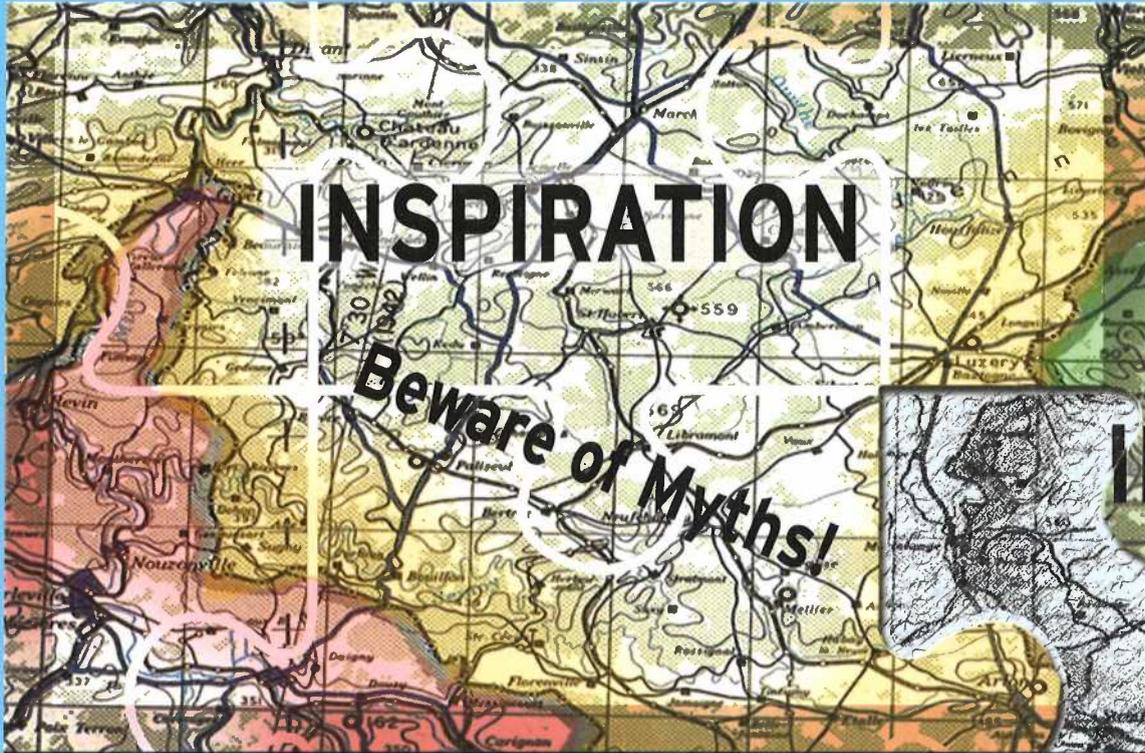


Stage 1



OBJECTIVE

This chapter argues for the need to have inspiration and explains its nature. It examines a few strategies before presenting 13 exercises that design students can complete to uncover their sources of and methods for attaining inspiration.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Designers must be inspired.
- Inspiration is a tool that furthers designs; it is not an end in itself.
- Designers need to seek inspiration rather than wait for it to come.
- Designers can find inspiration and should actively seek it in a variety of sources.



INSPIRATION: AN ACT OF CREATION

Our journey on the road from the World of Imagination to the World of Objects must begin at Inspiration. In any creative act, there must be a force that drives the creator and infuses the created object with energy. A designer's motivation for working on a project must be strong enough to produce the best possible end result. The creative energy going into the design should be clearly visible in the final product.

The word *inspiration* is derived from the Latin verb *inspirare*—to breathe into—as in the action of gods breathing life into their creations, a scene found in creation myths worldwide. This infusion of life is crucial to even the simplest design because the joy of creating is not there without it. Without joy, working on a design can prove to be tedious.

Inspiration can take countless guises and exist in many places. A poet's inspiration may also serve to inspire a dancer, painter, sculptor, or designer. No matter what form it takes, inspiration is an energy that drives people to be creative and infuses their creations with life.

As students begin to work on their projects, they should have some idea of where they are going. Their inspiration will take form based on the needs of the projects and the styles and energy with which they would like to infuse their projects.

FINDING INSPIRATION

It is necessary for designers to re-inspire themselves throughout the creative process. Sources of inspiration exist throughout everything and should be infused in the design process so that it becomes constant in the creative process. Inspiration keeps the idea for a design moving forward.

Take a moment to consider the general nature of the design project you would like to begin. You will examine it in more detail in the next chapter, but for now just think about how and where you might get started.

Figure 1.1 The journey begins with inspiration. Often that involves being still and taking the time to observe. Go to places that inspire you. Be around designs that inspire you, like this young designer. Look around constantly. Find whatever inspires you in your immediate surroundings.

BEWARE OF THE MYTH

Inspiration is something that cannot be waited for—designers should always actively seek it. The myths regarding inspiration are not true.

In the Greek myths, inspiration was bestowed by one of the nine Muses.¹ Each of the nine was responsible for one of the arts. Without their visitation, creativity was a lost cause, as described in this passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*:

And a third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses. This takes hold upon a gentle and pure soul, arouses it and inspires it to songs and other poetry, and thus by adorning countless deeds of the ancients educates later generations. But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen.²

Since ancient times, people have widely interpreted this idea to mean that madness (or at least a wild eccentricity) and lack of control are essential in some way to a creative person, resulting in the misplaced romanticizing of depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicides among artists and rock stars. Often, self-destructive tendencies are the only things a person knows about many artists throughout history. It is not unusual to find people who have heightened and sensitive emotions in any artistic field, but it is inaccurate to assume that emotional imbalances are prerequisites for being an inspired artist.

