

WELCOME!

I am addicted to color and design. Although we might not always be aware of it, color and design affect our lives tremendously on a day to day basis. Whether in our homes, at the beach or shopping at the grocery store, we are deeply influenced by these two things. My hope is that in writing this blog we can come together to share, learn and inspire...and learn and inspire...and maybe look at things just a little bit differently.

So come on in and stay for awhile. And please don't be shy - comments are encouraged!

-Kelly

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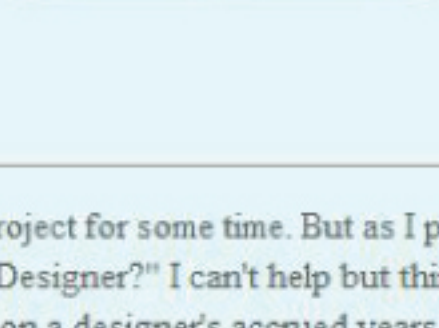
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SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

How Many Years Does it Take to Make a Good Designer?

I [PinIt](#) thinking a lot about age and enlightenment lately. About how the years we have on this earth correlate with wisdom and growth. Up until recently, I was convinced that the older you get, the more you know. That for every year you add to your life you gain more knowledge, more power, more understanding of how the universe works, and what your place is within it. That our lives are mapped out in a single line moving from left to right and that all of our experiences become dots on that very line until the day we die...and the line ends.

I remember drawing a personal lifeline in elementary school when I was about 7. We stapled together a few sheets of paper end to end and mapped out how we saw our life. Starting at the left end of the paper, of course, and moving in a very structured linear format to the right, we had to assign different achievements for ourselves at different stages in our lives. I remember assigning a career as a supemodel to one of those dots. I went to college, got married and had kids - those all had dots. And I'm pretty sure I ended up dying in my sleep of a heart attack, which was the final dot.



I hadn't thought about this lifeline project for some time. But as I ponder the question, "How Many Years Does it Take to Make a Good Designer?" I can't help but think about this linear format of living and how much value we often place on a designer's accrued years of experience. On how far to the right their dot is.



Out of the above three lifelines, can you tell who the *best designer* is?



We see it all the time. Years of experience being worn like a badge of honor. But is this the best way to gauge a designer's skills and creativity? If someone has 25 years - or 40 years - of design experience is it a given that they are going to be a fabulous designer?

We are always surprised when a young mind does something great. When a 20 year old Mark Zuckerberg creates Facebook. When a 13 year old girl wins an Olympic gold medal in gymnastics. When a 10 year old can play the piano like nobody's business. We think, how amazing is it that a little mind, that has hardly even mapped itself out on its own lifeline, can do such great things? We tend to assume that because these minds haven't had many hours upon this earth that they must be some sort of freak of nature to do such great things. But if you were to look at their short years upon this earth, you would probably find that they have spent many, many hours working on what they are great at. Probably more hours than a designer with 25 years of experience has spent designing.

Which brings me back to my question. I think there are certainly designers who have earned their status and reputation after so many years in the industry. There is definitely something to be said for experience. So much of design is learned on the job, so a certain amount of years of work experience isn't just helpful, it's necessary. But is that to say that a designer with only five years of experience is only a fifth as valuable and skilled as a designer with 25 years of experience? Or that a young designer can't come up with as creative of design solutions as a more seasoned designer?

Exactly how many years *does* it take to make a good designer?



Labels: [experience](#), [interior designer](#)

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15 comments:

[funcolors](#) September 21, 2010 at 9:47 AM
Malcolm Gladwell's book titled "Outliers". In this one MG repeatedly talks about the "10,000-Hour Rule" which is based on a study by Anders Ericsson.

The basic idea is if you are actively engaged in the chosen passion for a focused 10,000 hours, you will arrive at "greatness".

I can make this relate to professions involving color and design specifically.

When it comes to color in particular, we have called the act of learning and experimenting with color a journey — your color journey. The more robust your color journey, the more expert you become. In return for your investment of effort, you walk away with your own unique experience. It's logical.

Energy never dissipates it just transforms. Choosing to focus your energy so you become "experienced" in a short time frame or a longer one, isn't what's important, IMO. It's whether or not you choose to invest in focusing the necessary effort and energy at all.

Reply

[Kelly Berg](#) September 21, 2010 at 10:18 AM
"Choosing to focus your energy so you become "experienced" in a short time frame or a longer one, isn't what's important, IMO. It's whether or not you choose to invest in focusing the necessary effort and energy at all."

Well said, fel! Thanks for your insight. Outliers has been on my reading list!!

Reply

[emily @ the happy home](#) September 21, 2010 at 11:02 AM
kelly-- it was really lovely to read this! while i will probably never pursue design as a career, it's certainly something i'm passionate about. it really kills me when i get told that someone can do it "better" because they've been doing it longer. i find that hard to believe thanks for the pep talk!

Reply

[Kelly Berg](#) September 21, 2010 at 11:35 AM
Emily - glad this pepped you up! It's certainly something I've struggled with in my career...the assumption that because I'm younger I might not be able to do as good of a job o a project as a more "experienced" designer. It's a tricky discussion to have, though, because the flip side is that some young designers are often guilty of thinking they know everything - that a more seasoned designer is out of touch.

