

“Where Do You Get Your Ideas?”

I try to find ideas from something seemingly unrelated and extrapolate its essence to arrive at new and fresh ideas. That’s a good way to avoid sophomore design statements.
—Trevor Combs, Super Innovative Concepts, Inc.

Usually great ideas come from other categories, meaning if you are developing a product for the hardware industry you might use an idea from a housewares project you just completed.
—Paul Metaxatos, Proteus Design

From my mistakes. Or better put, discoveries are my best ideas.
—Linda Celentano, Linda Celentano, Inc.

Everywhere. Stuff I see, needs I find, combinations of things, growing, traveling, watching, doing, making, etc.
—Tucker Viemeister, Springtime-USA

From interacting with other people about a project. They usually say or do something that stimulates a solution.
—Peter Bressler, Bresslergroup, Inc.

I love to walk. I make a conscious effort to remain aware of the world around me in an energized way. Inspiration can sneak in from the oddest places you’ll miss if your mind isn’t open and ready to take it in. Good magazines are a source of inspiration and a knowledge base for what’s out there, what’s not, and opportunities I can capitalize on as a designer. I also read the *Wall Street Journal* every day cover to cover. Design is a business, and what designers do is very much a part of the world of dollars and cents. I need to understand that for the way it directly impacts my work.
—Joel Delman, Product Development Technologies

I enjoy walking through department and specialty stores to see what’s around. I go to trade shows like the International Housewares Show or the Tabletop Show to see what’s going on in new products. It’s important to be aware of what other people are doing and which companies pay serious attention to design.
—George Schmidt, George Schmidt, Inc.

I get many ideas from carefully observing the world. Ideas are a bit like radio waves; they’re all around us. The more I’m able to contemplate and focus on a given problem, the clearer the solution becomes.
—Mario Turchi, ION Design

Just look at the world; the ideas are right in front of you. Just watch people use things and then create things for their functional aspects. The aesthetic attributes are usually in nature.
—Davin Stowell, Smart Design LLC



Exhibit Design

Exhibit design includes trade shows, permanent museum installations, and temporary installations. Its essence is designing experiences that inform and educate. The message is the most important part of exhibit design; conveying to the audience complex ideas and concepts is the challenge. Exhibit designers are edutainers; they must both entertain and educate at the same time. (Sometimes entertainment is the only goal; the Nickelodeon Slime machine is pure entertainment, sliming the audience in a splash of green while belching.)

Exhibit designers work with every sense. They want us to feel, see, hear, taste, and smell whatever experience they are trying to convey. Immersion in the experience is their goal. If we are descending into the abyss of the ocean, we should experience it in every way we can, from the sound to the way light filters through the water. Exhibit designers usually work with curators who gather the information and items to be displayed and create a script of the text and images that make up the exhibit. The designer usually starts with this script, which precisely details the objects, experiences, and text to be included in the exhibit. Most exhibits now are produced simultaneously with an accompanying book; this also helps the designer to understand the material.

Once the script is understood and digested, the designer will make proposals as to what form the exhibit might take. These are usually quick sketches or models that express the kinds of experiences the audience will have. Once a direction is chosen, the designer begins to expand on these ideas and develop more elaborate proposals. Exhibit design is storytelling in three dimensions. The structure, form, color, lighting, and text all must work together creating a complex experience that allows each viewer to take away something different.

Unlike most designs, it is difficult to define accurately who will visit a given exhibit, so exhibit designers must create an experience that appeals to everyone, from the eight-year-old to his grandmother and everyone in between. Designers in this area have embraced universal design, using every means at their disposal to improve access for all, including talking rails, Braille signage, and tape-recorded exhibition tours. Exhibition designers are constantly finding new ways to communicate ideas to a broad audience.

Exhibits range in scale from simple kiosks that give directions or make a single point to major product introductions that cover entire exhibit halls and

convention centers. Automobile companies introduce their new lines at major automobile shows, where experimental designs are tested on the public to see what they like and dislike. Electronics companies introduce new products and new concepts in communication to the public and their dealers at giant shows in Las Vegas. Exhibit designers get the inside track on all this new stuff. And they get to create environments both fantastic and realistic, sometimes in the same space. Whether the product is automobiles, electronics, dinosaurs, chemicals, rugs, furniture, or books, exhibit designers are involved in creating the displays that help visitors learn what's new, exciting, and intriguing. Exhibit design is much like set design in the theater. It's show time! Telling a good story and having the audience get it is the goal of every exhibit designer.