The ancient-Greek philosopher Plato and his followers equated inspired creativity with the shamanistic trances of their oracles and priestesses. Plato's *Phaedrus* highlights the beneficial nature of this belief:

[. . .] but there is also a madness which is a divine gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none.³

Figure 1.2 Dance of Apollo with the Nine Muses (tempera on panel), Peruzzi, Baldassarre (1481-1536)



Even though we may not experience prophetic trances, we can all relate to the notion of being entranced during a moment of intense creativity or excitement about someone else's creativity. We lose ourselves in dance or song or are moved to ecstasy by an orator. We forget time and place, our emotions well up, we laugh or cry, or we scream and applaud. Indeed, we take leave of our senses for a moment. The "divine madness" seems to be the ability to let go, the willingness to open up to the influence of creative energy and to allow our emotions to surge where and how they may. Inspiration is attainable when we can follow our emotions, control them, and rein them in when necessary.

GENIES DON'T RETURN TO BOTTLES

Releasing your inspired energy into the world is like releasing a genie from a bottle. You can never be quite sure what is going to happen, nor can you make it go away once it's out. Thoughts and ideas have this power. Once they are out, they do not go away.⁴ For this reason, we must watch carefully where our thoughts take us at



Figure 1.3 In the inspiration stage, observe all you can, but be careful about immersing yourself too deeply in the works of other designers or artists. Use museums and galleries, but remember your own vision.

the beginning of a project. As soon as we begin to look at a certain source or entertain a notion, we have created a momentum that is often arrested only with great effort. If we are fortunate and have chosen our first steps well, this momentum takes us to where we want to go. If not, we have to start again with a brand new idea.

When people seek inspiration, they must be careful not to let the energy they find speed them in a direction in which they don't intend to go. Designers should be wary of immersing themselves in the works of other artists or designers; doing so will result in ideas that are heavily influenced by this already existing work and will rob their own ideas of originality and creativity. For this reason, designers should question whether they are opening up to the style, narrative, technique, or vision of other artists or designers. Inspiration should be the energy behind creativity—driving it—not leading it. You must therefore always be careful to choose the most ideal source of inspiration and be vigilant about where your idea is heading as a result of your inspiration's driving force.

PLAY SOMEWHERE ELSE

Beware of the tendency to get tunnel vision: If you are going to design watches, don't seek inspiration exclusively from other watches. Look to architects, painters, wood-carvers, or even filmmakers and musicians. Always remember that inspiration for any specific design project can come from anywhere—even the most unlikely source.

Good designers are continually on alert for new stimulation, new challenges, and new approaches to old problems. Follow their lead and become a collector of impulses; keep scrap-books and journals. Always add to your knowledge of art, music, and film. Make a point of experiencing, seeing, and listening to something new every now and then. Don't shy away from trying something that didn't work out the way you expected on a previous project. Experience builds on itself, and as your horizons broaden, previously rejected ideas may become ideal avenues to explore for other projects.

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY DOESN'T WORK

When discussing his vision, Pablo Picasso said the following:

Reality is more than the thing itself. I look always for the super-reality. Reality lies in how you see things. A green parrot is also a green salad and a green parrot. He who makes it only a parrot diminishes its reality. A painter who copies a tree blinds himself to the real tree. I see things otherwise. A palm tree can become a horse.⁵

This notion should be very familiar to you. As children, we have all taken a simple prop and transformed it into an amazing thing. For example, a stick in the backyard can become a guitar, a sword, or a magic wand. It can be *all* of these in a single afternoon. This playful view of the world allows us not only to see the world differently, but also allows us to show others the

world in a way they may have never considered before. The ability to create new worlds out of things that are all around us is indeed a valuable gift.

The way of viewing the world that Picasso refers to is one of the more powerful creative tools people are born with. Playtime is necessary for ideal human development. It teaches children about the world and how it works. It allows them to experiment with roles and situations that they may encounter later in life. Unfortunately, as children grow and reach adulthood, they tend to lose touch with this ability.

For creative endeavors, it is essential that designers tap into their imaginations, that they engage in playtime just like when they were kids. Playtime becomes the time designers use for experimenting and thinking. My former mathematics professor used to refer to *couch time*, which he advocated heavily as an important means for solving problems. He recommended that his students study a math problem, seek a solution, and sit on the couch to ponder it. After a few moments, when the students went back to work on the problem, they'd find the solution. "Eureka moments" often come while you are taking baths, sleeping, gardening, or doing something else unrelated to work.⁶ You'll say, "Suddenly, there it was. The solution was right before my eyes." Studies found that people who have eight hours of sleep after learning and practicing a new task remember

Figure 1.4 You can find inspiration anywhere. Try being somewhere you're not used to being. Finding creativity in an unexpected place, or even bringing it there like this street performer, sharpens the focus and makes the creativity more immediate and visible to the audience and performer both.





Figure 1.5 “Couch time” is important time in a creative process. You must allow for time to let your mind work on the problems involved. Whether you actually “sleep on it” or just have time to think, it should be planned into the conceptual phase.

more about it the following day than people who stay up all night learning the same thing.⁷ Our brain requires processing time to make connections and explore possibilities and seems to be better at this when we are not actively engaged.

Zen masters instruct without speech or by asking questions such as, “Where is my fist when I open my hand?” These are designed to shake students out of their normal thought patterns. When this inspired strategy doesn’t work, the masters hit the students upside their heads. Students are so surprised that normal thought becomes suspended. Their moments of revelation do not come as a result of concentrated thinking but precisely when the thinking stops.

Designing always involves deadlines, and the available time for experimentation and pondering is therefore always limited; however, you must never think of playtime as time wasted. It is possible to view the entire design process as one large game. Play involves rules, and each design project requires a new set of rules or at least a modification of the last set of rules. Play is also a challenge: Can you solve the problem? Can you beat the clock? Can you make it more fun?

INSPIRATION IS JUST THE BEGINNING

It is dangerous to believe that inspiration is an end in itself. Such creativity is fine, if this is what you set out to do. Design, however, involves a need to go beyond this and use an idea and the philosophizing surrounding it to create something else: a product that is physical, useful, and more than just an expression of a concept.



Figure 1.6 Seeking inspiration can take you down tangential roads or immerse you deeply into the field you are working in. Be wary of too much immersion; don't bury yourself in research to the point where your own vision is beginning to disappear. Maintain your own vision and let the inspiration bring you to creativity, not bury you in information.

