

BGC CRAFT, ART & DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Roby B. McEuen

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Conducted by Laurel McEuen on April 1, 2013 at Robeegraffix Advertising Design, Fort Worth, Texas

Graphic designer Roby B. McEuen is Vice President and Co-Creative Director at Robeegraffix Advertising Design, LLC, a privately owned advertising agency located in Fort Worth, Texas, which he runs in partnership with Gina McEuen, President and Co-Creative Director. The firm specializes in developing corporate identities and strategic marketing plans, and the creation, design and execution of integrated advertising campaigns. The agency's portfolio includes service, retail, corporate, and product identities, print and promotional materials, and website and interactive design.

McEuen was born on May 11, 1959 in McAlester, Oklahoma. He attended Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology, where he earned a Certificate in Commercial Art. In 2008, he earned a Master's in Advertising Design from Syracuse University. McEuen is the recipient of multiple American Advertising Federation ADDY Awards. He teaches Communication Graphics at the University of Texas, Arlington, and previously at Texas Wesleyan University and Texas Christian University. He is married to Gina McEuen (b. 1957), who became his business partner at Robeegraffix in 1986, and is father to Laurel McEuen (b. 1988) and Rachel McEuen (b.1993).

In this interview, McEuen discusses his background and education as a commercial artist, and his career in graphic design, advertising, and teaching. Topics include the advertising design community in Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, client-designer relationships, the market, fees, influential graphic and advertising designers, international design sources, the impact of computers, changes in printing technology, and design education.

This oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview. The interviewee has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

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Laurel McEuen (LM): Thanks for talking to me today.

Roby McEuen (RM): Sure, glad to be here.

LM: I really appreciate it. I guess we should start out by talking about some of your background; maybe about where you were born, where you grew up and if you think this may have had any impact on you going into the arts.

RM: Well, I was born in McAlester, Oklahoma, in 1959, the middle child of three kids. I have an older sister and a younger sister, the son of Billy Walt and Sara May McEuen. They both had some artistic talent. My mother painted and my dad was able to draw, but I'm not sure that where and how I grew up had so much to do with it. I learned early on that art was a really good way to meet new people. And that was really handy because my dad moved around about—our whole family moved—about every two years so we were moving to new and different towns and artwork was kind of skill set that not a whole lot of kids had. So it was kind of the way that I ingratiated myself with my peers. And, so I did things like drew custom t-shirts for kids and art work and different kinds of creative projects as a means of making friends and opening doors and by the time that I got to high school was a fairly accomplished artist. And not so much like fine art but rather cartoons, and I used type and things like that on t-shirts and kids paid me money for it. And so I was a commercial artist even when I was back in high school. Then those drawings and pieces of art—cartoons, type designs, little funny sayings—I walked into, I guess I was sixteen, and walked into a sign shop in Oklahoma City and showed them all my stuff and asked if they needed somebody to work, and they said, "Sure." And so I worked in a sign shop for about a year, painting and designing signs, all kinds of designs—painting directly on surfaces, exterior signs, plastic vacuum signs, a lot of different kinds of signs. And was probably the only kid I knew that was sixteen years old and really doing a professional type of job. I wasn't waiting tables or sacking groceries or anything like that. By then I had really kind of decided—my older sister had gone into the graphic arts—and I had decided by that time that was what I wanted to be was a graphic designer, or at the time what they called it back in the late seventies, early eighties would be a commercial artist, someone who produced art work for commerce and was paid for that.

LM: So you knew commercial art to be like a lucrative business practice. You didn't necessarily identify like as an artist, or you did?

RM: Well, I thought it was kind of neat that I could take something that seemed like breathing to me—like drawing breath, drawing to me was, because I had been doing it for so long—where I

could take something that seemed like walking and get paid to do it because nobody else was doing that.

LM: Right. I think it is really interesting that you use commercial art which, in our society is really about being able to communicate and to sell ideas, and you actually used it to interact and communicate with your peers so that's kind of an interesting sort of connection.

RM: Yeah, I was—I don't know that I was necessarily aware of it at the time—although I do think that I had kind of an underlying consciousness of—that if I doodled on my paper and drew pictures and kind of "illuminated" the things that I turned into teachers, tests and things like that, that I would garner attention for that. And sure enough, I did. And people were like, "Ooh, you can draw," and I was like "Yeah, I can draw."

LM: Yeah. It's a testament to the power of visual communication in our society.

RM: Right. Well, yeah. Even back then before they came up with the idea of personal brands, I was the kid who could draw.

LM: Yeah. That's really interesting. So it's more of a function of the way you operated within society more so than how you were raised or other like factors like that.

RM: Absolutely. Like I said, both my parents had some creative talent and ability. Neither one of them pursued it. And it turns out that all three of the kids in our family all ended up being graphic designers at one point in their lives or commercial artists so that all three of the kids had the ability to see, to create and use different types of mediums to make art and communication and visual communications.

LM: Yeah. What do you think about your educational background, where you pursued your—you have a technical degree, right?

RM: Uh-huh. I have a Certificate in Commercial Art from Oklahoma State University and it is now called Technical Institute. At the time they didn't offer any kind of degree. They offered an Associates and a Bachelor's now, I think. Anyway, that was really the only place that they [were] really teaching, not only the creative side of commercial art, but also there is a trade side to the business in terms of producing materials for reproduction that four-year institutions weren't really addressing, and so I went to Oklahoma State Tech to learn how to get something printed, prepared for pre-press, to get it printed and mass produced, and that's what was really my entrée

into the business. It was the fact that I knew how to create materials for reproduction that got me in the door in Fort Worth at my first job.

LM: Okay. So, I mean, you would say that was probably a distinct advantage of having a technical degree versus something like a B.A. in Fine Art?

RM: Absolutely. The fact that I actually applied—I didn't really apply for a job. Here's my first job interview experience—not my first one but my first job that I got—I had been interviewing over in Dallas. I was about to graduate. I had gone to advertising agencies, graphic design firms, illustrator studios and I had a very general portfolio, which meant that there was illustration in it, it meant there was production art work in it, it meant there was design work in it. And when I went over into Dallas, everybody was very vertical in whatever it is that they were doing so ad guys all knew about advertising and the graphic design guys knew about graphic design and the illustrators knew all about illustration and they never had really seen a portfolio that was very general that was good, that showed a broad range of skills and abilities in one portfolio. So what the ad guys saw were portfolios that were full of advertising and graphic design people saw portfolios that were full of graphic design and so on and so forth. And when I went on the interviews over in Dallas, which is a really big market, so everybody is kind of in a niche; they have a niche skill that they promote. Well, the ad guys all looked at my advertising and said it sucked. But my graphic design looked pretty good. And then when I talked with the graphic design people, they were like, "you don't know anything about graphic design but you know what, we really like your ads. There's some good ideas in that and you just might be a great ad man someday." Then all the illustrators looked at my illustration, which was passable—I mean it was not great illustration but it was good. All the illustrators were like, "don't be an illustrator." And so after about three days of that—interviewing in Dallas and just kind of not really knowing where I needed to be because nobody really knew where to put me—I had one interview left to make over in Fort Worth that was—this lady was a friend of my mother's uncle, so my great uncle knew this lady in advertising and had given me her name and I set up an appointment and I went over there. It was Claudia Benge at Goodman Advertising, a little advertising firm that was about eleven people. I got, oh, about half way through my portfolio and the spiel that goes along with it and she said, "hold on just a second," and left me in the conference room and came back and had the owner, Max Goodman, with her and asked me to start over. And I was like, "okay, I'll start over," and so I started over, got about half way through my spiel again and Max asked me, "Would [you] come back in the afternoon and talk to the creative director?" And since I didn't really have anything else on tap, I was like, "yeah, sure, I'll come back," and so I went downtown Fort Worth, looked around, saw kind of what was going on, killed about two hours, came back,