Be of Service

DESIGNER: LOUIS NELSON

Title: President and Director of Design
Firm Name: Louis Nelson Associates, Inc.
Location: New York City

What makes you happy when you come to work?

I'm happy that the office is growing in the quality of the projects we are working on. And I'm happy because I see a great deal of opportunity, largely because of the events of 9/11, for how design can be of service to the country and the people of New York City. I've always looked at how to be helpful. I'm really in a service business.



Product: No Nonsense packaging

Designer: Louis Nelson

Client: Kayser Roth

Year: 1973

Description: The market strategy naming, packaging, and merchandising of No Nonsense Pantyhose changed the aisles of supermarkets, made the color orange belong to this singular product, and for the first time offered inexpensive sheer hosiery to a fashion-conscious American public.

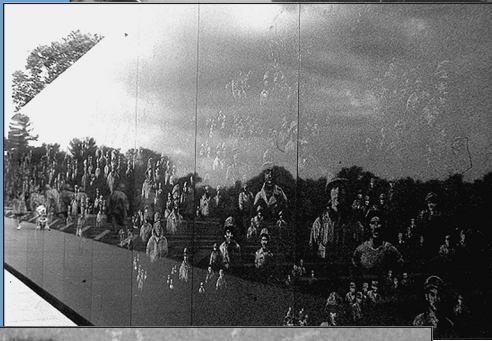
Photo: Melabee Miller

You've designed in all sorts of scales, from packaging to monuments to large environments. Do you use the same design process every time?

The process is always the same. When my staff or I don't follow the process, we run into problems. The first thing I do is find out what a problem is all about. Then I figure out the ideas to solve it. Once we pick the idea, we develop it. Then it's easy. The only things that get in the way are distribution problems, cost issues, details. Everything is in the concept. You can't do a concept unless you have some perception of the real needs or the perceived needs. But it has got to be more than just fulfilling some sort of immediate need or satisfaction, though there's nothing wrong with that. Years ago, when we designed pantyhose packaging, we came up with a package and a name that didn't demean women. All the packaging up to that time was extraordinarily demeaning. So No Nonsense provided a good product at a good price that was packaged in a direct way.

Years after designing No Nonsense pantyhose, you won a commission to take part in the design of the Korean War Memorial. Did you bring that same humanistic attitude to the Korean War Memorial?

Yes, but it also involved bringing an understanding to those who know nothing about the Korean War. The memorial had to coexist with other prominent memorials: the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam War Memorial, and the Washington Monument. They wanted a mural on a wall, but the memorial would be near one of the most successful walls ever built: the Vietnam Wall with all the names. How do you do something distinctive and also serve the purpose of coexistence? I searched in my own history to



Product: Korean War Veterans Memorial

Designer: Louis Nelson

Client: American Battle Monuments Commission

Year: 1995

Description: This powerful 164-foot-long mural, created to be “a memorial portrait etched on the nation’s heart . . . a touchstone to history,” is composed of over 2,000 photographed portraits of American soldiers, men and women of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. Etched on Academy Black granite panels, it stands on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

Photo: Jeff Goldberg

understand the effect the Korean War had on me. I think it's impossible to be detached as a designer. You have to be a part of your solution for any design.

I did a lot of reading about the war. It was far bloodier than Vietnam; we lost 54,000 in three years. I researched images of war from Mathew Brady's time during the Civil War to David Douglas Duncan, who took moving photographs of a Marine battalion in Korea. There is one common thread, and that's the look in people's eyes. That's what I wanted to put on the wall. At the same time I'm thinking traditional form, which is a sculpture of a great person, like at the Lincoln Memorial. The Vietnam War Memorial is essentially a restatement, masterfully done by Maya Lin, of another traditional form of monument: putting messages on walls. The only other way people honor service is by putting a portrait of their loved one on their mantel. So we developed a mural of portraits of real people who served in Korea, and it became the nation's mantel. The images are etched into a reflective surface so you can see yourself, and you become part of the past and part of the future.

Product: AirTrain station platform showing clear directional sign system suspended with minimal supports.

Designer: Staff of Louis Nelson Associates

Creative Director: Louis Nelson

Client: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Year: 2003

Photo: Louis Nelson Associates

What's your favorite product?

My favorite is always the thing I'm working on now. Right now I'm working on the AirTrain, a new public transit system linking Kennedy Airport to Manhattan.

Talk a little more about the AirTrain.

AirTrain is the largest mass transit program in the last half century, although it's been on the books since the late 1950s.

