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DESIGN & BRANDING

Become a Creative

Making the switch

So, how do you master design without a formal degree? The same way you master anything in today's day and age. You leverage technology, the free wealth of information that is the internet, and the world of resources available to you. Then, practice, practice, practice.

It will take discipline, there's no way around that one.

But to help focus your energy and make sense of the overwhelming world of options out there, follow these steps:

1. Allow yourself to suck

The number one rule is this: allow yourself to suck. I believe the reason that most people fail at a creative career is that they quit early on or count themselves out in the first place. Creativity requires courage. And what they don't tell you is that it REQUIRES sucking.

As a designer, I consider myself a person of good taste. That, however, doesn't mean that everything I create will be good. Much of what I do as a designer is to simply

create multiple things, test out whims and color schemes and shapes and ideas, then discard the bad and know how to recognize and nurture the good.

As with everything in life, the good and bad coexist.

When you feel yourself get stuck, think (or say out loud!) "I will create something, even if it's utter garbage" And just put pen to paper, colors and shapes to illustrator, or words to a google doc, as long as it gets you going.

"Editor you" or shall we say Becky with the good taste will figure the rest out.

2. Get inspired.

Get on Pinterest. Get on behance. Maybe just get on Google. You won't know your design style yet. You won't know until you collect what you like and see it all together.

This is the fun part, in my opinion. Curate beautiful things in a why that makes sense to you, then pay attention to what energizes and moves you. Is it the nuance of typography? Is it a rustic glam illustration style? This is okay. You are not crazy for loving this stuff. You are a potential designer. Nurture it.

3. Start a portfolio.

Even if you don't have a clue what you're doing and you have exactly zero clients. Even if it, you guessed it, sucks!

It is your starting point. It will evolve over time. It will be your foundation and allow you to build upon it until you can look back and see the evolution in your work.

Upload anything you've done that is relevant to start, or photos of the work you wish you created (see your inspiration from number three) You can't pass this off as your own, so keep it unpublished at this stage, but it will help you visualize what you are trying to create.

4. Choose your tools.

I worked with the Adobe suite which is the commonly accepted tool for designers. I used primarily Illustrator, Photoshop, and Indesign. Sometimes Premiere for minor video editing. But there are a lot of other **tools that I use.**

There is a bit of a learning curve to the Adobe suite, so this will take some tutorials and lots of practice to get down. Canva.com is also a great option for non-designers trying to design. Some design purists would kill me for saying that, but technology is designed to make things easier. Canva is intuitive and easy to pick up, yet extremely powerful. It has templates but also allows you to create things from scratch.

It can help you understand what kinds of things you can make and how to modify them to fit digital and print outputs.

5. *Get started*

Don't wait for the perfect client. Get started immediately with spec work and pro bono work.

Example of spec work: Early on in my explorations, I created a suite of materials around a made up coffee brand. I didn't spend a ton of time around it, but I found a mockup and edited it to create a simple, minimal suite of options for a make-believe coffee brand.

It's not particularly amazing. But it demonstrates a level of understanding of colors, style, and balance, and filled a void in my portfolio at the time that I wanted filled, just to show I could do that type of work.


Example of pro bono work: Through a family-member, I found out about a stay-at-home mother who was working on a

cupcake small business. I LOVE small businesses. At this point I had been working full time as a designer for a few years, and was knee-deep in defense industry and government contracting work. Needless to say, I was craving something feminine, something bold and fun to work on. I was looking for a brand that resonated with me on a personal level.

When I saw her instagram and her potential, I took the initiative to reach out and offer my services for free. She was delighted because everyone loves free things, and I set out to create a brand style and voice for her. I was energized by this project. I didn't need money for it. I did it in my free time and couldn't wait to get home to work on it.
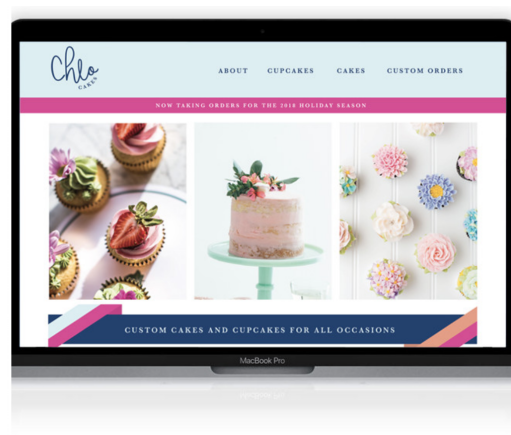
Bottom line: It is great for you creatively to do this kind of work now and then. It can help build or diversify your portfolio. It is especially helpful when you are starting out and need practice to have a real human to work for to motivate you and hold you accountable.

6. Train as you go.

This one will seem obvious: Watch tutorial videos and read articles. Yes, I could tell you to research as step number one of this process. But there is too much out there. It could get you started, or it could be overwhelming.

The best way to learn a creative skill is by doing. That's why in traditional creative classes, you are assigned a whole lot of projects. Otherwise you would just read books and know everything.

Someone can teach you the technical use of a tool, but they can't teach you how to create something with it that is uniquely yours.

Once you have a project, it will define the scope of work and narrow down the specific tool or skill you will need to use to accomplish it.

Example Scenario: Google Search: "How to blur background of image in Photoshop" and then you try it out as the header image in your one-pager and decide if you like the look or not.

Essentially, just start working. Research along the way, as needed. It will make sense.

Cheers, friend!

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