met with the creative director, got through the whole portfolio with him, he took me around the agency, introduced me all the people, and then began talking money. And my mentor at college had told me if they start talking money then they are pretty serious about hiring you. And he said when you go in there, go in with a number of what you think you need to have to live. And at the time I asked for \$12,000. A \$1,000 a month seemed like an awful lot of money to me at the time. And, they said, "Well, I don't know." They would have to meet and call me back. And then so they called in and made me an offer and it was \$10,000 a year for a year and I was—it really wasn't hubris on my part—but there was a guy in Oklahoma that I wanted to talk to before I accepted the job and so I said I need to talk to this one guy, I'm driving back to Oklahoma, finishing up school and I need to talk to him and see if he's got anything for me—because I had already talked to him and he didn't at the time—and so I went to see Dick Gilpin and stopped in and asked him, "Hey, I have an offer down in Fort Worth and just wanted to see if you have a spot that was open for me." He said "No," his son was fixin' to graduate and that he was probably going to bring him in and that was who he was going to hire, and so I said, well, if you are ever in Fort Worth look me up and I accepted the offer. I got \$100 to move my stuff—all my stuff—down to Fort Worth so I got me a U-Haul, I had a pickup truck and a U-Haul with a trailer behind that and loaded up all my stuff—I didn't even fill up the trailer—and moved down to Fort Worth and the job that I got was a job that they had been advertising that required two to three years' experience. And so I think what the education at Oklahoma State Tech afforded me was an opportunity to leapfrog over entry level positions and take a position that was two, three or four years' experience required because normally at that time what happened was that people came out of a four-year universities, went to work and took a really crappy job so that they could learn production and learn how to produce artwork and then that would take a couple of years and by the time they figured out production then they would go look for the job they really wanted. And I was able to step into a creative position—an Associate Art Director's position—at a small advertising agency in Fort Worth that needed somebody that had a broad range of skills, that could design logos, that could create ads, that could do illustrations because it was a general market, and do that coming right out of school as opposed to going to work for a publication firm, or a printer, or somebody like that, and learning production and learning how to create work for reproduction which is a very specialized—even today—is still a specialized skill that requires a very specific knowledge base and skill set to make that happen.

LM: Yeah.

RM: It was interesting to find out later, I told Claudia Bengé, the lady I came and interviewed with, that I only saw her as a favor to my Uncle Max because I was just trying to save face with the

family. She just started laughing. I said, "What's so funny?" She said, "Well, I only saw you as a favor to your Uncle Max, too." She said, "I was pretty sure you were going to come in here with a portfolio full of watercolors and I was going to have to send you down to Radio Shack or Tandy or Pier 1 or one of the really big companies that could hire somebody to kind of do the grunt stuff," and so she was very surprised at what I had to show in my portfolio and what I knew about the business and my understanding of production art work and why that was important and how that worked into advertising, graphic design and visual communication. So it was interesting. It was interesting to find out later that she just really didn't expect anything from me based on the portfolios that they had been seeing from the kids that were coming right out of school.

LM: That's really fascinating. Did you—I was going to ask—is there a reason you came down to Fort Worth or were you looking in Dallas?

RM: Well, remember I told you that my dad moved around every two years and when I was in college they moved down here to Fort Worth, and in fact, my mentor tells the story that I was literally like the kid that went away to college and came home one time and nobody was there—that they had moved away. I don't really exactly remember it that way and I may be just kind of blocking that out of my memory. I do kind of vaguely remember that they just moved away and didn't tell me they were leaving and then I found them in Fort Worth and I'm sure they were upset about that—no, they probably weren't upset about it.

LM: [Laughing.] That's terrible. But funny.

RM: So they were down here at the time and the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex market even back in the—I graduated in 1980—even in 1980s was a much larger market than any market in Oklahoma; larger than Oklahoma City, larger than Tulsa, so it represented more opportunity and a greater variety of work.

LM: That's really interesting.

RM: So that's how I ended up down here. They were down here at the time and I was staying with them while I was interviewing and then lived with them for about two weeks while I got settled down here in Fort Worth and found a place to live and all that sort of stuff.

LM: That's really cool. And kind of scary. But, you kept mentioning a mentor. Who exactly was your mentor? Was this somebody at your program?

RM: Yeah.

LM: At Oklahoma State?

RM: Yeah, one of the instructors at Oklahoma State, a guy named Larry Rose and he had—so he's twenty years older than me and had just started teaching there at Oklahoma State Tech when my older sister went to school at Oklahoma State Tech and he did it the hard way. He went to fine arts school—could draw, could paint, could do all that stuff—but then when it came time to make a living he had to learn all the production side of it—he never got his full Bachelors of Art from Oklahoma University, went to work and worked for folks like Boeing and Lockheed as a draftsman and illustrator and then ended up owning his own agency or graphic design firm in Florida. And so he was a real wealth of information about what the real world was like in the fact that you didn't need a degree from a four-year institution to go be successful in graphic design or even in advertising, and the truth is that at the time there really probably weren't very many programs that were—like today you have the VCU, Virginia Commonwealth University Ad Center, or the Ringling School of Art or SCAD, Savannah College of Art and Design, where they have gotten people like Larry Rose to teach there because they have an understanding of how the business part of communication works. And now they turn out students that get what it is they are doing besides making things that are pretty.

LM: Right, and that's very important. So in between working at Goodman, did you work anywhere else before Robeegrafix?

RM: Yes, I worked at Goodman for one year and so the way that things worked back then—so I was not making a ton of money, making that \$1,000 a month, that's net, not gross—so by the time they got through taking out the taxes and social security and all that sort of stuff, there was not a whole lot left to live on so I was doing freelance jobs on the side for a graphic design firm called Milburn Taylor Associates, and after about a year of working at Goodman, Milburn made me an offer to come to work over there as a designer art director and I took that job and worked there for about a year and then the reason he hired me was he was starting an office in Austin. So I did some jobs for them where I did the production and a little bit of design and they saw that I was capable and able and that when I did paste up all my stuff stayed on the board and it was all square and it was straight and so when it printed it was square and it was straight. Then he offered me a job because what he was doing was he wanted the office in here in Fort Worth and then wanted an office in Austin. His wife has a Ph.D. in business and economics was teaching somewhere down around Austin—not at UT, but somewhere down there—and they were going to move down there and so he was going to open an office in Austin and leave the office open in Fort Worth. So for most of the year that I was there, me and this other young man, Greg Draper,

ran the office here and did everything in Fort Worth for the office except for the billing. We did the estimating, we did the client contact, we did the production, we did the design, we did the art direction, we didn't do the photography, but we worked with the photographers and the illustrators and all sorts of other people producing art work while Milburn was setting up the office in Austin. And that went on for about a year and then he realized that he couldn't afford both of the offices and so one day he showed up and he and Ruth said that they were going to close the Fort Worth office and my friend Greg got a job with the largest advertising agency at the time, which was Witherspoon Advertising, and I was sitting there kind of thinking, "Wow, what am I going to do?" And, so I put together a business plan with the help of my soon-to-be father-in-law and went to my dad's brother who had money and borrowed \$10,000 and kept the office that Greg and I had been running, and on March 15th it stopped being Milburn Taylor and on March 16th it started being Robeegriff Advertising Design. And I was not quite twenty-one at the time and had my own business and a stable of clients because Greg and I were still, the people we had been working for still needed help. So that's what I did. Milburn tried to move me down to Austin. He was going to see if that was going to work but that just wasn't going to work either, so once I figured that wasn't going to work then that was when I went and put together the business plan and borrowed some money and hit the ground running and never looked back.

LM: That's really impressive, your own business at twenty-one, because Gina McEuen [your wife and business partner], who is president of Robeegriff now, she also had her own business at this time, was self-employed, or was she freelancing?

RM: In 1980—let's see, so 1982 would be when I started Robeegriff she was already on her own with a partner and they were running Rodgers and Howard and they were doing the same thing, graphic design. They had both worked at Pier I Imports as artists and designers and just got tired of it and went out on their own and typically that's the way that things worked, you go to the big company, you have steady work for a while, you learn the craft and once you learn the craft then there comes a point in time where you see that you are only going to rise so high within the corporate structure and so you set out on your own.

LM: Yeah.

RM: That's just kind of how it worked.

LM: Yeah, and you have a little more creative control over the final product?