People will be able to board a Long Island Railroad train at the new Penn Station in Manhattan and get off at the new Jamaica Station, which will be completed in 2003, and then walk probably 300 feet to the new AirTrain for a short ride to Kennedy Airport, where it will make a loop of all the terminals. The time from Penn Station to Kennedy is 38 minutes, and it will cost \$11. You can check your baggage at Penn Station and pick it up at your destination.

What are your duties?

We're responsible for the train technology; it's a light rail system developed by Bombardier that's been around for a while. We're not using magnetic levitation, but



AirTrain



RAIL LINK

A

HOWARD
BEACH

STATION

B

LEFFERTS
BLVD

TERMINAL

4

TERMINAL

5/6

the quality of the ride will be reliably good; the nature of the architecture is very good. We initially started working with the Port Authority architectural team on all the information systems. As the team leader, I had to pull five disparate systems together because they all come together at Jamaica Station. We're also responsible for all the signage and all the street furniture—train platform portals, places of entrance, and things like that. Our task is to make sure weary travelers are able to find their way to New York without any problem.

What else?

Everyone uses brightly colored skis these days. My team is responsible for getting Head Ski into multicolored ski technology.

How did that happen?

In the 1970s everyone was doing black skis built around various technologies for performance. But a revolution was happening at that time, and everyone wanted to be different. New materials were coming out. There was a fashion revolution. We changed to a

Product: Head Skis

Designer: Louis Nelson

Creative Director: Louis Nelson

Client: Head

Year: 1970

Description: Louis Nelson revolutionized the ski industry with the use of color, moving this successful line of skis beyond the typical black standard. The spectrum of color designates a skill level and relates to the psychological mindset of the skier, from beginner to expert.

Photo: Melabee Miller

Product: AirTrain station identity system and sign face detail showing typography and symbol application.

Designer: Staff of Louis Nelson Associates

Creative Director: Louis Nelson

Client: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Year: 2003

Photo: Louis Nelson Associates



spectrum of colors so the whole line of Head Skis would stand out. The subtext to that story is that the marketing forecast for the hottest color was purple. But the engineering team said, "Men don't buy purple." By the time the skis got to market, the hottest-selling ski was purple. So men buy purple.



Product: DAG Hammarskjöld Medal
Designer: Louis Nelson
Creative Director: Louis Nelson
Company: Louis Nelson Associates, Inc.
Client: United Nations
Year: 1998

Description: This simple crystal, designed to be held in the palm of a widow, a mother, a father, commemorates the fragility, purity, and strength of those men and women, military and civilian, from all over the world who have lost their lives while serving with the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Its nontraditional shape emphasizes the bestowment of the award as a posthumous benediction, not to be worn but to be displayed in a family home.

Photo: Skalski

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 7 Wafers (29g)
 Servings Per Container About 8

Amount Per Serving
Calories 120 Calories from Fat 20

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 3g 4%

Saturated Fat 0.5g 3%

Polyunsaturated Fat 0g

Monounsaturated Fat 1g

Cholesterol 0mg 0%

Sodium 160mg 6%

Total Carbohydrate 22g 7%

Dietary Fiber 4g 15%

Sugars 0g

Protein 3g

Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0%

Calcium 0% • Iron 8%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories: 2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Product: FDA Nutrition Label

Designer: Louis Nelson

Creative Director: Louis Nelson

Company: Robert P. Gersin Associates

Client: FDA

Year: 1979

Description: Louis Nelson initiated the research and design effort to develop and implement nutritional labels for the FDA. This label is the standard on the billions of packaged food goods referred to by the American public each day, giving them information to make healthful choices.

Context

DESIGNER: KATE HIXON

Title: President

Firm Name: Hixon Design Consultants, Inc.

Location: New York City

How do you create a space in a space?

Through contrast and organization. In the case of the FAO Schwarz doll department, we achieved this by creating a visual identity separate from the store itself. We used unique display fixtures, graphics, and flooring to distinguish yet unify the individual product lines within the space. The result is a visually branded environment, where the forms and finishes become the interior architecture over that of the box.

We were then asked to do their Los Angeles flagship store. Although the store was smaller than most and full of columns, it was expected to display the same amount of product as larger stores. By the time we laid out the space with shelving and floor displays, only the ceiling was left for any special design treatment to give the space character.

So where a column hit the ceiling, we created color lighting zones to differentiate between departments. This also became a way of animating the plain white box without taking any floor space. In addition to the interior architecture and fixtures, we designed the feature clock tower and a giant mechanical toy soldier that sits over the outside entrance tipping his hat and twitching his mustache.

