



CREATIVITY

BECOME A CULTURE CREATOR

The future for designers is to become 'culture creators.' Learn more about this new breed of creative and the top 10 characteristics that will place you among its ranks.

When was the last time you experienced something truly new? As designers, our jobs are all about imagination and new ideas, but those ideas seem to be getting harder and harder to find. The only way to keep our work fresh and ahead of the trends is to become more than designers, more than people who choose nice

fonts and appealing colors. We must become "culture creators" by finding new sources of inspiration and influence in the world around us and translating them into our designs. Here are 10 characteristics you must embrace in order to take your work—and your creativity—to the next level.

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1 THEY HAVE ENDLESS CURIOSITY

Culture creators are insatiably curious and constantly learning. Culture creators demand high stimulation of all the senses.

Obsessed with "things," these are the people who find wonder in collecting unusual or discarded ephemera—the type treatments of vintage sales brochures, color palettes from mid-century modern books, certain colors of pottery glazes from the 1920s.

They don't tolerate boredom: They spend any spare time cruising the internet, discovering new things. They often have multiple interests and hobbies: gardening, surfing, raising canaries, breeding show dogs, sewing plush animals, cooking jams and jellies, collecting and reupholstering 1960s furniture. They assemble massive collections of books, travel to exotic locations and sometimes find the idea of relaxing horrifying.

2 THEY ARE RESEARCHERS

Culture creators are obsessed with research. They are more likely to invest time in informing themselves with exhaustive research before assembling solutions, a practice which is sometimes misdiagnosed as procrastination. The culture creator is driven to fully understand all the possible dynamics that could factor into a solution before establishing any attempts at assembling innovative strategies.

They may have an advantage over the more process-driven problem-solvers who are more likely to default to a less informed solution or a systematic approach rather than a radical culture-changing vision.

Where many novice creatives jump ahead to find a solution to a challenge, culture creators first invest time in thorough and informed research.

3 THEY DEVELOP THEIR INTELLECT

Much like a terrier on a scent, the mind of a culture creator is wired to learn, learn, learn. They have an enormous respect for the history of art and design. Every past movement, every Zeitgeist creative leader, every cultural icon in the design world, they love to learn more about and celebrate.

Understanding things such as why the opulence of Victorian style affected the Arts and Crafts movements's stark purity is just the sort of fact retention that moves a culture creator to learn even more. Culture creators can identify nuances in influence and have an insatiable appetite for knowledge that can

affect their creative work. They use knowledge as a building tool that allows them to inject context and relevance into every idea they invent.

4 THEY ARE RESPECTFUL

Have you ever had to go on a diet to lose a few pounds? One of the basic tenets all successful diets share is the idea of "practicing conscious eating." Practicing conscious creativity means that you consider every influence, you taste each bite.

Culture creators exercise mindful creation all the time because it all connects for them. Their ideas flow from a sea of influence that's been collected over time and analyzed, evaluated and sometimes reconsidered before being stored away in their brains. The knowledge and influences we have today are really ideas that have come from other minds; a certain amount of respect is due to those who have come before.

Culture creators respect design's history as well as its future. They build context and relevance into every solution they create.

5 THEY'RE ATTRACTED TO EXCELLENCE

Culture creators have a deep passion for excellence in design as well as other disciplines. Excellent food, music and film are inspiring to them. They have a true appreciation for things that are done with skill and attention to detail, whether it's perfect stitching in a shirt, an intriguing set design or a perfectly composed gourmet meal.

Just as they prize knowledge, originality and expertise, culture creators are attracted to a job well done. An amazing attention to detail, an exceptionally well thought-out concept or a stunning execution will get their attention. Better yet, a truly excellent creation will have all these qualities.

6 THEY DEVELOP EXPERTISE

Nothing ticks off a culture creator more than incompetence. Culture creators have little tolerance for underperformers, poseurs, fakers, dishonest designers or opinions from unqualified evaluators. They may be perceived as naive or even arrogant, since their ideas and recommendations are often based on where culture has directed the project and not the solution that meets the client's perspective.

