



CAREER

NEXT GENERATION OF DESIGNERS

Meet six recent graduates who share their career goals and job-hunting strategies. You'll be surprised to learn which job attributes trump good pay for these ambitious newcomers.

Has the Great Recession caused up-and-coming designers to scale back their dreams? Not in the least, say several creative professionals just starting their careers. Like many young people, these individuals have high ideals: They prize meaningful careers over large paychecks. They want to exert influence in their companies, not as aesthetic champions but as problem-solvers.

Fortunately, the ability to make a difference may be more within reach than ever. Design is now commonly viewed as an integral part of the business, rather than an afterthought, thanks in large part to the work of previous generations. Still, finding that perfect first job isn't easy, particularly in a fragile economy. Here are the stories of six emerging designers, including their career ambitions, job-hunting strategies and ideas about the road ahead. We'll check in with them every so often to see how their careers progress and keep you updated in this column.

A NEW FACE AT FACEBOOK

Vivian Wang; www.vivianwang.com

graduation Date: May 2011

How does a new graduate land a job at Facebook? Just ask Vivian Wang. The Carnegie Mellon University communications design major applied for several positions with Silicon Valley companies, including Facebook, as she neared graduation. "Facebook was my first choice because it's almost like a start-up," says Wang, who specializes in interaction design. "People really care about design there."

The interview process took about a month, but Wang eventually landed her dream job as a product designer. The secret to her success? "I always over-prepare," she says. "More than just researching the products and websites of companies, I make it a point to talk with people who have worked there. I also try to think of more intelligent, useful questions to ask during the interview."

Wang had experimented with many aspects of design before settling on interaction design as her specialization. "It's a field where I can truly be the director behind the project," she says. "I can encourage people to interact with a website and get immediate feedback."

An internship at New York City-based frog design this summer cemented her interest in interaction design. After working for frog, Wang decided that she would like to try working for a corporation, where she could receive immediate, ongoing feedback. She also wants to be continually challenged. "I never want my job to feel easy," she says. "That's why a big and versatile environment is important to me."

A CAREER PATH WITH MANY OPTIONS

Stephen Edmond

graduation Date: May 2011

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, Stephen Edmond was a junior at a high school in New Orleans that offered a wide variety of visual arts programs, but no graphic design classes. The hurricane's devastation caused his family to flee to Shreveport, LA, where they spent three weeks living in a stranger's two-bedroom house, along with 15 other family members. It was during this turbulent time that Edmond was exposed to graphic design through a career-development school specializing in fine arts that he attended while in Shreveport. "I fell in love with the process of graphic design and working with a medium that's understood as well as interpreted," Edmond says.

Edmond, who has practiced an array of arts, including acting and gymnastics, says that although the devastating blow of Katrina caused him to "do a lot of growing up in a short amount of time," one silver lining, in retrospect, was being able to learn about a field with which he was unfamiliar.

After finishing up high school in New Orleans, Edmond applied to various design schools and was accepted into the Maryland Institute College of Art. Now, as he nears graduation, he's evaluating his career options. At the start of his job search, he set a goal of having a career path lined up before December 2010. As part of this plan, he pursued an internship with Ikon, a digital media and marketing company with offices in London and New Orleans, and was offered a job as a junior designer. Although he likes the company and the ability to work on diverse projects in his hometown, Edmond didn't want to put all of his eggs into one basket. "I decided to work hard and keep pushing because you never know what can happen," he says.

Being active on campus helped Edmond identify a new opportunity. Through a school-sponsored luncheon, he had the chance to meet celebrity make-up artist Beggie Wells, who has launched a new cosmetics line. The two hit it off, and Edmond started freelancing for Wells. Recently, Wells expressed interest in having Edmond work for him as a designer. "The job opportunity with Beggie Wells offers a lot of freedom," Edmond says. "I would get to work on a start-up business that has an immense amount of potential."

Although Edmond has yet to make up his mind—he hasn't ruled anything out and continues to explore

NO PLAN? BIG PROBLEM

What's the No. 1 mistake new grads make when job-hunting? Hank Richardson, director of design at Atlanta-based Portfolio Center, says it's to begin a job search without a plan. "The very idea of design is to have a plan to create something, so why not create a plan to get a job?" Richardson says. He offers the following tips:

- **Mark your target.** The goal can be as simple as to get a job with a small design firm, but you must clarify your objective.

- **Fill in the blanks.** Outline a set of criteria that describes your ideal job. This could include the city you want to live in, the type of projects you want to work on, the type of firm or company that most interests you, or the kind of individual for whom you want to work. Look for opportunities that satisfy most of these requirements.

- **Hit the books.** School may be over, but your research is just beginning. Search through design magazines and online to find out about as many prospective employers as you can that match most of your criteria.

- **Make a list.** Based on your research, develop a list of the decision-makers within each organization that interests you. These are the people you'll contact in your job search.

- **Catch their attention.** Reach out to those on your list through networking activities and personal contact. A digital minibook or a personal website that displays your work can be helpful in attracting the attention of hiring managers.

"If you make a plan, you're going to get there," Richardson says. "It's about a dream. People dream about the places they want to work, and the plan can help you achieve the dream."

opportunities—he does know that he wants a career that offers freedom and the ability to use all of his talents, including his acting ability. He also wants to make the world a better place. "I see myself in a place where I'm flexible and able to be experimental with design that has some sort of social impact," he says.