Product: FAO Schwartz
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: David Niggli
Client: FAO Schwartz
Year: 2001



Was it a thrill to design a toy store?

It was fun, and certainly a break from our core corporate business—but thrill? We get a thrill out of making things—refining the design as we go. This process was different for us because we didn't build it. The real estate development people ran the project. We did a model, finish boards, and control drawings, after which we handed it over for the client to build. We had very little quality control.



Product: Grand Central Partnership
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: Jones Lang LaSalle
Year: 1999

Do you enter design competitions?

Typically not. However, the project for the seasonal marketplace at Grand Central's Vanderbilt Hall was the result of a competition. We wanted to create retail fixtures or booths that would complement the architectural character of the space. We had to start with planning the space for function, traffic flow, and financial viability. It turned into a grid of 8- by 10-foot booths. So we did a massing model to see how we could minimize this effect. We proportioned the height of the units and angled the sides to complement the ceiling height

and the chandeliers in the space. The wall panels are made up of translucent panels with etched graphics to diffuse seasonal colored lighting. Ribbonlike signs further animate the space with color and add a sense of celebration.

What is your most successful project?

The before and after shots of the Pfizer lobby renovation convince me that it was a successful project—but the real success is in the continued relationship that has grown from that initial project. We continue to evolve their corporate headquarters toward a unified vision, one project at a time.

What would you like to design if you could?

Absolutely anything, but my favorite expression is always in the use of space as an abstract design medium—so, I guess, interior and exterior architecture.

How did the Ernst & Young project come about?

It was a result of an unsuccessful project. But they liked our ideas well enough to keep us involved. Ernst & Young's ad campaign has a simple minimalist look—black and white graphic icons with catchy phrases. We were asked to transform these advertisements into window displays for their new headquarters in Times Square. Our challenge was to meld the sophisticated character of the ads with the high energy and visual constraints of the 42nd



Product: Pfizer Corporate Headquarters, Lobby
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: Pfizer
Year: 2000



Product: Ernst & Young Headquarters, Window Display
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: Ernst & Young
Year: 2002



Product: IDEA
Designers: Hixon Design
 Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: Anwei Law
Year: 1998

Street district (“razzmatazz” was actually specified in the design criteria). To bring these disparate sensibilities together, we turned the streetfront windows into infinity boxes and the Ernst & Young icons into white relief sculpture. The displays were then animated with changing colored light, and everyone was happy.

You do work for nonprofit organizations. What kind of work is that?

Primarily exhibition design and production, but also some branding and print. We have been working

and print. We have been working since 1995 for a group called IDEA (International Association for Integration, Dignity, and Economic Advancement). This work started as an awareness campaign for Hansen’s disease. First was a photo exhibition at the United Nations and then a book, brochures, traveling exhibits, and now a headquarters and museum in Seneca Falls, New York. Their budgets are low, but we find the work rewarding; we get to enhance communication through design consistency.

Other nonprofit work includes various United Nations exhibitions, architectural signage for El Museo del Barrio, and an exhibit system for O2 (Green Design Networking Group).

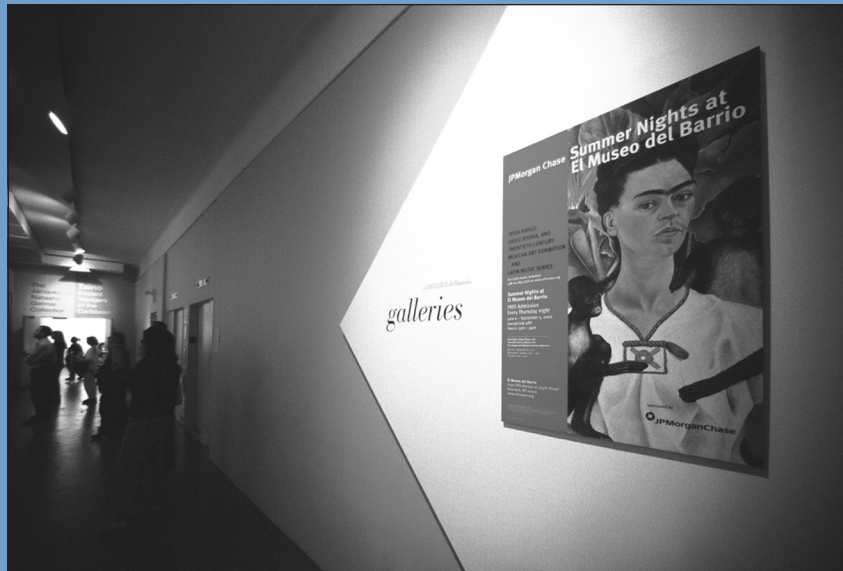
Why do you do this nonprofit work?