It is also all too easy to get carried away with inspiration and get lost in research. (Try for example getting lost in the list of notable designers in Appendix 3 or the timeline of Appendix 5!) Gathering information and impulses is exciting because everything is new. Be that as it may, deadlines must be respected and projects must continue to move forward. Time is limited, so research and couch time have to have an end and a purpose.

All too often, designers lose themselves in their research for their projects, only to have to sacrifice something else due to time constraints caused by the detours. Admittedly, it is difficult to avoid reading one more book, trying one more experiment, calculating a curvature to a greater degree, or going back to the museum if there is a chance that a problem will be solved. Perseverance certainly pays off, and your umpteenth visit to the library may yield a spectacular find. Sometimes the initial research is a lot of fun, and you can fool yourself (and others) into thinking that you are doing something essential when you actually are avoiding to make decisions about material you already have. Call it creative procrastination. If you are within your deadline obligations, go ahead and add to your knowledge. But, if you don't have the time, move on.

YEOHLEE TENG, FASHION DESIGNER

Yeohlee Teng came to New York from Malaysia to study fashion at the Parsons School of Design. She has worked primarily in New York City, where she established her own house, YEOHLEE Inc.

Yeohlee believes that clothes have magic. She dresses the urban nomad, defining a lifestyle that requires clothing that works on a variety of practical and psychological levels. She is a master of design management and believes in the efficiency of year-round, seasonless clothes, which have been termed *intimate architecture*.

Information inspires me; I thrive on it. It cannot be isolated to one subject; it is all encompassing. For instance, to give you a small snapshot of the past couple of days:

Last night I went to a restaurant called Freemans, situated at the end of an alley on the Lower East Side. It was filled with an interesting mix of people. This made me think about the dining experience in New York. The night before, I was at a place on the rooftop of a warehouse. It was pricier with a door person/bouncer. This place had side tables and beds. Basically, you lounge with any number of your friends and have your dinner in bed. The food served was clearly inconsequential. All of this gave me *food for thought*. Who knows how information translates into inspiration? I mull over the possibilities of places like Freemans being discovered, and who the people are, dining there. Are they really in the know? What about the cuisine? Is it *in fashion*? Like clothes, food goes in and out of fashion. This is what I ponder. Information comes from everywhere, and I talk to everyone. I have a great sense of curiosity. After the World Trade Center incident, I talked to taxi drivers about the local economy. I talk to the UPS guys to find out how the fashion industry is doing. They know, because they know how much product they pick up and deliver.

The problems I enjoy solving have to do with diminishing resources in a very general sense—and with time. I think about design that can be very efficient as far as the use of fabric and the manufacturing process are concerned. To that end, a one-size-fits-all garment conserves both time and energy, and it's a coup when you can design with zero waste. For Fall 2009, I did a coat with zero waste out of a pattern made of seven squares (see image from Fall 2009, Look 2).

Enough time needs to be spent on how useful clothes can be, how efficient they are, and how you can manage your life with fewer clothes. For example, for Spring 2004, I took a fabric that was extremely expensive and labor intensive to make and instead of doing more to it, like sewing it by hand and adding 60 more hours of hand labor to it, I tore it into strips (see image from Spring 2004, Look 33). When you are paying a lot for the fabric it is great that you can construct with a minimum of time and labor. You can then even out the cost.

I devoted another aspect of that collection to making fashion that had very few cuts and very little stitching. The clothes were easy to pack and did not occupy a lot of space. They were made of a very efficient fabric that was low maintenance, washable, and relatively wrinkle-free. In a general sense, a lot of the things I make are classic and timeless, so when they withstand the test of time and wash-and-wear, that *is* sustainable design.

I like materials that can go seamlessly from season to season, through different times of the day, and through different geographic regions. Not all the fabrics I use can function this way, but some of the basic fabrics that I use do. I look for fabrics that wear well, that are





Fall 2009, Look 2

Spring 2004, Look 33

comfortable, that have some elasticity to them, that do not over-wrinkle, that are easy to maintain, and that you can machine wash and hang dry.

For the fall season of 2005, I was on the hunt for an interesting fabric that could be made into coats that actually had stretch. For the spring season of 2006, I worked with a lot of fabrics that were extremely high maintenance because they had a chintz finish and were very stiff. Some were linen. I collaborated with Nano-Tex, because they can make some of these fabrics crease resistant, and water repellent. I work on this kind of prototyping whenever the need arises. When there is a lot of linen in the collection, there is obviously a need to seek out some kind of crease-resistant technology.

I found the exhibition *EXTREME TEXTILES: Designing for High Performance* at the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, April 8 through October 30, 2005, very interesting and inspiring. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, has published a book of the same title by Exhibitions Curator and Head of Textiles, Matilda McQuaid. The exhibition explored the different textiles that have high-performance applications. On view were particularly awe-inspiring polyester fabrics made into valves for the heart. I observe the fabrics, the ideas filter in, and I make an effort to educate myself.

When I find a concept not working in the process of designing a collection, I often throw the idea out. This can happen throughout the progress of a collection. I start off with certain ideas that I may abandon because other, more interesting concepts come along that are more appropriate for the collection or for the time frame. Sometimes, I come back to the ideas later. Ideas are much like opinions—everybody has them; some pan out, and some do not. Generally, if you overwork an idea it can be an indication that something is not right about it in the first place. I try not to get too hung up on my ideas.

Architecture and travel often inspire me: journeys, real or virtual, experienced vicariously through movies, books, and music. I come from a family of architects and engineers, but there

is no particular structure to my developing an interest in architecture. It evolved. With my family, the thing that I remember is that we drew together—we had drawing competitions, and we were always drawing.

My Fall 1997 collection was inspired by the look of Renzo Piano's Kansai International Airport in Osaka Bay. It was not just the appearance of the airport alone that interested me; it was a combination of the environment and the *urban nomads* (a term I coined for that collection) traversing through that space. I looked at all the people in the airport, and they looked really of the Industrial Revolution. Then I looked at the space and its materials and construction, and it looked like the 21st century—dress and fashion collide with architecture. It looked to me like fashion had dwelt too long in reliving different eras rather than applying itself to what the future or the present really needs.