Becoming an expert in their niche or talent is more important to them than pleasing their client or their boss, so conflicts can easily arise. Culture creators respect proven expertise in most any field, and they measure real achievement more through the quality and efficacy of what one has created rather than by its mass appeal or commercial potential.

7 THEY'RE INTERESTED IN VALIDITY

Culture creators listen to their inner voices above anyone else's. Not motivated by pleasing their bosses or their companies, they're instead focused on how the end-user desires what they produce. They're good at assessing the capabilities of someone who's evaluating them. Therefore, they resent evaluation

and critique unless it comes from a validator who they deeply respect—preferably another cultural leader.

8 THEY CREATE FEARLESSLY

Culture creators are fearless. They're naturally tactical and strategic, although this doesn't necessarily mean in the business sense of the terms. Creatively, they seek challenges, such as attempting to solve unthinkable problems.

They surround themselves with peers of equal or greater significance. If challenges are set too low for them, there are generally poor results. On the other hand, high challenges paired with highly skilled creators often result in extraordinary work.

Achievement and success for the fearless might mean changing conventions or even establishing new ones. These fearless leaders boldly go where others have only dreamed.

9 THEY RESPECT RARITY

Culture creators celebrate rare expressions of individuality. They're obsessed with not only observing life, but with studying the debris of life, as well. In doing so, they place value on what others deem worthless and see wonder in the refuse of everyday life.

They're attracted to original objects, either man-made or those ephemeral creations of nature. They

have a unique perspective on life and often craft their own identities from a complex mixture of categorizing, cataloging and collecting.

Something that is one-of-a-kind may be priceless to a culture creator.

10 THEY ARE ORIGINAL

Culture creators don't follow established leaders. Their ultimate goal is originality—something that's often difficult to identify until they find it. Being truly original is often a moving target that they're always chasing after.

Culture creators are generally acutely aware of their position and status in the greater scheme of world cultural development. Their vision is often so clear to themselves that they have little patience with those who fail to connect intellectually to their unconventional processes.

Since boldly going where no one has gone before is often a scary proposition for most people, culture creators can be perceived as arrogant. In a world steeped in the familiar, originality can be frightening.

Culture creators never default to a formula. They prefer to sow the seeds of phenomenon.

THE FUTURE FOR CREATIVES

This is a great time to be a designer. But in a world where anyone can design, you need to work harder in

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order to stand out. The best news is that you have a real weapon that cannot be imitated—passion.

Passion defines an authentic designer from anyone who designs simply because it's fun, or just to have a career. Whether you agree or not, design is an art form. The best designers are first and foremost artists. Everything else can be learned. Honest design requires talents that cannot be learned, only improved upon. Those gifts are passion, curiosity and drive. I firmly believe that without the art aspect, design is merely meaningless execution, not informed creation that moves people and changes the world.

As creatives, the future may be more exciting than we could ever imagine. The opportunities are plentiful as technology progresses. Who could have ever predicted the positive outcome of design 20 years ago? Its

role has been elevated to a place where suddenly we creatives seem to have dream jobs. One time, not so long ago, the highest position a creative could have in an organization would be that of creative director—but today, executive search firms are on the hunt for the next hot futurist, imagineer or chief creative officer.

Our culture has a heightened respect for design, and big business needs what we as creatives have to offer: our brains. We cannot control where design is going, but we can be assured that the ride to get there will be all too exciting. It's up to us to create the world that's beyond trend.

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» EDITOR'S NOTE

This article is excerpted from *"Beyond Trend: How to Innovate in an Over-Designed World"* (HOW Books, \$35) by Matt Mattus, who is a professional trend hunter. In his new book, you'll learn how to spot and cultivate the creative traits—in yourself and others—that allow true innovation to occur. Visit HOWbookstore.com for more information.

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