Because I’m a hippie! I believe we all need to contribute to our world with whatever talents we are lucky enough to have been given.

When I first got started in the business, a lot of people gave me opportunities; now it is time to give back. Most of our nonprofit connections have some basis in academia or work at the United Nations. It gives us an opportunity to be with people who care about something—which is good for us as a group.

Product: United Nations
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: Doreen Beck
Year: 1999





Can you sum up your design philosophy in one word?

Context! Everything we do has a context. People ask me the difference between design and art. Art creates its own context, whereas design is always in reaction to something: a design brief, a time span, a budget, an existing condition. Design is how to make the most out of those ingredients.

Where do you get your ideas?

Again, it's context. Because context is why our solutions work. It's where we get our ideas. All of our solutions and all of the details in our solutions are linked. Our visual ideas come from the analytical process we have learned at Pratt Institute. We lay out what we are going to try to achieve, and we start to sketch abstractly. Through that process an idea comes, we react to that idea, and then we get another, and another, and another.

Product: El Museo del Barrio, Architectural signage
Designers: Hixon Design Consultants
Creative Director: Kate Hixon
Client: El Museo del Barrio
Year: 2002

Meaningful

DESIGNER: FRED BLUMLEIN

Title: President

Firm Name: Blumlein Associates, Inc.

Location: Greenvale, New York

You have been quoted as saying, "Design is about exercising your imagination." What do you mean by that statement?

Your imagination can be free only if you are free. When designing, we try to play; we laugh a lot. Silliness breaks down the adult in us.

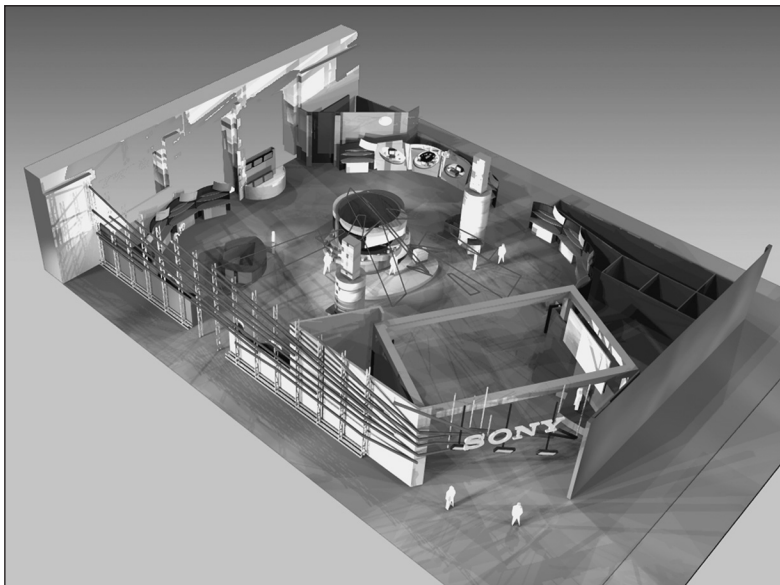
What makes you happiest about being a designer?

It's about understanding the world—seeing what needs to be done, imagining what could happen, then expressing those ideas on paper and in models, then seeing it become reality and people using it. It's always a surprise to see people use the stuff because we think we had this particular intent and people use things any way they damn please. It's remarkable to see the ingenuity of human beings when they encounter your materials; the designs have a life of their own.

Why did you become a product designer?

I like the integration of graphics and environments. I have always considered the object to be an experience, a prop in the theater of life. What we do is come up with the environments that are the stages of life. Most of the founders of industrial design came out of the theater. Design is theater.

Computer-generated rendering of the Sony Comdex 2001 exhibit.



When did you know you wanted to be a product designer?

I had a wonderful teacher in high school who suggested I might have the talent to be a designer. I remember visiting Pratt and seeing a sewing machine that was different from anything I had seen before. As I was studying it, Rowena Reed explained how design was done in an understandable way. At that moment I knew that is what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. It was a eureka moment.

What's your favorite product?

The McPhone for AT&T is one of my favorites because it is ridiculous. It's a giant toy for grownups. It was commissioned by AT&T as part of a bakeoff among telecommunications companies to get the McDonald's account. We thought we could have some fun with it.