Again, I was not really looking for architectural inspiration when I stumbled upon the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán. It felt very serendipitous. Before a trip to Mexico City, I visited the architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, and in their workspace is what Billie called a *Barragán stairway*. And I said, "Oh, who is he?" Then, off I went to Mexico, and Mexico City is Barragán's world. His spectacular use of geometry and color inspired my Fall 2005 collection.

When I see my designs out in the world, I feel that my work has been successful. I started my first collection with only five designs, one in each classification. My criterion was if there is somebody out there who wants to buy the five designs then maybe there is a reason for me to go into business. I was successful in selling that collection to Henri Bendel, where I thought my customer would shop. Then, Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus both picked up the collection. Dawn Mello, the Fashion Director of Bergdorf Goodman, immediately put my *iconic cape* into their spring catalogue. From a five-piece collection, I suddenly ended up with huge orders. I actually had not thought through the process of how I was going to manufacture in bulk and ship to stores. It was quite a learning curve.

But now I knew the ideas worked, not just by the fact that the fashion director at Bergdorf's recognized the collection as good, but that other people did as well. And when people came and bought pieces of the collection from the stores and off the catalogue, that gave the collection life. When you are a designer doing ready-to-wear, you need to succeed on a certain level. My success depends on how many people I can convince to wear my concepts and ideas. Therefore, the more people I see in my clothes, the more successful I feel. There is another school of thought in the world of fashion where it is considered fashion only if it is not wearable. I think differently. I think that really good design is universal and should have universal appeal.

Within the world of fashion and clothing design, one should be able to have a dialogue, referencing history and anthropology and different eras of fashion. A designer's work can be viewed within that context, just as art can be viewed within its historical context. Good design in fashion does not need validation by likening it to a piece of art. It has its own merit, with its own criteria, in its own world. Fashion reviews, however, tend to fall into a narrower confine. In the world of fashion, a designer's work is validated by who wears it and not by how many. In my world, my work is validated not only by who wears it; it is also validated by how many can.

STAGE 1: INSPIRATION

APPAREL DESIGN: INSPIRATION

What might inspire clothing? With all the ways in which clothing contributes to culture, industry, commerce, and a person's life, identity, and comfort, the avenues of inspiration are perhaps innumerable. Clothing can be for style, comfort, shelter, identity, symbolism, display—all of these and more. However, some of the more common avenues for inspiration might be from the client, from previous designs under the same label, from the occasion for which it is intended, or from a stylish muse of some kind. Looking at the history of fashion or the work of other designers is a good place to begin (see Appendices 2, 3, and 5, for starters.) Style is one thing, but to *want* to design clothing is to want to fill a need that has a very personal, physical connection to someone. Consider the clients and their needs. Think about their individual experience and how the clothing you are designing contributes to it in the best possible way, whether it's for function, style, or both. Clothing can be anywhere on a spectrum from frivolous fun to functional equipment, but in any case, the experience matters.

FURNITURE DESIGN: INSPIRATION

Where might one find inspiration for a piece of furniture, in this case a chair? Classical styles for one (see Appendices 2, 3 and 5 for leads.) Secondly, one might find that the designing of something so basic to human needs in our culture is a challenge in itself. So many chairs have been designed, why bother to design a new one? Part of the game becomes about navigating the familiar territory and coming out in a place no one has seen before. Chairs—probably because of their familiarity—are a great thing with which to play design games. Consider classical designs and how they have been manipulated, then look at postmodern variations. Think about comfort and the need for a really *good* chair. Chairs can also be decorative: They contribute to an interior and as such may want to have sculptural qualities or otherwise heightened aesthetic properties. The inspiration for the design may therefore come from the game itself: Create something unexpectedly new. Furniture is both an experience through use and through its contribution to the style of an environment. Make it function physically, but also emotionally. It's going to be around the user for a while—work that relationship and be inspired by the interaction.

GUI DESIGN: INSPIRATION

The inspiration for the design of a GUI may well relate very heavily to its application. Websites and apps are not things, as such. A website is a medium—a delivery system—and an app is exactly that: an application, a tool. Like a magazine, the graphic design of what appears on the “page” may or may not be invisible to the viewer, depending on how desirable the impact of “design” is meant to be over the impact of the content itself. As onscreen media became more and more a part of our daily lives, the “nuts-and-bolts” design of Web pages faded into the background, but the design of the interfaces took off, assuming more and more importance as more and more activities began to take place on screens. The inspiration for good design of an app or website may most likely come from the functionality itself, but also from an aesthetic of the overall “look” of the site's GUI, much like designing a restaurant: In the end the ambiance matters, the “feel” of the place informs the experience, but the food is still the main focus. In a seemingly circular bit of reasoning, seek inspiration in the design problem itself, in fulfilling the needs that require the design. How can you create the best possible experience, using this media to deliver this content or service? How does the interface inform the experience of what the application or site actually does?

Designing requires a strong personal involvement since the designer must be able to identify with the client, end user, and/or consumer of the final design product. Designers may have to assume the personalities of the people for whom they are designing. Designers must be able to find and depend on resources of inspiration to explore situations and reactions to situations that they have never before encountered.

The following exercises allow you to gather sources of inspiration and tell you where such sources may be found in the future. The 13 exercises prompt you to look into your mind from 13 different angles.

The exercises will help you to

- know how and where to find the muses when you need them,
- release the appropriate genies from their bottles at the right times,
- explore and play, and
- move on.

CREATING AN INSPIRATION JOURNAL

Brainstorm

The quotations that introduce each set of questions are from a variety of sources. They represent one of the facets of creative thinking. You should look for similar examples in authors, designers, artists, and architects you encounter on your own.