RM: Well, you hope that you have creative control. What we have learned over time is that the work that you produce is only as good as the client allows it to be. And some clients really want to have a hand in what is produced and some clients are willing to trust you and allow you to do the things that you do best.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And the ones that trust you and allow you to do the things you do best are the ones that get the best work.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And the ones that don't and insert themselves into the process all along the way and micromanage the design decisions and the design process get pretty much what they dictate in that process.

LM: Right. That makes sense. So you know Ralph Caplan's phrase 'exotic menial'—so that's less of a tried and true, proven experience of a graphic designer, and maybe varies from client to client?

RM: Well, I think 'exotic menials' are people that basically end up being the hands of other people. They don't get to do their ideas and that can happen in the corporate world where you are working in an in-house art department where somebody—your art director or your creative director or the person that is over you, it could even be an account executive or a production manager—they control what it is that you do. "No, make the logo a little bit bigger." "No, change that color to this." "No, do that." "No, do that." So what you are really doing is designing stuff based on their vision and not on your own vision, not trusting your gut to make decisions about proportional relationship of elements, the colors that they are supposed to be, how those colors go together, what the type is going to look like—you are not doing any of that because suddenly you've got somebody else that is making all of those decisions for you.

LM: Right.

RM: So it can happen in an in-house situation, it can happen in advertising agencies, design studios—any place where there is creative process and there are people that are afraid to allow the creative process to work, then you can find yourself in the position where you are basically just kind of creating somebody else's ideas and you are a, yeah, an 'exotic menial.'

LM: Yeah.

RM: You just make other people's ideas come to life.

LM: In addition to art direction there's a lot of like external factors like the budget and media?

RM: Oh yeah.

LM: and paper and—

RM: Yeah, yeah, we actually used to charge people more, when Greg and I were working together for Milburn, we used to charge—if a client began to really bear down on the process and art direct it, and we felt like they weren't really qualified to do that, we would have what was called "the asshole surcharge" and they would get charged more for doing that because ultimately what would happen is, if you are doing somebody else's work and they are always making changes, it takes more time and that extra time translates into extra dollars.

LM: Right.

RM: So along the way in the process we would have to tell them, "Okay, we have gone over budget," and if they kept changing things, move this over here, move that over there, flush all this, flush that, make this taller, make this bigger, make this shorter, then they would pay for it and that would be the "asshole surcharge." We would just, you know, sock it to 'em.

LM: Well, you have to get paid for the work that you do.

RM: Well, sometimes you do and sometimes you don't based on the client, but at that point that was really the only satisfaction that we would get out of the job—would be to make some money.

LM: Right. That makes sense. So could you talk a little bit about the work that you do at Robeegrafix and maybe—you know, it's Robeegrafix Advertising and Design—what you see as the difference between graphic design and advertising.

RM: Sure. It's Robeegrafix Advertising Design, and there is actually a design process that's involved in advertising and we felt like it was important to have the word "design" in the name because it is a broader term. So, the way that I look at it, the difference between advertising and graphic design is that advertising requires that the message be seen in media somewhere. So it's going to run in a newspaper or an outdoor board or on television or on a cable station, or it's

going to run in a magazine, so there's media that's always associated with advertising. Advertising requires that there be an agency acting as agent for the client in the purchase of media. So the big agencies, they have creative departments that create the television commercials and the outdoor boards and all that sort of thing but the place that they make the majority of their money is from the media buy. So, let's say Wal-Mart's media budget is \$235 million annually and the agency of record that handles them is placing all that media, so they are buying media for Wal-Mart in every outlet that Wal-Mart is in and they are making 15%, which is the traditional commission, they are making 15% of that \$235 million. There is no way that I could design an annual report or a logo or an identity and come anywhere near 15% of \$235 million in a year.

LM: Right.

RM: Ever. So agencies make their money by placing the advertising they create. But the way they get the account is by showing that they have a creative and talented staff. So they use creativity to sell the client but the money is made not on the creative side of the business but in the media and the business side of the business. So there is always media that is associated with the delivery of the message for advertising. In graphic design—graphic design is really anything that's necessary to support the sales effort that doesn't require media. So it might be a sales sheet, or a brochure or an annual report or packaging — or all of those things are called collateral material and collateral material is what most design firms put together. It could be the logo and the identity and the stationary, letterhead, envelope, business cards, pocket folders—anything that's created on behalf of the sales team that is not media related are projects that design firms work on.

LM: So, the design is the means to the advertising.

RM: Right. The actual piece that you create is what delivers the message so if we are doing an annual report, then when the annual report is finished and they distribute it to the shareholders and the shareholders see it and if their company is not doing too well, they might just have a—I think it's called a 10K that just has a cover wrapped around it and they are going to think, "Wow, they aren't doing too well," but if they get a really nice annual report that has four-color photography in it and nice graphs in it and showing charts with the profits they are going to say, "Oh. Well, they must be doing okay."

LM: Presentation is everything.

RM: Right, but there is no media involved so they just distribute this at shareholder's annual meetings, everybody gets a copy of it, so the company is responsible for distributing that to press, media relations and investors.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So the four audiences that they are talking to—three are exterior and one is interior, shareholders are the interior, and all the employees get them too—so shareholders and employees are one, and then you have investors and then you have media relations and those are the people that they are talking to but they don't buy media anywhere to do it. What they do is actually hand them a copy or mail it or deliver it or have somebody from the company take it to them—so there is no media that's involved in the process. It is simply the distribution of the information in the materials that have been involved in the design.

LM: Okay, so that is about the process too, so you would design something, you would lay it out, and you would get it press ready and you would send it to the printer and you may or may not get to buy the printing?

RM: May or may not. Yeah, one of the ways clients today save money is by shepherding their own jobs through the print process and they save the mark up. So we tell people whenever we go to interview with them that we make money two different ways and one way is for charging for the services that we provide—creative services, art direction, design, layout, production, production supervision—and the other one is by marking up things that we buy for them.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And we tell them the typical markup is 17.65% so if we buy printing for them we will put 17.65% on top of that and charge them that and we'll estimate that first but then we'll charge them that and the estimates generally line up with that as well.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So, was that the question?

LM: Yeah. That was the question. I was just kind of trying to talk a little bit about the process.

RM: Well, the process really depends on what it is that you are working on and it depends on who you are working with.

LM: Uh-huh.

RM: So earlier I said that you only do work as good as the client will allow you to do.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So, if I am working with a decision maker I have a greater chance of getting what I envision through than if I'm working with somebody who is not the decision maker. Or if I am working with an individual that is a decision maker and not a committee I have a greater chance of getting things through the way they need to be. So, one of the challenges that anybody in the creative industry faces is being able to get in front of the person that is the decision maker.

LM: Okay.

RM: So I am always going to do better if I can sell my own work directly to the person who is the decision maker, but before I can sit down and sell them my work what has to happen is, generally, there's anywhere from one, depending on the size of the group, two, three, or four meetings prior to ever beginning any creative work to establish the creative brief or the design brief for the project. So we listen to the client, here is what we are trying to do, these are the people we want to talk to and then we go back and we write a brief and the brief outlines a number of different things, it outlines what the problem is, where they are in the market place currently, what it is that they want to do, where they want to go, what kind of media's or what kind of delivery system do they want to use for the message, who they want to talk to, what's our central creative idea that we want to communicate for them and we'll go back to them with that and say, "Okay, this is what I understood when we talked", and if that is not exactly right then happens there is more conversation about, no, that's not the exactly the people we want to talk to, we want to these folks and so things change and you go through a process of creating a brief so what you do is you lay out the expectations of what the client is expecting and what we expect and part of that negotiation is how much is it going to cost, what are the deliverables going to be—everything that's involved in the process. So once you finally come to an agreement—they agree to the design brief, they agree to the estimate, they agree to—everybody is on the same page of where we are going, what's going to happen, what the research says, who it is that we are talking to—then you start the creative process and the creative process can vary. An annual report can take three to five months to create. A single sales sheet for a company—you could probably do that in a couple of weeks. An identity for a company—if a company is really large and they've got a lot of applications for the logo, like vehicles and packaging and advertising and website and they have a number of different types of media channels that they need to apply that

to, there is going to be a lot more work involved in creating a logo and an identity that works for them than if they are just a mom-and-pop and they are just starting, you know, Bob's Guitar Shop, and all I really need is a logo and some business cards.