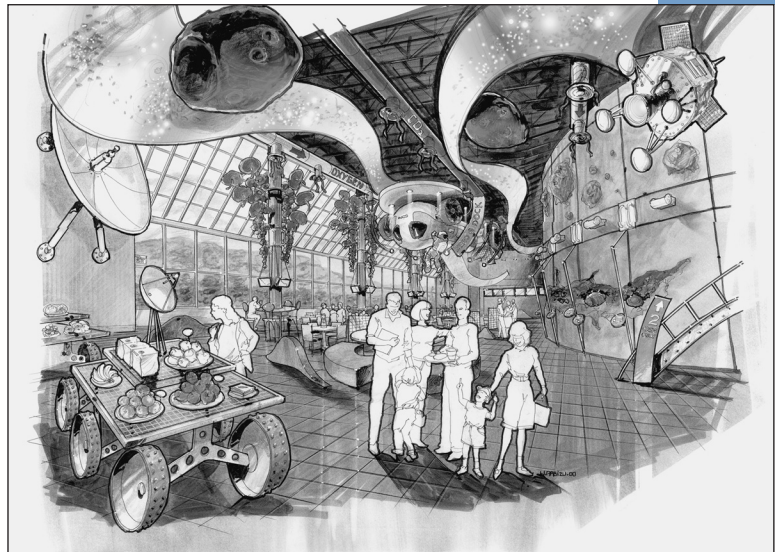
What is your favorite project you have done?

Both Spaceship Earth VIP Lounge for AT&T at Epcot Center and AT&T at the Movies Pavilion at Universal Studios were enormous fun to design and execute.

What are you working on now?

The Reckson Center for the Cradle of Aviation Museum on Long Island's Mitchell Field, where many planes were tested and pilots trained during World War II. We've been working on the Visitors Center and have just completed a restaurant called The Red Planet Café. It's a Mars station, a wacky environment themed to go along with the Cradle of Aviation Museum. The air and space museum has a remarkable collection of aircraft, including some of the Wright brothers' planes and a lunar module. We are supporting this with graphics and signage. It's wonderful to have a client who listens and appreciates ideas.

Final design concept of the Red Planet Café.





The main entrance of the 2001 Sony Comdex exhibit combined linear PVC tubing and digital graphic murals to create a sense of architectural space.

Can you sum up your design philosophy in one word?

Meaning! The meaning is the actual creation. The meaning is what people relate to in the spaces we create. The meaning is the people in the space. What will they need? How will they move through the space? What will their reactions be to the space? What do they smell, touch, feel in the space? Meaning exists on many levels. When we designed the History Bus for *Newsday* we created a series of interactive areas that fourth-graders can relate to and that can withstand their attack but with a depth of



The Sony Mobile Electronics exhibit at the 2000-2001 Consumer Electronics Show. The exhibit consisted primarily of digital graphic prints laminated to plywood. A mix of actual objects, including automobiles, was used.

meaning that adults can also enjoy. This is the challenge of exhibit design: layering meaning. As designers, we have to provide enough flexibility so the audience can find many meanings and each individual can have a unique experience. We seek a universality in the things we do so they hit a chord. We create experiences that go beyond language.



What qualifications do you look for in a designer?

One of the most stringent qualifications is humility. If you're going to be hired, you have to go through the test of being handed a broom and sent to the basement to clean up. A lot of people fail that test. I sweep and take the garbage out, and I expect everyone to do it. I also look for a sense of respect for other people's talents. Design is not about earning a living; it's about earning a life.

Initial concept sketch for the "Schooners and Steamships" exhibit module. The interior of the Winnebago housed five exhibit modules dealing with different areas of transportation

Can you describe your History in Motion project?

The Long Island paper *Newsday* did a series of articles looking back at the history of Long Island from the dinosaurs to the present. They wanted to bring this to children as a traveling exhibition in a 35-foot Winnebago and asked us how to do it. The content covered the history of aircraft, automobiles, boats, ships, and trains (the Long Island Railroad was the first commuter railroad in the United States). The exhibit travels to grade schools in New York State, where the fourth-grade curriculum is local history.

When you are designing for fourth-graders, do you design differently than you would for adults?