This is a meditative exercise so don't be hasty. Read each question and write down everything that comes to mind: make lists, write down keywords, and jot down impulsive thoughts. Give yourself time to think about the questions and your notes before you edit them into clear answers to the questions. Not all the questions will have clear answers at first, and the questions are not designed to be easy. These answers will be the basis for your search for inspiration, not only for now, but also for future projects.

Visualize

Since designing is a visual skill, use your thoughts and answers to create visual statements in a sketchbook or folder. Collect images and photographs. Create collages and sketches to illustrate each section. Think of this as an open-ended project, a journal that you will add to as your insights evolve. Do not try to be logical. Let your impulses and instinct control your choices. A good strategy is to focus on the exercise, impulsively collect images, whether they are sketched, downloaded and printed, or clipped, and once you have a good stack, start to arrange them into a collage that describes your thoughts on the topic.

1: FOCUS

... with me it's the Muse who causes poetry by focusing the world. —May Sarton

As we may expect from a poet, Sarton's choice of words is interesting. The muse *causes* poetry. She doesn't allow, create, or induce it; she *causes* it. The muse makes the creation inevitable by sharpening the creator's perception.

To "focus the world" is to reveal things in a way that their meaning is clearer than before. Poets, painters, and



Figure 1.7 May Sarton

designers find ways to expose things that have been hidden from view so a new context or an entirely new meaning can result. On the one hand, we can examine artists and writers in search of revealing insights and interpretations. On the other hand, we may enlist a muse to help us focus the world in a manner that lets us see things we have not seen before.

1. What have you seen, read, or heard that made you understand something in a way you had not or could not before?
2. What can make your perception clearer? What can help you to focus the world?
3. What, where, who could be your muse? How?

2: ENERGY TRANSFERRED

A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. —Charles Olson

Energy is never destroyed. The energy that goes into a creation will radiate from it forever. We can stand in front of a painting and sense the painter's approach and the energy of his or her emotions. A concert of music that is centuries old can stir our emotions every which way, and poems written more than one thousand years ago can bring tears to our eyes.

We sense the artist's joy, anger, or excitement—the reigning emotion of the creative moment. The energy of the artist's creativity and inspiration is transferred to you through the artwork, perhaps hundreds of years after the artist lived. On the one hand, you can be aware and open yourself to influences from all possible sources. On the other hand, you can let this knowledge spur you to animate all you create with your own energy. Either way, your objective is to use this transfer of energy to fuel your creativity.

1. Have you been completely thrilled and energized by a poem, a piece of writing, a work of art, a film, or a performance? What was it?

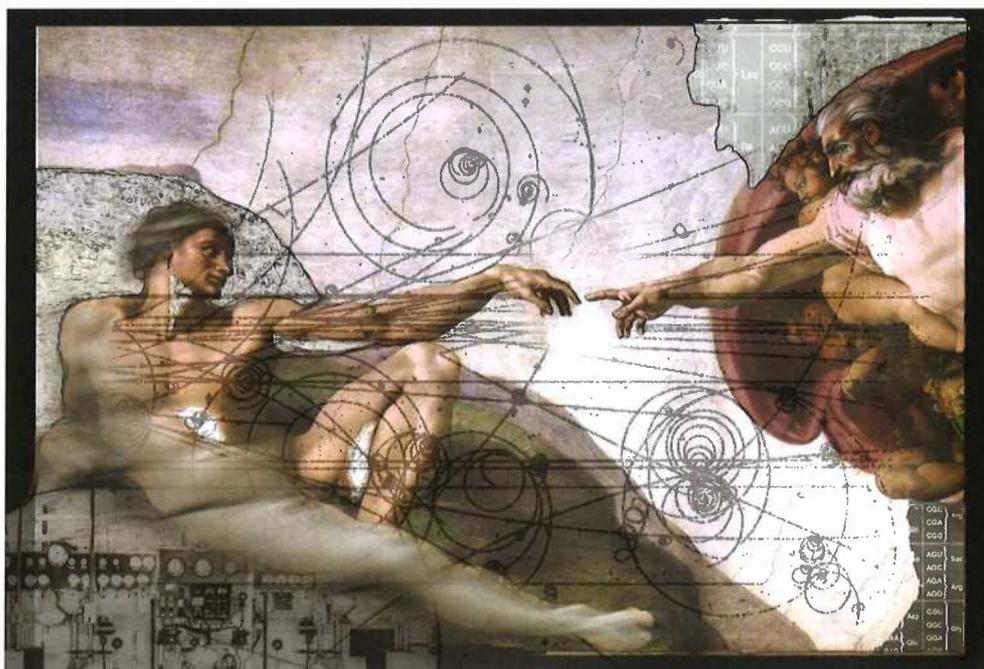


Figure 1.8 Sistine Chapel Ceiling (1508-12): The Creation of Adam, 1511-12 (fresco) (post restoration), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) (manipulated by author)

2. Describe what happened. How did the energy manifest? How do you think it managed to do this?
3. If you haven't been so energized, don't stop until you find a work of art that transports you, now! Where will you go to look for this?

3: THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD

*... What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me,
what is this quintessence of dust? —Shakespeare, Hamlet, II, ii*

People, especially because of their contradictory nature, are an endless source of inspiration for all the reasons William Shakespeare wrote about and more. Hamlet, a man in turmoil, was overflowing with admiration at the glory of human beings, even while he contemplated killing one. We can admire people as individuals and as types. We can love them and fear them. We cannot always understand why we feel a certain way, yet we still feel something.

Designers must understand their clients and collaborators, and often they won't have much time to relate. Work on understanding people, but also genuinely like them for what they are. Learn as much as you can about people and what makes them tick. You have to care about people to create good things for them.

1. What are the best qualities of people who affect you strongly and positively?
2. What excites you about them? What do you admire?
3. Who is your favorite person? Why?



Figure 1.9 David, detail of the head by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), 1504 (marble) (manipulated by author)

4: IRRESISTIBLE FORCE

... I should want to show by my work what is in the heart of such an eccentric man, of such a nobody [as I am in the eyes of most people].

