

## INTERVIEW

by Hazar Alkhawaja

### When were you first convinced of design as a field of study?

I was very creative as a child, and my parents were very supportive by registering me into art classes through public and private lessons. I had won various poster designs usually relating to food groups at my elementary school. My sister who is ten years older was enrolled at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana taking art classes. When I saw the pastels she was drawing with, I was fascinated! AND that kneaded eraser; coolest thing ever! When I was about 15 years old and a subscriber to Seventeen Magazine, I saw an article about Graphic Design. That was it for me, and I knew then, that was my destiny!

### Please share some aspects of your design process when accepting a design related project?

I always talk with the client and ask the same 5-W questions and the 1-H: 1. Who are you? (or your product, service, etc.). 2. What do you do? (hopefully better than their competition). 3. When do you do this product or service? 4. When was this product or service created (like a history of the company). It's sort of the About Us page. 5. Why do you do this? Created a product or service or have a generational - a family history of it? You do this because you are unique, passionate, etc.? 6. How do you do this, your process, and are you using traditional medium or on-line or both? Then my research begins. I look at a lot of the

competition, I ask if there are any examples (print and web) that they can share either that they have had designed previously of their own work or of their competition, even their own likes of previous or current examples of print or digital media. I usually come up with three solutions. Depending on the client, I will sometimes give a conservative approach, a middle approach and a more forward approach, this of course depends largely on the client. This can lead to a first round of elimination. This is when the client has their say, often they begin to tell you what they really wanted! This can be frustrating so you have to remain positive, leading them to a solution that makes sense to their end user. Sometimes that is what you have to emphasize, the end user is who you need to please!

### What are some of your long-term goals within the design field? [Besides publishing an amazing magazine that people won't be able to put down].

HAHA, we can only hope! Professionally, my long-term goals are to stay relevant. I hope to always be "learning" while expanding my knowledge of new media and to remain healthy while continuing to be passionate about all things design! I love my chosen career, it is such an easy job, when you do the thing you love; you can't believe people pay you to do what is your passion. That is the key to a professional life.

### What may be the most challenging thing you

### face when beginning a new project?

I have learned in the past that you must sign a contract up front and be paid a good portion first as a retainer of sort. Lawyers do this so what prevents design professionals to not do the same?

### If you were to choose between an endless supply of fine paper from a company such as Neenah or free future upgrades for your design applications, which would you choose?

Future upgrades! But I love beautiful paper; the client pays for the paper selection since that is part of the design.

### What is some of the advice you would give to designers who are breaking into the field, elaborate if possible? [I would love to hear your responses to this].

I have actually just designed a series of Self-Promotional stickers I call Design Motivation! But here are some that I will have to include in Design Motivation.

1. Be Passionate
2. Love what you do unconditionally
3. Your portfolio should be the very best design out there
4. Stay humble
5. Be kind to others
6. Work hard, play, exercise and rejuvenate
7. Admire and appreciate nature, and great works

8. Drink plenty of H2o; eat healthy!

As you know Hadeel, I have a manifesto I always post to students:

My Manifesto to You: *"Show Up... On Time, Be Prepared with New Work to Show Each Week, Think Forward. We must be willing to know at least a little bit about a lot of things to be successful, awarding winning designers. Keep your eyes aware and absorb visually, the world around you. You must be open minded and explore: the internet, art exhibitions, art history, fashion, architecture, movies, photography, publications, marketing trends, current events, history, typographic trends, advertising, television, news, graphics, billboards, books, magazines, newspapers, cultural events, sports, world news, culture, international travel, environmental issues, popular culture, cultural differences, languages, international foods, demographics, dance, music, and much, much more, etc. Be a sponge!"*

**Who are you most inspired by, or what are you most inspired by when creating influential work?**

So much and so little time! I am mostly inspired by the multitude of shapes. Basics really: Circles, Squares, Rectangles, all of it. When I design fonts, this is where I start. I think it goes back to my childhood when I was in my father's office. He was a Civil Engineer and Surveyor. I would have these templates with which to draw and he would

give me vellum to doodle. He was a Mapmaker/Draftsman and I think that is where I got the engineering skills or rather the drafting skills; while my mother encouraged all sorts of handcrafts, she was a DIY way before it was "cool". She was a seamstress with incredible intelligence and talent. She was a huge inspiration and I miss her; we were very close.

**What would you consider a very complicated concept or idea to have to explain to an individual who may or may not have touched base with anything design related?**

Well I think I would start by showing examples from nature. It's everywhere. In a seashell, a butterfly, a bird, the animal kingdom, a tree, flora and fauna. It is all around us. The architecture in Chicago (which I am very influenced by) is just amazing! From Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. I love great Architecture. These are some of my favorites including the buildings of Jeanne Gang and the drawings of Zaha Hadid.

**When you have reached an inevitable block or break when vigorously working on a piece, what would be some of the steps you take to get those "creative juices" flowing again?**

I have practiced Martial Arts for many years, so it is good to take three classes a week where I am in a leadership role; I also take a bike ride along the Fox River where I live. I have a great Frank Lloyd Wright inspired home at the water's edge; it is very Zen. To

see all the geese, ducks, fox, deer, birds, raccoons, the trees and the amount of natural environment is relaxing, especially the water and the changing sky. My office looks out over this amazing setting.

**Does any specific type of music make you work harder or you become more productive to when listening to it?**

Sure, don't we all as artist use music as our muse! If I want to speed things up I play upbeat or if I am contemplative it is smooth and slow. I listen to almost all genres except a few, who shall not be named.

**Last and final question, if you could choose any individual-designer or within another field-alive or had previously passed away, to have an opportunity to collaborate with on a grand project. Who would this individual be and what would the project sound like?**

God, because he's in the details!