We work to make the exhibit, as the expression is, bulletproof because kids are going to jump on it, hang on it, and use it in ways you could not possibly imagine. Replacement is important,



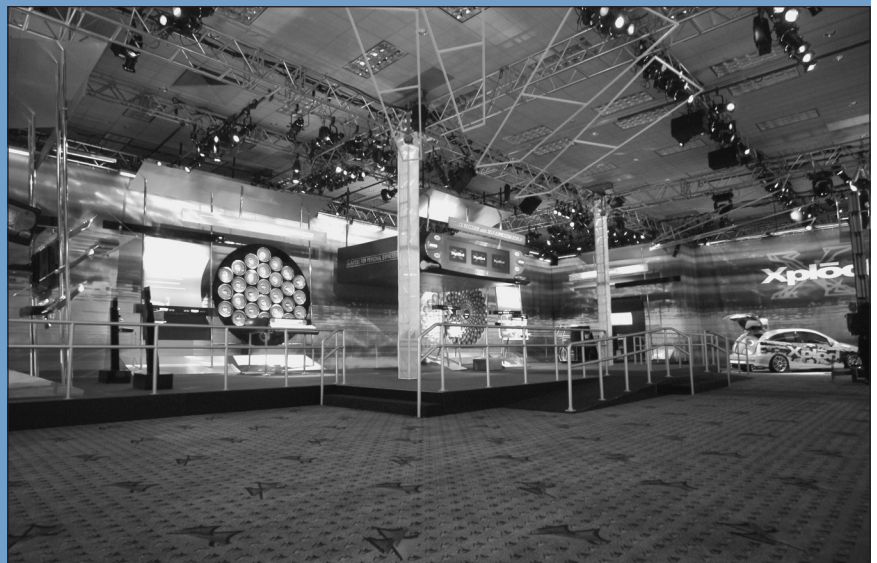
Each History in Motion module had hands-on artifacts, such as steering wheels. When the artifacts were turned they caused interactive wheel graphics to rotate, revealing a series of informative visuals through “porthole” windows.

as well as simplicity. We made it easy for children to navigate, but for people who want to go deeper we added touch-screen interactives. These are on the outside as well, so people get a preview of what happens inside. The exterior design is also meant to entertain and inform even when it’s just sitting still or driving down the highway.

What’s your design process?

It’s basically a communal effort. Everybody doodles, everybody has ideas, everybody has an opinion. When we start a project, we all sit around the table and throw out ideas. It’s a community of ideas; usually we can’t tell who came up with the ideas we eventually decide to develop. Laughing at what we are trying to accomplish helps us free our minds and explore areas we might reject if we are too serious. We put our egos aside and try to create something that’s meaningful.

The Sony Mobile Electronics exhibit at the 2002 Consumer Electronics Show.



Question

DESIGNER: TOM HENNES

Title: Principal Designer
Firm Name: THinc Design
Location: New York City

What makes you happiest when you are designing?

I love the unsolved problem, which is much of the work we do in museums. The task of bringing unexplored territory to people who otherwise wouldn't likely encounter it is really fun and an enormous challenge. Most of our work goes beyond physical design to cognitive design.

So is it about bringing the story to the viewer?

It's beyond the story. It's the challenge of laying out a piece of terrain that people can explore in their own way. It's about giving people the chance to connect the dots themselves. We try to make the dots visible but let visitors do the work themselves so they have a role in the process instead of being passive passengers along a predetermined curatorial route.

Is this a new way of thinking about exhibit design?

I don't know if it's entirely new, but I think it's relatively unexplored. It runs counter to current trends in museum pedagogy, where the goal is for people to come away with a uniform result. We're taking an approach that embraces nonuniformity and embraces complexity and says people are capable of more than they are given credit for.

What's your most successful design?

One of our real mixed successes is the project we did for the Mystic Aquarium. I think it's successful because people do explore it; they do feel a sense of wonder, and many of them want to come back. It's a failure because it isn't sufficiently explorable. It's one of my favorites because it launched us on a whole new way of exhibit making.

Product: Challenge of the Deep

Client: Mystic Aquarium Institute for Exploration

Design Team: Tom Hennes, Bill Camp, John Evans, Sasha Marbury, Paul De Koninck, Daniel Maldonado

Fabricator: Mystic Scenic Studios, Spitz, Inc., The H.R. Hillery Company

Lighting designer/supplier: Paul Palazzo

AV designer/supplier: Xenon Pictures, Dennis Earl Moore Productions

Year: 1999

Photo: Jamie Padgett





Product: Nickelodeon Green Slime Geyser
Client: Universal Studios, Orlando, Florida
Designer: Tom Hennes
Year: 1992
Photo: Tom Hennes

Are people, in general, smarter than we give them credit for?

There's far too much seriousness about these things. I think the universe is a fantastically whimsical place. We're doing an exhibit about water for the California Academy of Sciences; it's the heart of an aquarium. The exhibit begins by addressing the connection between water and life. It turns out that life is an extension of processes that happen in ice. Water is constantly trying to be ice at 68 degrees, but then it remembers it's not supposed to be ice at 68 degrees. It's monstrously hilarious, mysterious, and stranger than anything you could make up. I don't know how we'll show that, but we'll get there.