LM: Right.

RM: So, and again, it depends on who you are working with. The larger the group and the more the layers of bureaucracy that you have to go through, the more that it costs.

LM: Right.

RM: And so, part of what we try to do it, is we try to show the client is that we have thought about this from their point of view and in the presentation show them that we didn't just come up with one design and bring it back to them. What we show them is our process. "Well, this is where we started and this is what we are thinking and this is how is kind of worked for us and this is the progression of how we"—so a lot of times we will show the client the progression—"so we went from this and this kind of spawned this idea and then we went to this and then that spawned this idea"—and what you'll find is that every designer in every design firm has a different process but it's basically the same.

LM: Yeah. What about your personal creative process? I mean, do you have things you do like for inspiration? Do you have any sort of idols or references as to things you look at? I mean, I don't want you to give away your trade secrets.

RM: No, no, no. No trade secrets. It is important to stay lubricated, and by that what I mean is that you don't get too dry and brittle in terms of what you are doing, and so I will talk a little bit about when I wrote my master's thesis for Syracuse, it was on creating environments that inspire creativity and there a lots of different ways to do that. There is inspiration all around us—museums, concerts, even really nice retail stores like if you have ever been in Design Within Reach store, if you have been in the store, the things in the store, if you have any kind of esthetic at all, are very inspirational. The fashion industry in Miami and all of the retail fashion, the graphic nature and quality of a lot of that clothing—highly inspirational—so when I was going to Syracuse, we actually met in different centers of industries—San Francisco, Miami, New York, Boston, London, Amsterdam—and so simply just the exposure to other cultures and other environments where you see things—it's all fresh and it's all new. So in London, the pub signs for all the pubs are really fascinating because each one is a work of art in and of itself. It usually visually conveys the name of whatever the pub is—I can't think of any right off hand—but it's like The Black Pig

and there might actually be a three-dimensional black pig that's up on the sign and then underneath it, it says in type The Black Pig.

LM: Right.

RM: But then you take a thirty-minute airplane flight to Amsterdam and there's really cool street graffiti that's like two, three and four-color posters that have been spray painted using stencils onto the walls—and they are—they are posters for like events or concerts, or—and they have just really great visceral quality about them and so you get exposed to those kinds of things when you go to these different places. That's real helpful and so just as an individual one of the things I try to tell my students is to do is what are you reading. Are you looking at magazines? Are you reading books? Are you going to art shows? Are you going to festivals? Are you going to concerts? Are you doing things that increase the cultural currency that you have to trade with and increase your knowledge base about the esthetic of things that are going on? Our world is not just the world that we drive around in and what is on the internet; there are lots of other different things that can be very stimulating—fashion, architecture, product design—all of those things provide stimulus for the creative. So [in my] personal work, one of the things that I do—I came across a thing that somebody had posted on Facebook about a project that a couple of artists, and I think they are over in Europe, started called Six Word Stories Every Day. So you create a piece of art work and all you can use are six words to tell the story—plus whatever the visual is and so those have kind of become a real interesting [source]—sometimes when I'm stuck or just need a break and need to step back from what it is that I'm doing—I'll create a six word story—and then post that on the internet and what it does is it allows me to look and explore and think about how to use photographs and illustration and typography, when I need to capture ideas or thoughts or feelings in a way that I don't get to do so much in my work.

LM: Right.

RM: Originally, I will tell you that when I first started in this industry, it is very, very difficult to be creative all the time, and when you are interfacing with the computer that's really basically what you are being asked to do. You are being asked to be creative on the computer and there is this function of production and preparation for printing that's kind of going on in the background that relates to what it is that you are creating, but it's really primarily being creative and that really wears, that really wears on me in a way that—and I suspect it really wears on other creatives as well—we need to step away from the computer. Back in the day, when I first started, I was talking about that I knew how to do production art work and I knew how to create a mechanical for reproduction, for getting ready for print. So there were two components to the job. There was the

creative part, which was about sketching and drawing and using paint and airbrush and pastels and all different sorts of art supplies and creating what the piece was going to look like. There was craftsmanship involved in that and then if you sold the idea then you would have to produce it and get it ready to be printed. And while there was an art to great, good clean reproduction artwork, a lot of it is just kind of repetition where—I don't want to say mindless, because it wasn't mindless—but it's about getting the board square on your table with your T-square and it's about making sure that all the lines are straight and it's about making sure that if it's 11 x 17 folded down to 8 ½ x 11 it measures 17 inches wide by 11 inches tall and it has a fold mark in the middle of it at 8 ½ inches so part of it was just really kind of—

LM: The technical aspect of it.

RM: Yeah, it just didn't require a whole lot of creative—it required a lot of technical focus and attention but really no creative. So what would happen—if I was responsible for a job from conception to completion, there would be a period of time that was creative time and then there would be a period of time that was production time. So I wasn't always being creative all the time. I had a chance to step away from it, to get some distance, to back away from it. You don't really have that so much today and, in fact, I think it is real important as a designer and a creative to be able to step away from the creative process and to find other input or a different sort of stimulus to allow me to kind of continue to gin other creative ideas.

LM: Right. And to just give some background, you were talking about pursuing your Master's degree and teaching. You got your Master's degree from Syracuse in what year?

RM: 2008.

LM: Right. And so it's in Communication?

RM: It is in Ad Design.

LM: Ad Design. And you also have, what it is, for the last fifteen years or so, you have always taught and you are currently teaching at the University of Texas at Arlington. Do you feel like these are kinds of things that have propelled you through your career and changed, perhaps, the way that you approach design?

RM: I don't know that it changed the way I approached design. I will tell you that—so I taught as an adjunct at Texas Wesleyan University for three or four years and then I taught as an adjunct at

Texas Christian University for seven years and now I have been at University of Texas for twelve or thirteen years, I'm not for sure how long.

LM: Oh, so more than fifteen years?

RM: Yeah. A long time, and what I learned early on was students are like clients. They don't really know anything. And if I can explain the process to them or I can explain how a piece moves from creative through production to printing to a student, that's a skill that translates directly to explaining that to a client if a client wants to know that. The really good clients don't want to know, they don't care how I get it done. They just care about the creative content and the level of quality they are going to get the deliverable, so—and I will tell you that teaching students—so when I first started teaching I was much closer to their age but as time has gone on they have gotten younger and I've gotten older and what that means is I still have to be able relate to them, I still have to be able to make the materials relevant—I still have to be able to create rapport and connect with them and so that in and of itself is a challenge and a creative endeavor that relates extremely well to business because you do the same thing with clients and with people that you are pitching business to.

LM: Right. Makes sense. What about being a student yourself in your Master's program? It sounds like your travels and your experiences that afforded you really rejuvenated your visual vocabulary, but did you meet anybody along the way that you found to be particularly inspirational?

RM: Well, the Syracuse program was an independent study degree program, which meant that every summer for two weeks we would go up to Syracuse and we did this for three years—we went up to Syracuse for two weeks and during those two weeks they brought in people that were world class advertising and graphic design people. Lou Dorfsman, who is the creative director at CBS, Stavros Cosmopolos, who was one of the founders of Hill, Holliday, Connor and Cosmopolos in Boston. Bruce Campbell who was art director and commercial cinematographer most famous for the Bartles and James campaign that was—it's really old but it's a classic. Oh, who else? Willie Baronet from the Baronet group here in Dallas came in and talked about creativity. They just had a lot of really great, top-notch, first-class people come in and talk to us about process and give us assignments. Kit Hinrichs from Pentagram was there. Delphine Hirasuna who is a writer that works with Kit Hinrichs came in there. These are like all the people that are A-listers of graphic design and advertising and they were there at that school and you got to sit in a classroom with them and you got to ask questions and you got to—you know—when lunch time came we all picked up and left the classroom and got a sandwich or something from

the cafeteria and went and sat down under the tree and talked about the business, and talked about the process and talked about life and talked about what was going on with me and what was going on with them so it was, it was an invaluable experience and extremely invigorating, challenging, and it came for me at a very fortuitous time because I was really dry and kind of used up and I didn't even know it. And that can happen real easy in this industry but so one of the first things we had to do was—Stavros Cosmopoulos—he goes by Steve—gave us an ad to redesign, and he gave us a sheet and the sheet had nine boxes across and seven rows of those boxes so sixty-three of those little boxes that were the shape of an ad and we had to bring back the very next day sixty-three different ideas for an ad.