I think Lon makes great points of - that experience lies in how you choose to invest your energy and efforts.

Thanks for your comments!

Reply

[heather jenkinson](#) September 21, 2010 at 11:54 AM
I remember seeing the TED talk where Malcolm Gladwell talks about his 10 000 hours and it makes a lot of sense. I believe that when it comes to design, this ideology is particularly relevant. We can have an intuitive understanding of colour & design - even a strong instinct for it, but until we understand the 'why' and can simplify complex processes, with ease to our clients and peers, we are not masters of our craft.

The title of good designer needs to be earned and I think it really does come down to experience and putting the hours in.

Reply

[Maria Killam](#) September 21, 2010 at 7:56 PM
I agree, it depends on how much time one has spent on any given profession, not the number of years in addition to natural talent which I think is critical in any creative career.

Reply

[kristie@makingarrangementsblog](#) September 22, 2010 at 12:58 PM
for what it's worth: as a psychologist in my 20's, i did not get the respect that older psychologists got - even when i knew i was better or that they weren't even half-trying anymore.

when i made the decision to give that up and pursue my creative passion, i found it easier to gamer respect in my new field - simply because i was older. i certainly didn't have the experience that a 30-year-old designer might have, but because i was pushing 40 - people seemed to just assume that i knew what i was doing. it's really not fair, nor does it make good sense, but that's just how it's been for me.

i'm a good decorator, but i was also a good psychologist. i think that if i were a psychologist today, i'd be at the top of my field. but it's not my passion, so i'm glad that's not where i am. i love decorating and i'm pursuing it with all my heart. and i'm happy to finally have the advantage of age to go along with it. makes the wrinkles kinda worth it. kinda. :)

Reply

[DesignTies](#) September 22, 2010 at 2:00 PM
Great question, Kelly -> It can apply to pretty much any industry, not just design. I absolutely believe that years of experience DOES NOT correlate with the ability to do a job well. There's so much more that goes into being good at what you do, including your people skills and being willing to change with the times. The best designer in 1975 won't be getting many calls for consultations if he or she is still decorating rooms like it's 1975.

Passion and desire drive a big part too. Would you rather hire a designer with 40 years of experience who's bored of the whole decorating scene, or a new designer fresh out of school who has amazing ideas and can't wait to make them reality??

Kelly

Reply

[Kelly Berg](#) September 22, 2010 at 3:44 PM
Kristie and Kelly - LOVE your comments. Thanks so much for sharing.

Reply

[Casa Vilora Interiors](#) September 22, 2010 at 7:07 PM
Wow, that was very thought provoking. I have only been designing for about three years but have had a life long passion for interior design. That's what drives me to be great...my passion and willingness to keep learning. Thanks for your blog.

Reply

[Annie, bossy color](#) September 23, 2010 at 6:20 AM
Love this post, Kelly! And an excellent question. I do think that designers w/ a FEW years of actual experience under their belt bring more to a project than someone fresh out of school. But I think people who make snap judgments about younger designers are unwise!

And although we should value their experience and service, SOME older workers - in every field - are, well, tired :)

Reply

[heather jenkinson](#) September 23, 2010 at 7:11 AM
Great point, Kelly from Design Ties: "Would you rather hire a designer with 40 years of experience who's bored of the whole decorating scene, or a new designer fresh out of school who has amazing ideas and can't wait to make them reality??"

I think older, more experienced designers should employ/team up with the new, freshly inspired designers!

Reply

[Beth @ Beyond White](#) September 23, 2010 at 11:05 AM
Years ago in Human Resources, a long-term employee might grumble about being passed over for promotion or a big raise. But did she do the same job every year for 7 years? That's just 1 year of experience repeated 7 times.

Sometimes someone who had been there 1-2 years would have taken it upon herself to learn and grow more than the 7-year employee. That's not to say time in the field isn't important. But how you tackle your time is too.

Reply

[Erika at BluLabel Bangalore](#) September 27, 2010 at 4:00 PM
What a great topic of conversation! I believe we humans put so many limitations on ourselves and others that as a result some may never reach their fullest potential.

I've always been one to look at the quality of work, not to say that I ignore the years of experience. But the end result, at least in design, always speaks for itself.

Reply

[Elizabeth Brown](#) September 28, 2010 at 7:50 PM
I'm not really big on anything linear. For some reason, I don't mark time or events that way. But from (time to time), I pull out old paintings or projects and say, wow, that really sucks! Somehow, "time" has matured my vision. So yes...time does make one a better designer.