Do you have a favorite project?

My favorite project is the Nickelodeon Green Slime Geyser because it's just a stupid machine that belches slime every fifteen minutes. This project is really about scatology; for kids.

Do you get to learn a lot doing exhibits?

Heavens, yes! It's a free education. We're doing a fantastic project with the Field Museum in Chicago that deals with the 15,000 years of human history in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. I've never done an anthropology project before.

How do you design? Where do you start?

There are as many ways of starting as there are projects. I'm torn between two approaches we use simultaneously. One is to gain enough sense of the material to get an intuitive feel, to make some leaps without getting lost in the subject, and the other is to dive deeply, to get lost in the subject and see whether that leap was the right one or not. It depends on when the magic strikes. Sometimes there's just a lot of fact and data gathering.

We talk a lot of the problems around; we sketch and scribble a lot. We have a wonderful collaborator, the sculptor Marc van ven Brook, who brainstorms projects. The two of us end up on the floor cutting pieces of paper and making funny models because something intuitive occurs to us. Sometimes those lead to

insight. With Cal Academy we started doing very, very fast, rough cardboard models before we went into developing an explorable landscape. If you focus too much on the subject matter and too little on the exhibit material, you'd end up writing a wonderful textbook that you can't build. And if you focus too much on the physicality of the exhibit and the activities, you may miss some really interesting territory. We play with ideas as hypotheses and punch holes in them. If someone can't punch a hole after several rounds, we might have something worth keeping. Until an idea has gone through that process, it's just another idea.

Who are your heroes?

My personal hero is John Dewey, who developed concrete executable criteria for experiences that are educative or noneducative, for defining what an experience is and how it actually functions. How you can use experience as a kind of positive good. How you foster experiences and open people to greater experiences. I continually go back to his slender little book *Experience and Education*, which has become our philosophical foundation and methodological, scientific approach. Now we're moving into areas he hadn't considered.

Can you sum up your design philosophy in one word?

Question. The quality of the exploration is only as good as the quality of the question. And explore, because if you stop looking at a place you haven't looked at yet, you're going to stop growing.

How did you become a product designer?

I did lighting and set design in the theater for several years. Then theater begot industrial shows that begot theme park attractions that begot an exhibition at Epcot. Though I was completely intimidated by doing an exhibit for IBM, by the end I was hooked.

The IBM exhibit at Epcot was a relaunching of IBM in the consumer eye. Paul Rand had done this spectacular rebus logo, which was the only thing in IBM's entire repertoire that had a wink to it. At first they didn't want to show it to anybody. Eventually we had a screen saver made of it that ended up on all



Rainforest Cathedral Sketch



Product: Solutions for a Small Planet
Client: IBM
Location: EPCOT Innoventions, Orlando, Florida
Designers: Tom Hennes, Victor D'Alessio, Jim Goldschmidt, Jennifer Whitburn
Fabricator: Cinnabar, Orlando, Florida
Fabrication team: Dave Park, Barry Adamson
Lighting designer/supplier: Paul Palazzo
AV designer/supplier: Clarity

the Aptiva computers. The work on the exhibit started to infuse back into the brand as well. It's been wonderful to develop relationships with companies that are in a period of transition, because interesting things happen at those points.

What would you like to design if you could?

The mind fairly reels among submarines, gliders, helicopters, spaceships, and the Whalelarium where virtual whales swim up to you.

Product: Playstation Store at Metreon Center, San Francisco, California
Client: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Designers: Tom Hennes, Victor D'Alessio, Karen Gettinger, Miguel Petrusak
Year: 1999
Photo: Jean-Michel Addor



Product: Sony Playstation, E3 '97, Atlanta, Georgia
Client: Sony Electronic Entertainment
Designers: Tom Hennes, Victor D'Alessio, Sasha Marbury, Mike Graziolo, Daniel Maldonado, Dusan Mosscrop, Stephen Cook
Fabricator: Exhibit Group
Fabrication team: Chris Oberding
Lighting designer/supplier: Clarity
Year: 1997
Photo: Jamie Padgett, Ross Muir



Product: Seagate exhibit, Comdex '98, Las Vegas, Nevada
Client: Seagate Technology, Inc.
Designers: Tom Hennes, Rick Stockton, Dana Christensen, Marna Clark
Fabricator: Exhibitree
Lighting designer/supplier: Paul Palazzo
Year: 1998
Photo: Jamie Padgett