LM: That sounds exhausting.

RM: It was exhausting but it was also very invigorating.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And so it was our first assignment. We had to bring sixty-three thumbnail layouts the next day so there is a lot of tension. You don't want to be the dummy in the classroom. You wanted to have good ideas, so there is a lot of stress about how does this—how am I going to stack up? How am I going to, is this going to relate? Is it going to be good enough, because there were people in the program that had worked at DDB in Chicago, owned their own businesses, had worked for large publications; there were some really very talented people in the program, and so it was pretty stressful. But it was also—when you get through and you get down to the end of the sixty-three little squares and you still got other ideas that are ginning because you have kind of worked through the process and really begun to think about what the problem was and begin to think about what the solutions might be—that there are visual solutions, audio solutions, auditory solutions, that there are—that it might just be typographic, it could be an illustration, it could be that there are all sorts of ways to come at it. Then you have ten or twelve people in class and you're all putting your sheets up on the board and what you see is that from the ten or twelve people, maybe there is some crossover of ideas, but it's almost like having sixty-three times twelve, or let's say ten, for instance to make the math easy—there are 630 ideas up on the wall for this one ad because of the number of people and because of the process.

LM: Yeah. Well, I think that is so important because it highlights, kind of, the tensions that maybe you sometimes have with clients where they say—they just want you to interpret what they are thinking and it's just like the possibilities are endless.

RM: They can be. And the other thing that you learn is that every artist's voice is valid. Everybody sees things differently, nobody comes at the problem from the same direction. We all have different skill sets. We all have different knowledge bases. We all have different backgrounds culturally that we come from and all those things influence the ideas that we come up with. How we think about them, how we put them on paper, all that sort of stuff, and so if you look at it from that standpoint, was any one person's stuff better than any other person's? Well, maybe they were and maybe they weren't, but I will tell you on every sheet there was at least one gem of an idea for the ad and none of the gems were all the same.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So good ideas can come from anywhere.

LM: I bet that's right. I wanted to ask you, throughout your career can you describe your inspirations. I want to know who your idols were, what kind of work you were looking at—any sort of graphic design greats or particular styles?

RM: Sure. Well, my older sister who preceded me in graphic design at Oklahoma State Tech did two things for me. One, she got me a book called *Living by Design* by Pentagram Design out of London and the other one that she got me was an art director's annual which is kind of the big—is from the New York Art Director's Club. They are still around. They have a show every year and it recognizes excellence and greatness in art direction. It's mostly about advertising. So she gave me a book about design and she gave me a book about advertising. So Pentagram was an early influence in my career because Pentagram brought a complete approach to solving problems for clients—they were organized around five partners—hence Pentagram Design—and each one of those five partners pretty much had a different discipline. One was a product designer, one was architect and I think the other three were graphic designers and each one of those partners had a group of artists and designers and model makers and people like that who surrounded them. So what they could do was literally take a company that was moving their offices, they [Pentagram] could actually do all of the architecture and design and the interior design of their space, help them create their products because they had a product designer on staff, and do all of their support collateral materials for selling the business and they never had to leave that shop. And all of these partners were experts at what it was that they did. And now Pentagram has offices in New York, Germany, Austin, San Francisco and London.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So they were an early influence. When I got down here to Texas, the Richards Group was the be-all and end-all of advertising and graphic design in the Southwest. People like Woody Pirtle, Don Sibley, Rex Peteet, Jack Summerford, Bart Forbes, all of those people that worked for Stan Richards—Stan Richards had a keen eye for talent and at the time, nobody else in Dallas Fort Worth was really servicing the client the way that he was—and by that I mean he was, again, kind of like Pentagram, offered—they had a design firm called RBM&M—Richards, Brock, Miller, Mitchell and Associates, and they did all the design side of it and then they had the Richards Group which was the advertising side that did all the ads and all the stuff they do for everybody else. So the client you would probably most recognize from them would be Chick-Fil-A. So Stan Richards and all those folks from that group—if you were to do like a family tree of the Southwest, a lot of the leading designers are running their own shops and had at some point done a stint in one of the Richards' organizations. Woody Pirtle went from the Richards Group to Pentagram in New York City and now he is on his own creating fine art. Sibley-Peteet started an office here out of the Richards Group and now has an office here and in Austin—there were a number of artists out of Austin—there was this kind of southwest look and that was interesting and was inspirational for me.

LM: Yeah. In the past I've heard you mention having lunch with someone who you admired, can you talk about that?

RM: Yeah, well one of the great things about—so when I got down here to Fort Worth—they had kind of an art director's club when I was in Tulsa in school, Tulsa has an art director's club that bring in speakers and puts on programming and stuff like that. It's really geared towards visual design and visual communication and what art directors and designers do, not so much advertising. When I got down here to Fort Worth they didn't have a club and so Gina and me and two other designers, a guy named John Anglim and Gary Harmon, decided to take the Advertising Artists of Fort Worth, which was kind of their equivalent of an art director's club and turn it into a legit art director's club. So the really cool thing about that was that—so we got people to be members, they paid money and we used that money to bring in speakers from all over the United States. And I brought in people that I wanted to see, and listen and talk to. James Cross, a designer from California; Elwood Smith, a great cartoonist and illustrator from upstate New York; Forrest Richardson who was a graphic designer but also dabbled in golf course design; Don Weller, a classic, one of the great illustrators of the seventies and eighties; Chris Hill; Jerry Herring; Robert Miles Runyan who did the 1986 graphics for the Olympics—he was actually one of the fathers of the annual report, the guy who created the first annual report for Litton Industries; Michael Doret; Bart Forbes; Jay Loucks—gosh, Michael Patrick Cronan, Mike Quon, the list goes

on and on and on of people that we just brought to Fort Worth. And this was really cool because they would come and speak and then we would get to spend time with them alone and talk to them about—it was Robert Miles Runyan who had grown his—so he had started off as an individual designer, kind of like what we were doing, and then grew his business to big—big projects, all that sort of stuff—and then decided that was too much trouble and that he made just as much money, if not more, by being small and just charging for what it was he was doing and took his business back down. So that was the word of advice that he gave us, he said you don't have to be big to be successful. And we were like, "Oh. Okay."

LM: And that's the model you followed?

RM: That's very interesting. No, it was good—it was good to hear somebody who had done that. So there was Michael Patrick Cronan who was out in San Francisco who just recently passed away. He said [you] get the kind of work that you do—so if you want to do something different, then you start showing people that you can do different stuff.

LM: Right.

RM: Otherwise you are going to get the kind of work that you do.

LM: What kind of work do you do?

RM: Well, we do all kinds of different work and that's one of the nice things about being in a design environment is that you never really know what's going to come through the door, but we do logos and identities and a brand new projects, but we also do invitations and special things with paper for clients. We do sales materials, we do websites; you just never know what's going to walk through the door and that's kind of the nice thing about it. So you have to show a lot of different kinds of work. Now the bad news is that kind of like the folks over in Dallas that didn't know what to do with me when I was originally interviewing, clients don't necessarily see a skill in an area that is not in their niche translates. So if I am doing a lot of pharmaceutical stuff, heavy manufacturing may not be able to look at that and say, oh, yeah, well there is a level of quality there but that's what we want and recognize that that kind of creativity and precision will translate into their industry. A lot of times, if they don't see that you do what they are involved in, it's kind of hard to get the work.

LM: That makes sense. Has your work or your style ever been compared to anyone else's? How would you characterize it—your personal style?