Reply

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"Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric." - Bertrand Russell

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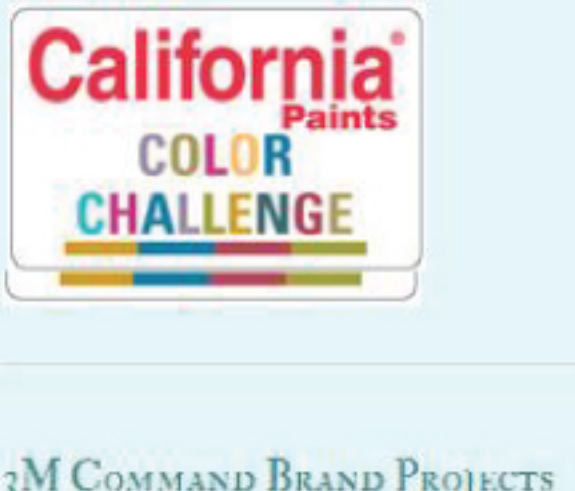
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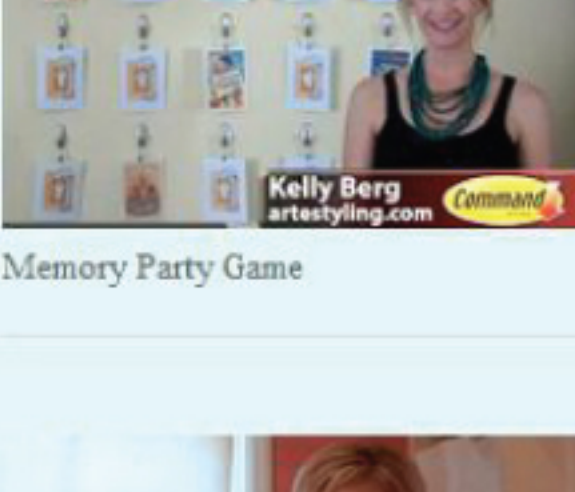
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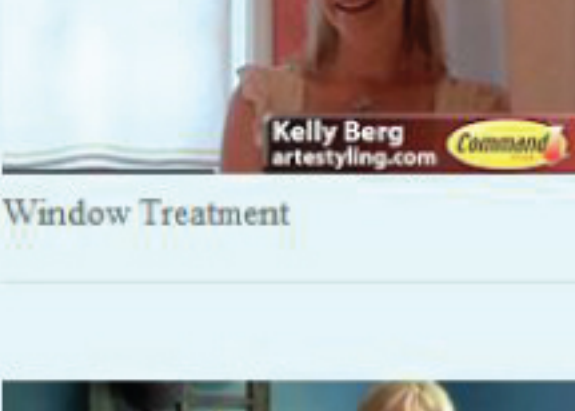
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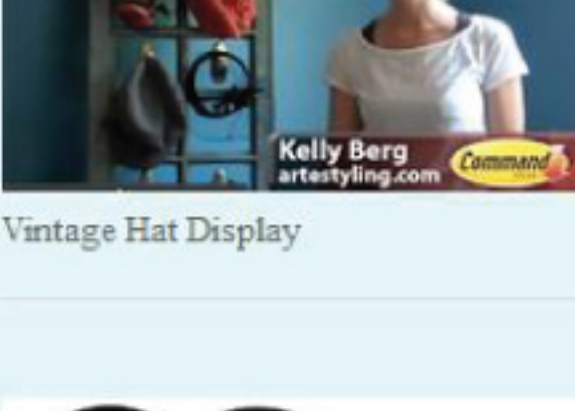
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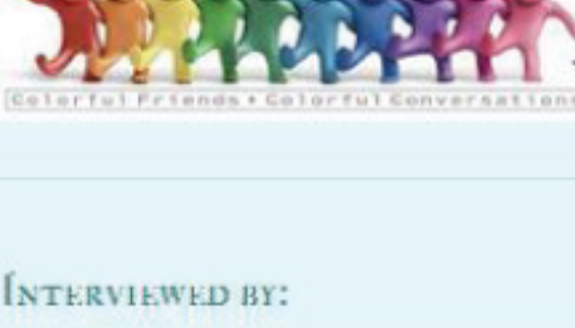
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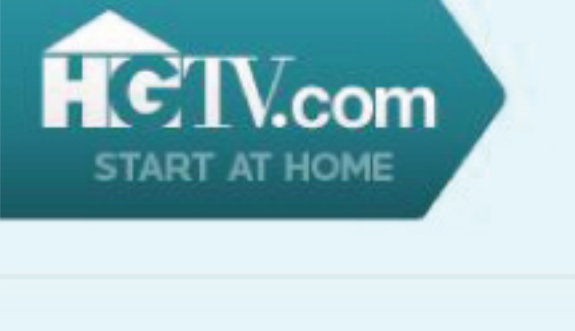
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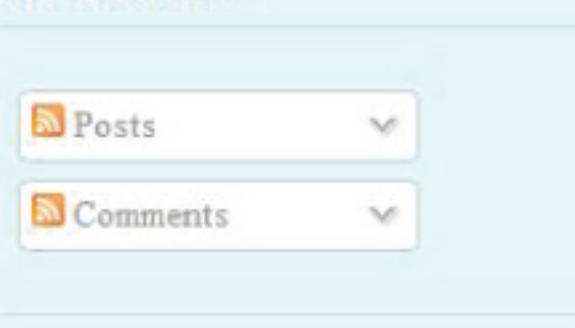
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