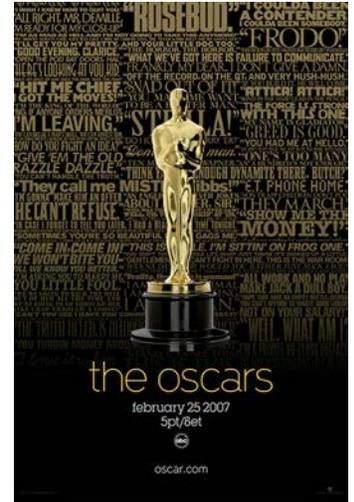
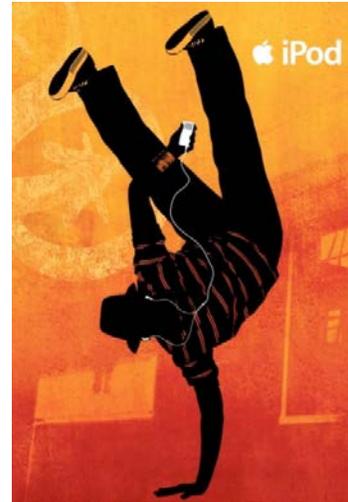


Insane Interview with Erik Miller of TBWA\Chiat\Day

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INTRODUCTION

I had the absolutely amazing opportunity to speak with Erik Miller, the Design Director for TBWA\Chiat\Day in LA. I learned about his background, daily responsibilities, what sets his work apart, his freelancing experience and much more. You've definitely seen his work - some of TBWA\Chiat\Day's clients include Pepsi, Visa, Pedigree and of course Apple. We've included some of the work he references throughout the interview at the end of this article.

WHAT'S YOUR DESIGN BACKGROUND AND HOW DID YOU ORIGINALLY GET STARTED WITH DESIGN?

I've been designing ever since I was a kid and have been around artistic people my whole life. My parents are both teachers - my dad's a music professor, and a professional trombone player. And my mom teaches 6th grade I just loved to draw and sketch when I was young. When I was growing up I played percussion, baseball, soccer and was heavily into action sports. I did a lot of BMX, freestyle and skateboarding and Schwinn sponsored me for freestyle and later on I rode a lot of motocross. I did tons of surfing, snowboarding and mountain biking. In Junior College, when I was trying to figure out what I was going to do, I did diving, and I thought I was going to be going to the Olympics for that. I practiced a lot at the Rose Bowl Aquatics Center on the 10, 7 and 5 meter platforms and then I blew out my knee, so that part of my life totally changed. But I was always doing side projects like logos for friends and logos for companies and things like that so it was always part of me.

A friend I used to race with took me over to Pasadena Art Center College of Design showed me what was going on with one of his projects. It was right before anyone knew what interactive was or how it worked or how to navigate through it and he showed me the school and I remember going "Alright, how do I get in and what do I do to get in?" so I got my grades up and got a portfolio together and got into Pasadena Art Center College of Design and that was insane, that was an amazing experience.

I went there as a graphic design major but I didn't just want "graphic design", I wanted knowledge of everything design. In growing up I loved architecture, I loved product design, I loved automotive design and I loved film so what I did as a graphic design major was sit-in on a lot of other classes that weren't in my major because I wanted a well-rounded knowledge.

HOW DID YOU LAND AT TBWA\CHIAT\DAY AND WHERE WERE YOU WORKING PREVIOUSLY?

Right after I graduated from Art Center College of Design I did some work for Walt Disney Imagineering. I worked on interactive and environmental design for Disney World.

After that I worked at a multi disciplinary design firm called Selbert Perkins Design, there I worked on a lot of different projects, everything from environmental projects, corporate identities to web. After that I worked at a company called Ellerbe Becket, they are an architectural firm. I did a lot of stadium design work for them, did some motion graphics for them, did some print for them, all kinds of stuff really.

After that I decided I needed to do my own thing, needed to be my own boss. So I launched Erik Miller Design, or EMD for short, I kept pretty busy doing a lot of logos, some environmental work, some print work. At the same time I was a stay at home dad, while my wife worked full time. Than an amazing thing happened we had twins!, My wife and I agreed that she shouldn't go back to work. EMD wasn't wasn't pulling in enough income, so I started doing some freelance work around Santa Monica and Hollywood and I friend of mine was working at TWBA\Chiat\Day and brought me in for some freelance work.

After working on many projects for Nissan, Infiniti and others. I sat down with Rob Schwartz, Chief Creative Officer, and we talked about the vision of the company and the vision of having a design team within the agency to help elevate what we could offer our clients. We came up with this design philosophy and design team within the walls of the LA office of Chiat Day that just needed to happen that I would lead.

SO YOU BASICALLY GOT STARTED WITH TBWA\CHIAT\DAY DOING SOME FREELANCE WORK. DO YOU STILL OUTSOURCE TO FREELANCERS AT ALL?

I do. When we are constantly flowing through transitions and are totally slammed on a project or just need a completely different aesthetic then we bring in freelancers. And I want to back up a little bit and say that I'm also an instructor at Art Center College of Design for the past 3 years and what's awesome about that is not only giving back to Art Center but also that I see the best of the best in my classes so I am able to give opportunities to freelance designers and advertisers. If I see someone good we'll definitely use them. I teach a class one day a week and it's a good opportunity for me to stay on the edge of the latest and greatest of what these students are doing and a good opportunity to be able to give my knowledge of what I've done and what I'm able to bring to the table for the students.