RM: Yeah, well when you look at the work I do and you look at the work of the agency, I think that what you see is there isn't really a personal style. Again, I think there is a level of quality but if most of the solutions are being driven by a design brief that is to solve a specific problem that it's going to have—everything that you do is custom—and it's going to have a different look for each client. For instance, the Americana approach that we just did for Texi Leathers would not be appropriate for Global ChemSource.

LM: Right, yeah.

RM: So the work always reflects some of the personality of the companies that they represent. And because of that, there's not a house style of how we solve problems. It's not a cookie cutter business. Everything we do is a custom tailored job for each individual client to solve a specific problem and even within that one client we might attack an identity problem a little bit differently than we might a direct mail campaign, or even if we designed an ad campaign for the same client it might be vastly visually different simply because of who we are talking to and what the medium or the channel about how that is going to be delivered.

LM: Right. So it's less about the work you two do being recognized as a firm, than about due diligence for the company you are working for.

RM: Right. I think the designer should be pretty much invisible. If they aren't invisible—if they went and hired a name because that's what they wanted to do, then by all means if you hire Seymour Chwast to do the illustration then you are going to want it to look like Seymour Chwast work. One of the things that Woody Pirtle did was design—he had a style of illustration he did—if you want that style of illustration, go hire Woody Pirtle and he'll do that for you and he'll charge you lots of money to do it.

LM: Right.

RM: And there's nothing wrong with that, but most of the things, whether you are in advertising or graphic design—the life span of most communication is very short. In fact, it is getting shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter. So style is less important to me, I think, than content and an engaging way to deliver that content. If I can use style or an illustration or photography or whatever, to tell that story and that's what's appropriate, then I'll use it.

LM: Okay. So is that how you would kind of define the difference between, say, an artist and designer? I mean, do you identify as both?

RM: I'm a designer and really, I would go back to the old term 'commercial artist'—commercial artists don't exist except in the framework of business. What I do, I create, and it is not intended—it needs to look good, it needs to have an esthetic, it needs to have a level of quality, it needs to have all those things that are part of design—balance, proportion and sequence and unity and all that sort of stuff that is all part of it—but it's not art. It is design specially to accomplish a specific purpose. So, my mentor, Larry Rose, one of the things he used to say is that design is a premeditated plan to achieve a specific goal.

LM: Okay.

RM: So I'm thinking beforehand about a way to achieve a specific goal. Art doesn't do that. Art can be provocative. Art can be decorative. Art can be magical and transformative and can affect people in ways that commercial art may never do. But it is first and foremost a product of an individual for that individual. In fact, my comparison is, everybody thinks of Michelangelo and Titian and Leonardo DaVinci as great artists and the truth is they worked for the church. And the story that they told was the story of the Bible and they were commercial illustrators; they were commercial artists—they had patrons and they got to do other stuff, portraits and sculpture and stuff like that—but they worked for the church and the church was the one that paid most of their salary or gave them a place to live or fed them or took care of them and in exchange what they did was told a story to an illiterate population. That's what their job was.

LM: That really a fascinating interpretation. I really like that.

RM: Well, I could find people on both sides of that argument, some that would vehemently disagree with me.

LM: Yeah, of course.

RM: And, but they were doing something for a client that was to achieve a specific purpose. And so to me that is commercial art. That's design. And in turn they were paid for that.

LM: Right.

RM: They had other things—they had to make a living—they had other things they were doing like fine artists today have to make a living. There were other things they were doing that people appreciated and wanted to have in their villa in Italy that they paid for the privilege of having them come do that.

LM: Right.

RM: Paint a fresco on the wall. Paint a portrait of their wife and children. Create a fountain or a tombstone or a mausoleum, that they would pay the money for them to do that and got them to do that but they wouldn't have gotten to do that if the church had not first given them the work that allowed them to develop their ability that served the purposes of the church.

LM: Right, but you're not saying that any sort of artwork that's commissioned is necessarily commercial art.

RM: No, absolutely not. No, again, commissioned artwork is—so a very good friend of ours that was a great illustrator that worked here in Fort Worth, that came out of the Art Center was a guy names James Tennyson. James was extremely talented—still is extremely talented—but he moved from a place of doing commercial work that the context of it was within society and served a purpose to doing portrait work and doing commissioned work which doesn't exist in the public sector.

LM: Right.

RM: So that's really the difference between the two. Design and communication and advertising all live in the world that we all inhabit and the stuff is directed at us. And fine art tends to live in a place that is much more removed from—until it comes into a museum; most all of that art work that we see in museums was at some point in time was commissioned or was just work by the artist until somebody decided they were going to collect all their stuff—

LM: Yeah.

RM: —was in a repository somewhere.

LM: Yeah. One of the things that we have been discussing—or I have been discussing—in a lot of my projects this semester is the difference between a craftsman and a designer, and I think that goes back to the idea of an 'exotic menial' and being someone else's hand. Do you ever just feel like you are just a craftsperson rather than a designer or do you draw the line between these things?

RM: No, we go back to people like Titian and Rafael and folks like that learned their trade was because they apprenticed with Michelangelo and DaVinci and folks like that. And so at that point when they were apprenticing they were craftspeople but they were learning how to do fresco or

they were learning how to make pigments or they were learning how to do the things that they had to do.

LM: Yeah.

RM: So they were craftspeople. So it's interesting that the Renaissance—the way that was all structured—there was an awful lot like it was structured in Pentagram. There was this central figure that was creative vision and genius by what was being done and then there was a group of artisans and craftspeople who surrounded them who made that possible for that to happen.

LM: Right.

RM: And what would happen is that those people would get to some point where they would develop a modicum of proficiency in what it was they were doing and they would try to strike out on their own. So I think craft is part of what I do. So I don't feel like a craftsperson per se, but I do know how to make things with my hands.

LM: Right.

RM: And I see that as part of the art of what I create and present to clients.

LM: That's good. That makes all the difference. Could you talk briefly about some of your more major projects and campaigns—what sort of work you are proud of in your portfolio?

RM: Well, there are different things in different areas. We have some logos that we did that are still alive today that were done almost twenty years ago and that's a testament to the appropriateness of the design. One of them was for Bice's Florist and it's all over their trucks. It's all over the website. It's on their packaging. It's on their labels. It's on everything they are doing and we went in and talked with Buddy Bice and asked for \$2500, I think, at the time and I was still pretty new in business and so that seemed like an awful lot of money for a logo and an identity and it's still around today. Birdville Independent School District, their logo—Gina came up with the idea and I worked with the typography and illustration of it and they are still using that. Let's see. What else?

Fort Worth Public Library logo and then there was also one that she came up with the idea but I created the design was Pine Mountain Vineyards which was recognized by *PRINT* magazine in the regional design annual. So that was nice to have that. We have done a lot of work for Alcon Laboratories—everything from white papers to full collateral campaigns to really specialized

invitations and just that body of work I'm very proud of—that was done for a lot of product managers for a lot of different products. Let's see. What else? It's interesting, I think for me, there are some things I like because of—I did some type once for—well, I can think of two off-hand—the Historic Handley Railroad Museum and then did some type for Historic Fort Worth's Cattle Baron's promotional piece. It is very ornate; a lot of handwork and the type; but used the computer to do it and just like the way that it turned out. There were some things that I did for Alcon Laboratories that—I don't get to draw enough.

LM: Yeah.

RM: But there have been opportunities to work that into a piece and the way it has turned out has been really nice—either with the computer or drawing by hand—and I'm thinking specifically about, I just finished an illustration for the American Heart Association that was a red dress on a dress form with pleats and pretty ruffles and material and everything. It turned out really, really nice. It was very elegant, very tasteful and then there was a real graphic illustration I did of a railroad caboose that was for HandleyFest and part of that is just the process of watching the things kind of come to life in terms of how you do those. I don't know. There are lots of different things for lots of different reasons.

LM: Yeah. Do you feel like your work is based on like regional preferences—I know you have some things that are products that are distributed nationwide and things like that, but do you think living in Fort Worth helps you cater to a certain demographic?

RM: No. I think it just depends on the client and what their tastes are. Some clients are big idea clients. Some clients really want the minutia of the thing be right. Some clients can't stay out of the process. It's less a regional consideration as it is a personal esthetic and how much do they want what it is I do—which is to serve them—to shine.

