



Is Going Green as Hard as It Seems?

Four designers on the front lines share the ups and downs of planet-friendlier design.

One early morning this past spring, I joined an AIGA breakfast club focused on green design called "Going Green for Real." I hoped the event, held in a cozy nook of a cafe in Manhattan's East Village, would provide perfect fodder for my next column. I wasn't disappointed.

The presenter that morning was Naomi Pearson, a designer and sustainability consultant who has worked for Two Twelve Associates and who hosts the online radio show *Design Evolution* (naomipearson.com/design_evo_radio.html), a program about sustainable design. Pearson spoke about her research into green printing and topics like lifecycle analysis, the process by which designers gauge the environmental impact of a design project from beginning to end. The questions involved might include, How much energy will be used to make this? Can it be recycled, or even upcycled—changed from something disposable to something of greater value—or will it be chucked into a landfill?

The designers gathered at the talk were an eclectic bunch, and some seemed better versed than others in green design. I realized that they could act as an informal sustainable-design focus group. So I interviewed four of the attendees—Tina Chang, Joe Shouldice, Anke Stohlmann, and Richard Salcer—to find out: Why is green design so important, and what challenges are involved?

Their responses reveal how designers can be alternately inspired, intimidated, confused, and occasionally triumphant in the quest to figure out what green design means as a real-world practice.



TINA CHANG

Partner, Little Fury

and Start Here

littlefury.com; starthereny.com

What obstacles are preventing designers from becoming better versed in green design?

"Green" is a huge buzzword. The challenge is really about trying to take it seriously instead of it being just a catchphrase. It's an easy label to put on everything, and I think the danger is allowing people—not only yourself, but in general—to get away with the idea that you're doing your part, but you're not really pushing it. So little is required nowadays to be considered "green," but when you break down something, you start to understand that there's much more that could have been done, or you see how you're just doing the minimum. You've done several green projects, including Start Here, your own line of green notebooks. Do you have specific tips on how to make a lower-footprint design?



The Start Here notebooks, printed on recycled stock and manufactured by local printers, feature a range of green innovations, such as a biodegradable corn plastic wrapping. Design firm: Little Fury,

Help Remedies packaging, made from 100 percent biodegradable and recyclable paper pulp. Design firm: Little Fury; industrial design: ChappsMalina.



If you get the printers involved early on, I think that's a great way of increasing your green factor. Because they can tell you, "If you could make this brochure 16 pages, that would be better because it's gaining up on this one sheet." You're creating less waste.... There are so many technical things that printers have expertise on. Instead of using them toward the end of a process, if you use them at the beginning, they can be tremendously helpful in honing your design to its ideal form. How are you learning about green design? I think the learning happens when it's real and as things are actually on your plate.... Ask yourself, "What's the project I have in front of me, and how can I make it more green?"



JOESHouldICE

Designer, SagmeisterInc.
sagmeister.com

What do you find most daunting about green design? I think it's im-

portant to be realistic about the fact that—at least today—a lot of the stuff we do is going to have some kind of harmful effect, but that there are a lot of, and increasingly more, ways to do small parts of your project that will make it greener.... I think that trying to hang onto those, and grow those, is a more realistic way of looking at things instead of going for the 100 percent option. It's probably pretty hard for a lot of people to go whole hog into it. What stood out from the talk as being particularly interesting or helpful?

What does resonate is that [Pearson is] the expert, and she's also quoting other people she feels are experts. And yet *her* feeling—and even these other people who are "the experts of the experts"—their attitude toward it all is that they're still learning as they're going, and they don't have all the answers either. I think that was a nice little lightbulb moment. What could you never give up even if it wasn't green? Posters. There are all those special treatments and printing techniques, but there's no specific one that makes me think, for instance, I could never design again if I'm not allowed to do foil-stamping. But if there's an opportunity to do a poster, even if I know it's something of a superfluous poster that doesn't need to be printed, I think that the opportunity is always extremely appealing. And that would probably win out.



ANKESTOHLMANN

Creative director,
AnkeStohlmann Design
ankestohlmanndesign.com
What do you find most daunting about green

design? How it clashes with reality—or budgets, in a sense. Ideally, you always want to do green design, but if your client has very small budgets, what do you do? What *can* you do beyond using recycled paper? Recycled paper is just one step. But if there's not a huge budget, or your client doesn't have an interest, how can you weave it into the design? What stood out most for you from the presentation? What really resonated with me was the way Naomi phrased it, that it's really a step-by-step "conversation by conversation." You cannot achieve it all in one go. It has to become a way of life.... You don't have to be there [now], but if you think, "I'm going to be there in ten years," then that's OK, too. How do you go about making those initial changes? I guess it's taking a moment at every step in the process and looking at the design again—not just specing it the same way because that's what you've always done. Instead, taking that one minute to just rethink and ask, "Can it be done differently?" What's one thing that you couldn't give up even if it

wasn't green? Printing in general. Having something in your hand, a book—those things are all printed. How many trees went into this book? So even though I'm the designer of a book, I'm also the consumer; I want to have it in my hand.



RICHARD SALCER

Creative director,
Richard Salcer Design

What is green design

to you? Well, green design to me is nothing new, let's put it that way. This is a subject that seems to come to the fore every decade or so. In the past, people have made noise about it, and then it disappears, but I have a feeling that now it's different.... A lot of the talking has to cease, and the action has to start.

Why is it important? Some people think, "Well, it's expected of us." Other people look beyond that. As far as what it means to me, it's incumbent on designers to be knowledgeable about sustainable ways of doing things. And also to take the sting out of the word "sustainable." I think people hear that and their eyes glaze over: "Oh yeah, sustainable—what are we sustaining?" A lot of people still have that feeling inside, and nobody wants to acknowledge that they don't know what it means yet. What would help you make the transition to reducing the impact of your design work? All I can say along those lines is that a person has to stay curious about this sort of thing. Nobody's going to hand this to you saying, "Okay, here it is, the turnkey operation whereby you can be a green designer." You have to want to know what you can do about it. You have to attend seminars, you

have to read books, you have to stay curious—so that when people ask the questions, the answers come to mind readily for you.

FOR EXTENDED Q&A WITH THESE DESIGNERS AND MORE ON WORKING GREENER, CHECK OUT
printmag.com/sustainability

JEREMY LEHRER, a Print contributing editor, is a community gardener and compost specialist who writes about design, spirituality, and sustainability. He will contribute frequently to the new printmag.com section on sustainability.