WHAT KIND OF HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE ARE YOU WORKING ON?

We're Mac based. All the Adobe programs. Macs have more of a friendly user interface and it's just the industry standard. There's no way we can use a PC, it's just not going to work. It just doesn't make any sense for the design world. Also I don't think Steve Jobs would like that - he's one of our clients.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

You know, there really is not a typical day as a design director for Chiat Day. Every day is completely different and I think that's why I love working here. There are so many new challenges and opportunities to build brands and it encompasses our whole concept about disruption here and our use of media arts.

WHERE DOES YOUR DESIGN INSPIRATION COME FROM? WEBSITES? BOOKS? NATURE?

It just depends on the project. For the most part I think it would be from taking a break and going out in nature. I love surfing. I love the outdoors. I still ride my motorcycle so I do a lot of motocross riding and mountain biking. I think the inspiration comes from just being outside the walls here and looking into nature. Sometimes looking at a book or two, that totally helps start if you're stuck. Also from my resource of knowledge, pulling in from architecture and the philosophies of Frank Lloyd Wright, typography from David Carson and logos from Paul Rand and Saul Bass and furniture design. Kind of anything, you know? You never know what's going to inspire you. It could be a piece of furniture, it could be a flower. I think that's what I love about graphic design.

IN YOUR MIND, WHAT REALLY SETS THE CREATIVE WORK AT TBWA\CHIAT\DAY APART FROM WORK PRODUCED BY OTHER AGENCIES?

Well I think one of the biggest things is, we have a philosophy here we call disruption, and I haven't seen anyone else in the industry really use this, and it's a process we take our clients and creative's thru. It's usually a 2 to 3 day embarkment. So we embrace the client to break free from conventional business thinking we take them through these steps of unconventional thinking and it really breaks down who your target audience is, what your product is, what your competition is doing and helps you understand the full spectrum about everything. What happens is that we take our clients through this process and the client really becomes the brand ambassador; challenging us to make their brand better because they feel empowered and because they understand their marketplace and strive to make the brand a success after we've taken them thru the Disruption process. Another thing that really sets Chiat Day apart that I am really excited about is the concept of Media Arts and that's really a brainchild of Lee Clow. When I say media arts, it's how the brand itself can become a piece of media. One example would be the Apple store, that in itself is a huge piece of media and how the audience experiences the brand. Another is the Gatorades packaging we designed, when a consumer holds and drinks out of a Gatorade bottle that in itself is a piece of media. The audience feels embraced and empowered by what that brand stands for and how it becomes a part of them. So with that, it's like every day is an amazing opportunity to build brands and create awareness that you just can't get anywhere else. I've worked at a lot of other places and they just don't get it. I think within the walls of Chiat Day and having Lee Clow lead the ship it's just an amazing opportunity.

WHAT'S YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT AT TBWA\CHIAT\DAY?

I don't think there's one proud moment. I think I'm proud of everything. Working on all these Fortune 500 brands and working on big clients and presenting to the CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi. Huge opportunities - it's just amazing. I think some of the highlights too of some of the things that have been really successful here would be the Gatorade packaging because the Gatorade packaging influenced the advertising and when I talk about media arts, that campaign was basically the label of the packaging itself, so total cross-pollination of the brand was that simplistic, powerful G Bolt, and all these sports related words, the no excuses, shine on and be tough and just how all the ads reflected that, with the T.V. spots, print ads, bus shelters, bus wraps and building wraps.

That one, plus I think a lot of the Pepsi work we've done here. We did these limited edition Pepsi bottles that only lived at Wal-Mart. What's cool about those is when they hit the shelf they were instantly gone and you actually couldn't even find one because people were buying them up and putting them on eBay. So that was pretty cool. Last time I checked they were selling for like \$150. So, I don't think it gets much more complimentary than that when your designs can't even sit on the shelf.

Then some of the packaging work for Pedigree. They came to us and said they sponsor a Nascar car, so we got to design the whole graphics wrap for the actual car and the actual uniforms and the whole 18-wheel diesel and what the pit crew wears. There are all these cool opportunities you really wouldn't get anywhere else for such big brands.

WHAT'S ONE PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT THROUGH THE DAY WITHOUT?

My iPhone. It's sick it just does so many things it's just ridiculous. I mean look at the apps, I mean this thing is insane. I don't know how I could live without an iPhone. Especially for a designer - the interface is so user friendly and just does so many things. It's a trip.

DO YOU HAVE ANY DESIGN MENTORS OR HEROES?

I kind of considered Raymond Loewy one of my biggest inspirations as well as Lee Clow, Saul Bass, and Paul Rand.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ASPIRING DESIGNER WHO SOMEDAY WANTS TO BE IN YOUR SHOES?

That's a great question. There's a lot of things. One is passion, Another is setting realistic goals for yourself and achieving them. Don't let anyone discourage you from doing what your heart tells you what you want. You are responsible for your destiny, no one else is. I think one of the bottom lines is that you have to want it more than anything in your career. You only get one shot in this life...make the most of it! I took so many classes above and beyond what was needed and what was called for. You need to really make sure that this is what you want to do in life. And most of all, Have Fun!

SELECTED WORK OF ERIK MILLER

