a better designer over your career?

Speaking and writing about a subject forces you to think about it — really think about it. Of course, it's possible to think about designing without writing down those thoughts or presenting them on a stage somewhere, but adding a level of permanence to your thoughts moulds them into something with more structure and depth.

I've lost count of the number of times where I've actually changed my opinion very slightly once I've expressed my thoughts in a written form, which would suggest that I never really gave them the consideration they deserved until I wrote them down or constructed them into a presentation. In my mind, there's no question that these processes have helped me become a better designer.

D R E W W I L S O N

@drewwilson • Web Designer & Entrepreneur • drewwilson.com

Are there any quotes you always remind yourself of when starting a new project?

I'm not the kind of person that lives by or remembers quotes, though it seems to be a popular thing in the design industry.

Instead, when starting a new project, I use knowledge and wisdom gained in my previous ventures to help guide me. If you're going to start a 'side-project' and you want/hope it will make you money or get big one key thing to remember is: do *not* treat it as a 'side-project'. Great things require a lot of hard work, consider them *Priority Projects* instead.

JAMES T EDMONDSON

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How have your perspectives on 'good design' changed throughout your career?

Before going to design school, good design was simply something that was visually appealing—something that told me "the designer enjoyed creating this." Growing up, I wasn't exposed to a whole lot of what I would call "good design", but when I was seventeen, I saved up for a summer and bought myself an iMac. Everything was packaged so nicely, the setup process was elegant and smooth, and everything looked very considered. That was the first time I was blown away by good design.

After going to design school at California College of the Arts, I have a much more concrete definition of what good design means to me. There are many similarities between my old and new definitions, for example everything must be considered. There should be no part of the design that is standard or default as a result of nothing more than laziness. The pillar of good design after "consideration" would be "purpose." If something does something evil, in a really elegant way, it's still bad design. It's up to designers to define evil independently. I wouldn't have a problem designing a bottle of whiskey, but I would seriously lean away from designing cigarette packaging. Both are unhealthy industries, but one markets more diabolically, thus making the design bad, even if it looks and feels good.

Good design means doing something positive in a good way. If you're interested in this topic, I suggest Christopher Simmons' book Good Design. Reading that, and being exposed to Christopher as an instructor has taught me quite a lot about the responsibilities of designers to contribute in meaningful ways to society.

The Workbench.

T H A N K Y O U

Firstly, to you. You're the people that have tweeted, funded, visited and bought The Workbench. You're the reason this has happened. You're all amazing.

Thank you to all the designers involved. I hope one day I'll be half as talented as any of you. Let's face it, you are the book.

Lastly, thanks to Joe Kendall, who has helped me throughout the project with his incredible development skills and awesome ideas. Thanks to my sister, Ellie Brade, for editing the book, she's ~~one~~ of the most hard working and dedicated person I know.

Set in Palatino and Edmondsans. Have a good day.

Zander

The Workbench