LM: Okay, so again it's about the client.

RM: I think it is more about the client and what they want to allow to have happen. The great work—one of the things when I went and talked to the different people about—like Stan Richards and Tim Hale at Fossil Watch and Colin Forbes at Pentagram—one of the things they talked about was, and I find this to be true, Stan Richards says don't try to educate clients—find clients that are already educated. What he means by that is—don't try to help them understand what it is that you do. Show them how what it is that you do will help them. And if they are already educated about that, if they know what it is that you bring to the table, then you don't have to

educate them. But all those folks talked about creativity and talked about—I think it was kind of understood that people knew what it was that they brought to the table and there was a trust on the part of the client. It didn't mean that they didn't ask questions. It didn't mean that they weren't skeptical or apprehensive or unsure that what they were being told was going to work, but the really great work happens when the client has enough trust and faith in the person that is working for them to do it.

LM: Yeah. So when you were talking about these greats of advertising who kind of get to do what they want to do and people will just use it—I mean is that the goal that everyone is working towards or—

RM: That would be a dream job. That would be a dream job.

LM: Yeah.

RM: Alan Peckolick who was one of the partners in Lubalin, Peckolick and Carnase, which was a type design firm in New York City at the end of the sixties and into the seventies, I was listening to him talk one time, and they had been hired by a company out of Mexico that had wanted them to produce a book because they had seen another book that they had done.

LM: Yeah.

RM: I mean they had pulled out every stop they knew how to pull out—gold-edged gilded pages, emboss around the leather cover and it was really, really nice and the president was very happy with what they did and when he was meeting with them, when they were delivering the book to him—and he was ecstatic with it—he said—you know, next time I want you to really pull the stops out. I want you to really cut loose. So that kind of client is a rare client but that's who you are looking for.

LM: Right.

RM: —Is the client that says, "Damn. I like what it is that you are doing and I just want you to go nuts and do what you want to do." And in some ways that is a little harder because we look for clients to set the boundaries for us either monetarily or esthetically or time wise, and that helps us kind of know where we are supposed to land.

LM: Right.

RM: And if it is just one big wide-open go-nuts, it's a little bit harder and in that sense; it is more like fine art because when the fine artist sits down at the canvas—it's a blank canvas—they don't know what it is that they are going to do until they begin.

LM: Right.

RM: Now, it's not exactly the same but it's pretty close. But there is always—even with the book where they told him to pull all the stops out—was still an end result and a goal that was in mind in terms of what they wanted to achieve.

LM: Right.

RM: So it's still never truly done in a vacuum, or where there is absolutely no input from the client. Even though he said pull all the stops out—next time let's really pull all the stops out—you know this one was just like off-the-hook to begin with there was still the constraints of you're making a book.

LM: They are still your client no matter what.

RM: There is a container that that fits in.

LM: Yeah. So, in addition to the challenge but the necessity of client, I was wondering about some of the other challenges that you have had to overcome in your career and I was thinking, you know, about how much technology surrounding graphic design has changed since you have been in the field. I just wondered if you could kind of speak to changes in technology, and maybe changes in cultural shifts and changes in taste in the field?

RM: Yeah, technology is really interesting. When I came out of school in 1980 nobody was using computers to do anything except big computing stuff.

LM: Right.

RM: And they were just on the verge of coming out with personal computers—maybe some of that was happening but it wasn't really on a wide scale platform. It was really more specialized and then about—gosh, I guess it was somewhere between 1984 and 1986 is when the Macintosh came out and there were about three applications. PageMaker was a layout program. In 1988 they came out with Illustrator which is a drawing program, and PhotoShop came out somewhere in between those two. So we had two really powerful programs that were about creating content

and one really powerful program, PageMaker, which was about assembling and bringing things together and printing that as a document that could be printed. So we were one of the first adopters in Fort Worth to take the little MacPlus—which is now the one in the MoMA—the little black and white nine-inch diagonal screen and started doing art work on that—it had a seven megahertz clock speed. It had—you could upgrade to four megabytes of RAM. It had a twenty megabyte external hard drive that was nearly as big as the computer, and it had, before it was a Plus—when it was just a Macintosh—it had a 400K floppy disc and then when you got the Plus you could get an 800K floppy disc. And 800K is not much. And we were delighted. The laser printer had like thirteen resident fonts in the printer, and when we originally started laying pages out, all of the graphics were bitmap. They were driven by bitmap images not by the vector of postscript. So every kind of job you could think of—catalogs, logos, all sorts of stuff like that. Some projects were better suited to the Mac than others. Then we got a Mac2 which was color and learned that we could actually do slide presentations using Illustrator and PageMaker and PhotoShop. So that increased the offerings that we had. We learned there were things we could do with that color computer that we couldn't have done before because we would have to buy it out as a service.

LM: Did it take some adjusting to transition?

RM: Yeah, absolutely. We talked with—before we ever made the decision—we talked with other artists. "What do you think about this? We are thinking about doing this." We talked with our vendors, who really didn't want us to go down that road, but they knew it was going to happen and were upfront—"yeah, we know it's going to happen." Yeah, learning any kind of software program—we went and took classes from the people that sold us the equipment, Gestetner, which was a printing firm—so we spent one whole day over in Dallas in training and then just started putting jobs on the computer and seeing if they were suited for it. And some were and some weren't.

LM: And printing changed too I guess?

RM: Sure. Absolutely. All of the type houses that used to be around are gone. All the color separators that used to be around are gone. All of that happens in the Mac in the process of designing and laying out the piece. So yeah. It changed printing a lot. The process is still basically the same as it was when Gutenberg was printing stuff. They are still basically the same. You still have a plate, you still put ink on the plate, you take the plate and press it on the paper. It's still the same process.

LM: Right.

RM: So the one thing that's kind of missing today is that I see is that we have a knowledge of bindery and prepress and how the job needs to be made that a lot of people that are just coming out of school today don't have, and there is just no way to teach it.

LM: So that experience is gone?

RM: Yeah, it's going by the wayside.

LM: You don't lay things out by hand the way you used to?

RM: No, but we still start on paper, with paper and pencil, every time we start a process.

LM: Do you think the digitization of the field has affected the aesthetic at all?

RM: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. No, I think things—just the sheer number of images that we are exposed to is off the chart compared to what it was ten years ago—or sure twenty years ago.

LM: Yeah.

RM: It used to be the process for creating a television ad was so time-intensive and they were shot on film and then they were converted and then they were on air that you couldn't hardly—I mean once you created an ad and spent all the money to create the ad—you just ran the spot out of it. And now ads will run and if there is something in the ad that offends somebody or is egregious or—they can change it [snaps fingers], they can have it fixed and they can change messaging—

LM: Like really quickly—

RM: It's very easy.

LM: Yeah. So that's kind of what you are talking about—the lifespan of ads are getting shorter and shorter. That's really interesting.

RM: And to answer your question, absolutely. If you look at the music scene and you look at how technology has affected that and the imagery, the colors, the spectrum of finished-ness, so it could be anything like hand drawn art to digitized photography to pixelated images—all of that is

a result of the esthetic that is part of the internet and the electronic delivery of communication. Absolutely.

LM: I think it's funny that even now we see the early products of being able to process digitally being parodied—you see people using deliberate pixels and things like that and so—it's happened so quickly—in the last twenty or thirty years—

RM: Oh, less than that I think.

LM: Yeah. Well the availability of different sorts of ways to communicate visually have really saturated our lives.

RM: Yeah, and the world has gotten much smaller. What I was talking about on the surface experience—one of the things that Tim Hale at Fossil Watch did was—on a regular basis—is they send teams of designers and art directors on visual scavenger hunts so—just to stay current with the trends visually with what is happening around the world. So first quarter they might pick a team of four or five people—give them HD cameras, laptops, smart phones, tablets and send them off to Rio de Janeiro for a week and their job is to go hunt down—and literally, it is a visual scavenger hunt—they go collect imagery of what's going on there. It could have to do with food, fashion, merchandising, business, construction, architecture; it could be anything and they send all of that information back to the main office simultaneously and it goes into a repository for everybody to access for a resource. The next quarter they pick a completely different team and they send them off to, you know, Germany, or China, or Amsterdam or London or Tokyo or they might even go here in the States—off to Chicago or San Francisco or New York and literally just go—just scavenge all the visual information they can find that is happening in an urban setting and send all that information back to the mothership in Richardson, Texas. And it's simultaneous and instantaneous in terms of what they get back from them.