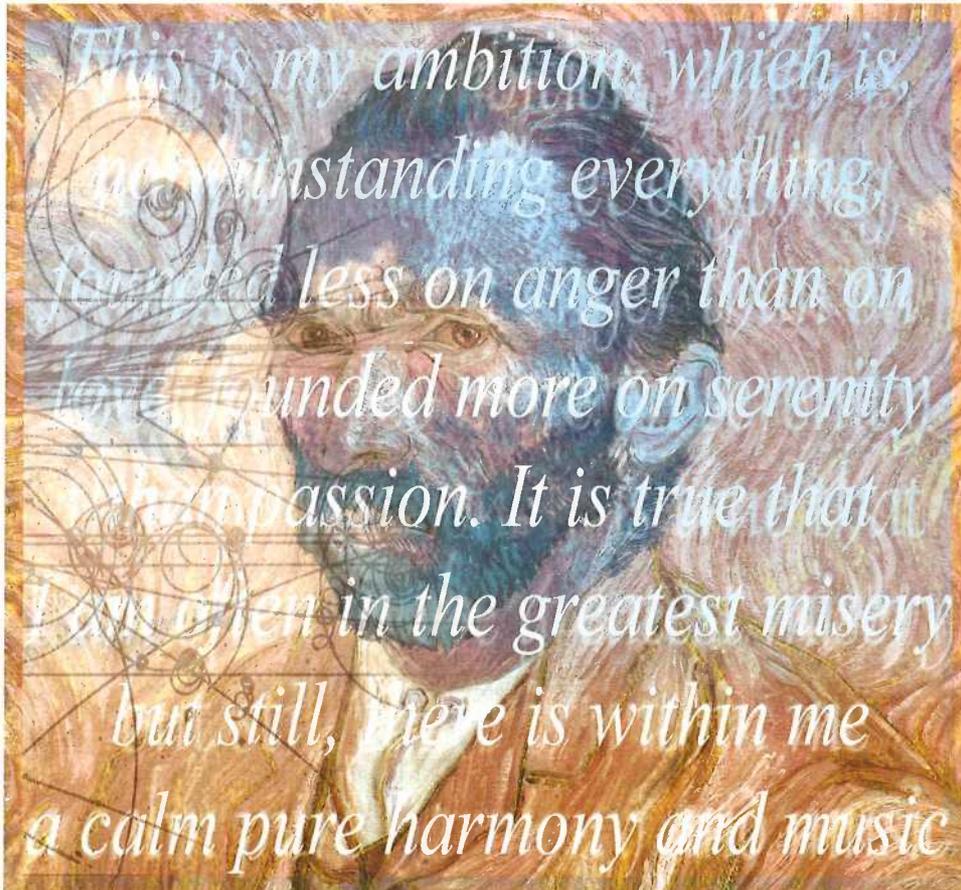
This is my ambition, which is, notwithstanding everything, founded less on anger than on love, founded more on serenity than on passion. It is true that I am often in the greatest misery, but still there is within me a calm pure harmony and music. In the poorest huts, the dirtiest corner, I see drawings and pictures. And with irresistible force my mind is drawn towards these things.

More and more other things lose their interest, and the more I get rid of them, the quicker my eye grasps the picturesque things. Art demands persistent work, work in spite of everything, and a continuous observation. —Vincent van Gogh, in a letter to his brother Theo, July 1882

Opening your heart and self for a creative drive can be difficult and debilitating. For professional designers, continually giving in to the “irresistible forces” can become a drain on their energy and cause them to burn out. We all have limits and must know what we are capable of accomplishing. However, by allowing yourself to be drawn to the edge, you find out where that edge is and how it allows you to learn to control the forces that pull at you. Therefore, the strength of the focused and directed creative impulse becomes that much greater.

1. What interests you to the point of being drawn to it with “irresistible force?” What would you like to be so interested in?
2. What can make you *need* to create?
3. What “puts you over the edge?” How do you come back?
4. What is the wildest impulse you’ve ever had? Did you act on it? If not, why not?

Figure 1.10 Self-portrait, 1889 (oil on canvas), Vincent van Gogh (1853–90) (manipulated by author)



5: THE NOISE THAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE

Musicians, painters, whatever, they have no choice but to describe where they live. . . . Sometimes it may seem hard to keep your ear on the street because there's a lot of stuff you don't want to pick up. But as Bob Dylan said, "He not busy being born is busy dying," and I think the death starts in your record collection. I like to feel alive. I think I'm awake, and this is the noise that keeps me awake. —Bono

Design what you know. But what happens if what you know is limited or not recently renewed? Think about your background and environment. How does this define your vision and thoughts? What can you do to add to that?

Is it possible that you are missing something by not being aware of your surroundings? Open yourself up to new influences in all the arts and in your daily life. You may find treasures you didn't expect to find.

1. In terms of your influences, what is your environment? Where are you from? *What* are you from? What are the forces, things, people, and situations that shaped you into who you are?
2. How do you think your current environment affects your opinions and tastes?
3. What makes you feel alive and awake?
4. What do you need to listen to, look at, or experience to keep your ideas fresh?
5. Experience artistry that is unfamiliar to you. What would that be?

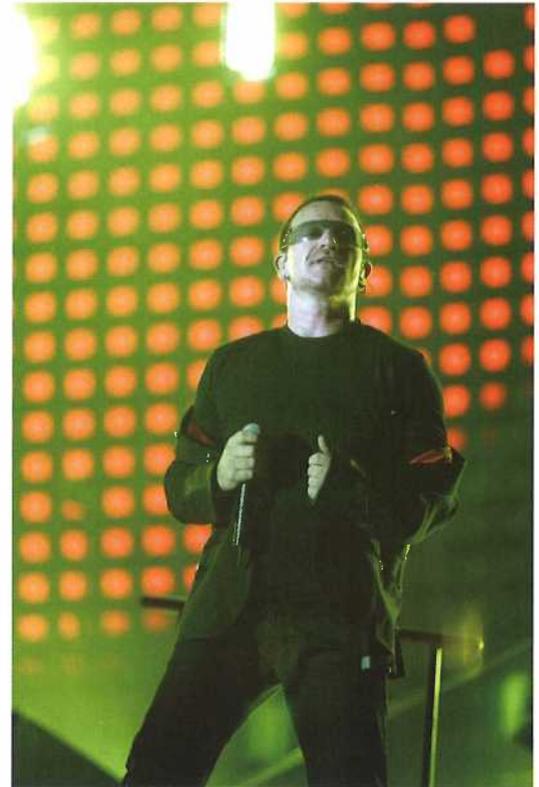


Figure 1.11 Bono in concert

6: A CHALLENGE

Now, I truly believe that we in this generation, must come to terms with nature, and I think we're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves. —Rachel Carson

Rachel Carson's call for action was an urgent one. Unfortunately two new generations have arrived on the scene since then: she was speaking in 1963.