PREPARED FOR OPPORTUNITY

Jaki Hale; www.heresjakt.com

graduation Date: May 2011

The Boy Scout motto, "Always be prepared," isn't lost on Jaki Hale. She began creating her personal brand identity, including a business card, website and portfolio, more than 18 months before graduation. "I've been trying to maintain a green identity that's a Paul Band-inspired minimalistic style," she explains. She hopes this identity, as well as her work as president of her collegiate Advertising Federation chapter and the experience gained through internships, will help her



HIRE ME
Vivian Wang created a fun, hand-illustrated leave-behind for prospective employers that offers eight lighthearted reasons for hiring her.

land a job as a junior art director. "I really like conceptual," she says. "I think it's the perfect mixture of business, art and psychology."

Recently, Hale has exercised her conceptual muscles through the National Student Ad Club Competition, helping to create a campaign for this year's sponsor, JCPenney. "We're learning so much because we have access to all of these resources that the university can't always afford," she says. "It's a lot of hands-on experience."

The communication arts and advertising major from the University of West Florida in Pensacola is getting additional firsthand experience through her internship for the marketing department at The Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine, where she does everything from promotions to public relations to event marketing.

When it comes to finding a job, Hale has enlisted the help of her parents, who also work in the ad business. She's made plenty of contacts on her own, too, by helping out with the Addys and participating in local trade groups and conferences.

"Last year, the president of our Ad Club got an on-the-spot job offer from Y&R at a conference," she says. "If that happened to me, I would have to take it!"

RIGHT BRAIN MEETS LEFT BRAIN

Mike Hu; www.mikeyhu.com

Graduation Date: December 2010

Many people might think engineers and designers don't speak the same language. But Mike Hu can see things from both sides. After earning an engineering degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and working for several years in engineering roles, Hu did some soul-searching and decided to explore another interest: graphic design.

"I had always been interested in design and the arts, but I hadn't taken it seriously," he says. Fortu-

nately, his aunt worked in the design field. With her encouragement, he enrolled in a bachelor's program in graphic design at the California College of Arts.

Nearing graduation, Hu began an internship with NOON, a small San Francisco-based interdisciplinary design studio. He landed the internship by asking the owner of the firm—who also teaches at CCA—for the job. After a few months, the internship transitioned into a full-time design role, allowing Hu to work on a range of projects, from print to web design.

His engineering background has helped him with the technology side of design, but Hu doesn't want to limit himself to digital media. "I know for sure that I love interdisciplinary design," he says. "I think I would be bored doing just print or just web."

Hu's long-term objective is to keep improving his craft and to grow as a designer. One thing he's learned early in his career is to not shy away from risk-taking. "I think the best piece of advice is not to be afraid of failing," he says. "More than anything, you just need to put yourself out there."

BUILDING A HEALTHY CAREER

Colleen Miller; www.clickcolleen.com

www.landermiller.com

Graduation date: May 2011

Colleen Miller isn't exactly a newbie to graphic design. She and her husband, Rick, owned an independent graphic design business, Landers Miller Design, in New York City for three years before she decided to pursue her master's degree in interaction design from the School of Visual Arts. For Miller, the new direction offers exciting possibilities. "We're building up a relatively new field that concentrates on the relationships—interactions—among people, media and technology," she says. "It's part of creating an overall user experience, where we help define the structure and behavior of interactive products and services."

The discipline Miller is most interested in is health-related. For her thesis project, Miller is working on a mobile application that helps people make small improvements to their diet that can eventually become habits—a process that takes about 28 days, according to her research. Her goal is to find a job that combines her interest in health and wellness with her design talent. She thinks that a larger organization or design consultancy is her best bet for finding that sort of position, but it can't be just any large business. She plans to be selective in her search. "I like the idea of doing freelance-to-permanent work because there can be a trial period to see if it's working and whether you want to have a longer relationship," she says.

Above all, Miller seeks a job that provides balance. "If you're working all the time, some things can suffer, like your diet or the ability to have an outside life that contributes to the quality of your work," Miller says. "My dream job is about creating a lifestyle for myself that includes personal balance, a holistic understanding of stakeholders and users, and finding new ways to contribute delightful experiences to the world."

When it comes to finding a job, Miller has the luxury of being able to work for Landers Miller until the right opportunity comes along. "I don't want to go

out there after two years and be where I was before," she says. "I want to take the time to make sure I find the right fit."

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Malin Beedijk; www.becauseitsdutch.com

graduation date: May 2011

You could say graphic design runs in Malin Beedijk's family. Both of her parents are trained graphic designers. Watching them as she grew up in Portland, OB, was enough to convince her that this was the career path for her.

Beedijk started out pursuing a graphic design degree at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design before transferring to the California College of Arts, where she has honed her interest in simplifying information and ideas. "I'm interested in infographics, mapping and the visualization of complex data," she says.

This summer she worked as an intern at San Francisco-based Elixir Design, where she fell in love with the design firm and all of the people there. The experience made her realize the importance of finding the right fit. "You're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you," she says about meeting with potential employers.

Although she enjoys San Francisco—her thesis involves representing the city from unique perspectives—she thinks the cost of living in the Bay Area is a little too pricey for someone just starting out. So she's targeting more affordable cities, like Portland, for her

first job. "At this point, I'm looking at entry-level positions and internships as a way of getting into companies that I'd be most interested in," she says.

A priority for Beedijk is finding a job where she's not just working behind the scenes. "I would like to be at a point where I can manage projects and close client relationships," she says. "I feel like to create good design, you need to be able to communicate with your client and audience."

Eventually, Beedijk may make a bigger move: graduate school at the Design Center, Eindhoven, in the Netherlands, where she can get in touch with her Dutch roots while experiencing design from an international perspective. For now, she enjoys learning about different design firms through AIGA-sponsored studio tours and reading every design publication she can get her hands on. "I feel like you can do almost anything you want to do in your career, but you really have to be connected to other people who are doing the same thing," she says. "There's so much more out there than you could ever learn on your own."

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