LM: That's fascinating. So things are just speeding up.

RM: So yeah. It's speeding up and getting smaller, so they can office in Richardson, Texas but their entire design staff which is like over 250 designers, art directors and photographers—they can all be exposed to the latest visual esthetic and trends going on in Tokyo—they don't always—they don't ever have to leave Richardson, Texas.

LM: That's really fascinating. So with those ideas of the fast pace of the twenty-first century and globalization and the way things have changed with technology—are there any other factors that you foresee changing the field and where do you see it going in the future?

RM: Oh, well. The place where we are right now is kind of a commoditization of products and services and that to me is a bad thing. And by that what I mean is—there is a website called 99 Designs and it's for logos and identities. And so depending on how much money you want to spend—so you could spend \$400 and you'll have half a dozen designers present you two or three or four ideas. And you get to pick from that. And you write a brief—you tell them who you are, what you are doing and who you are going to talk to you, how you are going to use the logo, and these people, from all over the world, produce these logos and whatever you send back that's what you get to pick from. The more money you spend, the more people you get, the more things you get to look at.

LM: Right.

RM: So it's reducing identity to a place like it is like shoe shopping.

LM: Right.

RM: So based on the level of ability and skills and understanding of the person that's asking for the logo and based in the skills and abilities of the person that is creating it, maybe a business and a business person will get what they need in order to be able to do their job.

LM: Right.

RM: Maybe. Maybe not. So what's happening is there is a new—what technology has afforded is that there is lots of different places for people to enter into the field of communication as a client that weren't there before. If the Internet weren't here and they needed a logo and they were a business and they were starting out they might go—one of the things they needed was a sign for their retail business—they might go to the sign shop and the guys at the sign company would make them a letter and a sign and that might end up being their logo. If they were bigger or a little more sophisticated they might actually go to a graphic designer. And if they were a little bigger than that—you know when companies like Gap and Levi and folks like that first started out—to craft their images they actually went to an advertising agency or graphic design firm or freelance artist because that was like the three places that you could get professional graphic design and advertising done. Places you can get that stuff done now is just completely and totally off the

hook. And it puts the onus and the burden on the owner to understand what it is that they are asking for and a lot of times they don't.

LM: Right.

RM: They just want something that looks nice.

LM: So it's more—or it's less about saturation than it is about like availability.

RM: No, what I think I'm talking about is that I think there is a lot—so now let me just kind of back up a little bit. So now a company—let's say they got their logo and their wife's best friend designed the logo for them.

LM: Right.

RM: Now they need a brochure. They don't go to a designer to help them organize the information and create an attractive professional piece of collateral. They just go to the printer.

LM: Right.

RM: And the printer has three or four artists—they all have Macs—and they will produce the book for them for a fee but it's really not about the fee, it's about getting the printing. So the creative part is being done as a kind of added value thing for the printing.

LM: Oh, I see. That's really interesting.

RM: Well, so there are all sorts of places you can enter into the process based on the application. Let's say you have your logo but you need it embroidered. So, or let's say you don't have a logo but you're thinking, "I need to have shirts for my guys that go out and mow the lawn."

LM: Right.

RM: So they end up—so a little designer in an embroidery shop—it's really more about setting up the stitching for what the logo is going to look like—ends up designing the logo for the lawn company. Not really their job, but that's what they did. Or there is a little artist that's at the printers who ends up designing the entire thing just because—so the printing company can get the printing or—every business today—I say every business—but any business that is in the creative services field—even the media companies—outdoor companies, magazine companies,

television, even radio stations—all have creative people on staff so that if somebody wanders in and says, "I need a television commercial" and so their putting the script together and they say, "Do you have a logo?" and the guy says, "No I don't have a logo." and they go, "Oh, don't worry. Our creative department will crank out a logo for you." Or, "We'll just use this type and we'll put this logo on there for you." And so what happens—it's actually a dilution of the—clients today don't always get what they need because they enter into the process in a place that was previously was inaccessible for them.

LM: I see.

RM: And so there is no guarantee that they are going to get any kind of effective communication tool. It's going to work at some level but is it going to be the thing that strategically helps their business move forward? I don't know. It depends on where it comes from. And the people who are schooled in crafting messages, crafting communication, typically don't work in the creative department of a printer or don't work in the creative department of a magazine or don't work in the creative department of an embroidery shop or a vinyl sign company or a publisher or—and all of those places are points of entry for clients now that they could not even get in the door—they didn't even know to look for that twenty-five years ago.

LM: Yeah, That's kind of like where the making takes place, is the craftspeople who—

RM: Right. And they know how to make the thing happen but I wouldn't want them to design my logo.

LM: Right. They aren't really qualified.

RM: They're not—they don't know what they are doing when they do that.

LM: What do you the remedy to that is, if there is any?

RM: I don't know what that remedy is. I think as an industry we do a pretty lousy job of telling other people the story about what the importance of that is.

LM: Uh-huh.

RM: And part of that is because there is just so much awful stuff out there that there is kind of a level of acceptance on the part of the consumer, the customer, that wasn't there thirty years ago.

LM: Yeah. Because it used to be that a good brand and a good logo was necessary to be able to sell you products.

RM: Yeah. You could tell the difference between mom-and-pop and the kind of small to medium size company and then the big retailers—the big consumer products folks.

LM: Yeah, and that's less obvious now?

RM: Less obvious and it's just so much more of a jungle out there than it was—a visual jungle—than it was thirty years ago.

LM: That's so fascinating. Well, is there anything else that you would like to talk about or you want to share?

RM: I think—so another thing—we'll just go back to what you were talking about before—the other thing is that now that everybody has computers on their desk, everybody thinks they can get stuff—just great, wonderful, quality stuff [snaps fingers] right away.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And that's the biggest fallacy in the industry right now.

LM: Right.

RM: You just can't. Great communication and great visual imagery takes time. And one of the biggest problems facing clients, and us, today is that everybody wants everything on such as short fuse that, even as a journeyman practitioner in the business, it's hard for me to be able to do quality work if I have to turn it around in a 24-hour period.

LM: So that's kind of the downfall of technology?

RM: Yeah, I think the downfall of technology is that people expect it and to some extent I think there is some devaluation that goes along with that too.

LM: Yeah.

RM: They think, "If I can do this on my own computer, why can't you do that on your computer in this little bitty amount of time?"

LM: Right.

RM: So people want to pay—which is what is the outgrowth of that 99 Designs thing—people only want to pay \$400 for the logo. They don't want to do the \$50 level thing because that's just a crapshoot, but they think, "this seems to be like an okay process and there is a really good chance I'm going to get what I want," and there are all these hungry designers out there that are willing to compete—they literally compete for the job—whoever's design gets picked, they get paid a portion of whatever the money is that the client spent. So in a lot of ways, it is devaluing what the creative and graphic designers are doing as well—which is sad.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And it's a business model. And there are people that use it.

LM: Hmm. Is there anything else?

RM: Well, they used to say—what did they say? Quality—oh, it was three words, quality, speed, price—they used to say you can pick any two. You can have really, really good but it's not going to be fast.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And it's going to cost.

LM: Right.

RM: Or you can have it fast but it's probably not going to be really, really good.

LM: Yeah.

RM: And we might have to bring a lot of sources to bear so it's probably going to have to have—so the point being that I think the speed thing is off the table. Everybody expects you to make stuff happen immediately. So now it's down to two choices. Do you want it good or do you want it cheap?

LM: Right. And that's still holding, I guess.

RM: We'll see.

LM: Well, thank you!

RM: You are most certainly welcome.

LM: It's been a privilege to hear you talk in such an in-depth manner about your practice. I've really enjoyed it.

RM: Thank you.

[End of the interview]

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