The awareness of the environmental problems we face has certainly grown, but so have the problems. The challenge that emerged from our consumer-goods-driven, industrial economy in the latter half of the 20th century has become even more critical in the early years of the 21st: our mode of living is simply not sustainable; our use of resources is beyond that which the planet can replenish.

Designers must shoulder some measure of responsibility for the environmental effects their work has. The decisions made in the design studio have an effect on the products' entire life cycles: from the gathering of materials to the eventual disposal, reuse, or recycling. These products, be they buildings, interiors, garments, appliances, or any of the myriad other consumer goods we are surrounded with, all have their hidden costs in terms of environmental effects.

Designing with sustainable practices in mind allows the details to be examined and each stage of the life cycle made as environmentally sound as possible. One reason why the challenge Carson voices is still effectively unanswered is that the problem is overwhelming and there are many unclear aspects to the discussion, which has also been unfortunately politicized. Keep your sights on the human scale of the problem to begin with and start by being inspired to

better your immediate surroundings. From there, you will then be able to benefit people and communities worldwide.

1. Consider your surroundings and the products you use and wear. Find examples of waste of materials, energy, or other resources throughout the entire life cycle of the buildings, furnishings, clothing, and other products. How would you redesign these to minimize the waste?
2. What can you change in your own lifestyle to minimize your impact on the environment?
3. How could you, as a designer, help others to make similar changes?

7: REFLECT INFLUENCES

From the time the D&G collection was launched, its design philosophy has remained constant. Domenico [Dolce] and I get a lot of our ideas from the street; we are very influenced by what kids wear to go out at night to the clubs. We try to reflect these influences in a positive way. —Stefano Gabbana, of Dolce and Gabbana

Going out and looking at the world is as necessary, if not more so, than any other research you conduct. You can choose influences and how you work with them, but you must seek them out; don't wait for them to come to you.

An influence should be just that; it should influence you. It should not be something that you recycle into your designs. Copying an influence is easy. To be truly creative means you add your energy and interpretation to create a design that is more than just the sum of its parts.

1. By whom or what would you like to be influenced?
2. Where will you go for this influence?
3. How will you reflect these influences to make the creations uniquely yours?

Figure 1.12 The designers Dolce and Gabbana seek inspiration from “the kids” like these, but put their own positive spin on what they find. “Positive” is to be realized as “energy” not a “quality.”



8: COMMUNICATE FEELINGS

Fashion is not enough! . . . I try to communicate a feeling, a sensation . . . I'm always telling stories. Stories about women. From the spy to the Madonna, via the heroine, the goddess, the "petite Parisienne," the secretary. I then created clothes that men and women can wear in these imaginary adventures. I direct them. —Thierry Mugler

There is a side of designing that is about dreams and fantasies. A designer creates a vision of the world as it should be instead of molding designs to the way the world is. Sometimes the impetus for a new design is simply that someone—the designer, the client, or the world at large—is bored with what is available. It becomes our job not only to create the design, but also to create the context that calls for its existence. We must show the environment this new design belongs in and ensure it looks desirable.

Western society is driven by a consumer economy. The demand for “new” is greater than ever and continues to grow. The influence of popular culture on design increases and design trends are increasingly affected, even in long-term applications such as architecture. With this has come a demand for the increased expressiveness of design. Modernism, and the cool structured functionality that went with it, has given way to the (sometimes) playful anarchy and retro-referential style of the postmodernist and deconstructivist movements.

It is extremely important to be aware of the trends and movements that shape designs. Our reason for observing them may be so that we can run counter to them or ignore them. If we are astute at spotting trends, we can use them to predict what the next trend will be and so be ahead of the curve. A trend can be recognized only in the context of where we are and where we have been. What is the zeitgeist, the spirit of our time? What is changing? What is old? What is bubbling under the surface? A spirit creates an emotion, and we can either tap into it or create an alternative view. Designers can put a unique stamp on this world and in doing so bring dreams to life.

1. Where does your imagination like to go?
2. What bores you?
3. How would you change the world if you could?
4. What are your favorite adventures or fantasies? Why?
5. What is the spirit of our time? (See Appendix 4 for a brief discussion of this topic.)

9: BE COMPLETELY QUIET

There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it can't do otherwise; in raptures it will writhe before you. —Franz Kafka

This seems at first glance to contradict the idea of the need to look at unlikely sources for inspiration to create specific designs. However, the idea presented here is grounded in the perception that your consciousness is your own. No one can think your thoughts. No one can see through your eyes. Everything you experience in the world and all your ideas, thoughts, and impulses are within you and nowhere else. But, trying to access your thoughts is not always easy in the middle of the noise and activity of daily life. All our increasingly convenient gadgetry seems to be making this not better but worse. It becomes very difficult to take the time to be still and think, digest, and meditate.

Outward noise is not the only problem. Have you ever tried listening to the chatter that's going on in your brain all day? We tend to either be thinking of something that has already



Figure 1.13 “Don’t even listen, just wait.” Finding the stillness of your mind, beyond the chatter and background noise of everyday life, allows you to directly access your experiences and impressions of the world.

won’t have to withdraw yourself; you will be able to quiet yourself in the middle of a stressful situation. This will help you access your own thoughts, experiences, and beliefs and harness them to your work.

1. Do you have an opportunity to be alone and quiet? How? Where? When? If not, why? How can you make this happen?

10: THE BEGINNER’S MIND I

If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few. —Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind

Being able to see the world with a fresh, unformed view is of great importance. This enables designers to have a new vision in designs, find new approaches, and see new solutions to old problems. If you find yourself coasting along on preconceived ideas, stop, go back, and question all of them.

1. When have you best been able to accept new knowledge and ideas?
2. Why do you think that was?
3. How would you prepare yourself to do that again?
4. When are you best able to generate new ideas?



Figure 1.14 A designer must be able to find the quiet space within herself and connect to her focused thinking, even in the middle of a workday or in a stressful situation. You may not be able to meditate at a desk, but you can know how to find a quiet moment to be with yourself and be yourself.

11: THE BEGINNER'S MIND II

You can't do this kind of work with total jerks, but you can't do it with total professionals either. They are far too knowledgeable about the normal way, and that gets them completely blocked.

—Ole Sheeren, OMA Project Manager, on working with the architect Rem Koolhaas

Too much knowledge can be as much of a stumbling block as lack of it. You cannot undo knowledge or unthink a thought, but you can open your mind to be receptive to the different, strange, or seemingly impossible. Once we become accustomed to a certain method through study or training, it can be very difficult to break those habits. Always question your previous methods, opinions, and knowledge. Keep in mind that *normal* is a very relative term.

1. Define *normal*.
2. Have you ever gone against the normal mode of thinking? How? Why? Why not?
3. How would your design go beyond notions of normalcy?

12: PAIN

The birth of a new idea comes best when everything is going well and will be painful. Don't attempt to tamper with the process and don't deny the pain. —Andy Law, Founder, St. Luke's Advertising Agency, UK

The birth of a child is an often crazy and messy situation, involving a lot of pain and stress. In the midst of it, it can be difficult to imagine it ending well. However, when labor is over, all seems well once a small, warm bundle is in your arms.

Resisting the pain just delays the inevitable and can cause complications. In the creative process, trying to stay away from the agony of choices and decisions does just the same. Trust the process and go with it.

A new idea needs to be carefully attended to at the time of its birth. A healthy atmosphere and environment will facilitate things, but the process will still require a degree of tension and pain. A good design requires the expenditure of a lot of energy, the keeping of strange hours, and the agonizing over details and solutions.

By preparing for the process, you can make sure all goes well. There are no shortcuts, so make sure you are ready for each step of the way by having resources of inspiration and keeping your eyes on the ultimate goal.

In addition to this, knowing your limits prepares you for times of stress. You know when you can go on and when you need to hunker down. Being able to look back and say, "I could handle that!" will allow you to be less apprehensive the next time a high-stress situation occurs.

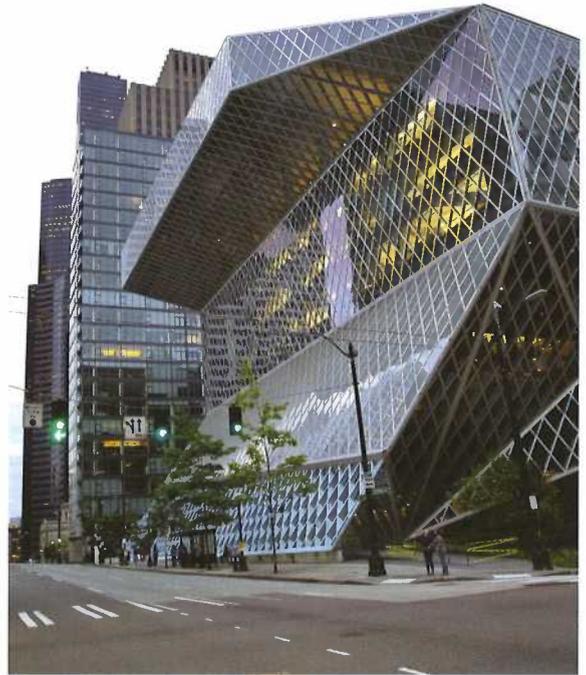


Figure 1.15 Seattle Central Library, Rem Koolhaas and Joshua Prince-Ramus (OMA/LMN) principal architects.



Figure 1.16 A birth, any birth, is a moment of pain, distress, and anxiety. What results, however, is usually something new, vital, and joyful.



Figure 1.17 Make your own opportunities. Find a way to plant something that grows, even in the most difficult soil.

1. When are you at your strongest?
2. What needs to happen for you to be content with the world and feel that all is well?
3. When have you had to endure mental or physical pain to achieve a worthwhile goal? If you have, could you do that again?

13: GET UP AND LOOK

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them. —George Bernard Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession

A professional needs to be proactive about opportunities, processes, and solutions. If something doesn't work, fix it or do it again. If an idea isn't developing, don't wait for it to resolve itself. The creative drive must also drive one *to* creativity, not just through it. Get up. Go.

1. What needs to happen for you to be a more creative person?
2. What steps can you take to make this happen?
3. What could you do routinely at the beginning of a design project to energize your creativity?
4. What can you do today?

- 1 The Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, were born in this order: Calliope, epic poetry and eloquence; Clio, history; Melpomene, tragedy; Euterpe, music; Erato, the poetry of love; Terpsichore, choral song and dance; Urania, astronomy; Thalia, comedy; Polyhymnia, oratory or sacred poetry.
- 2 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 245a.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 244a–244b.
- 4 This is the basis for the myth of Pandora’s box.
- 5 Pablo Picasso: “A Palm Tree can become a Horse,” *Sunday Observer* (London), July 10, 1950.
- 6 Archimedes, on having a sudden realization while taking a bath, ran naked through the streets of Athens shouting “Eureka!”
- 7 Robert Stickgold, Dana Whidbee, Beth Schirmer, Vipul Patel, J. Allan Hobson. “Visual Discrimination Task Improvement: A Multi-Step Process Occurring During Sleep,” *The Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* (March 2000).