

# Kanto

CREATIVE CORNERS / NOVEMBER 2017

## Start Strong

DAN MATUTINA

### ANGLES

*West-Line Studio's architecture is an ode to tradition and topography*

### LENS

*Daily Overview presents both an unsettling and optimistic portrait of humanity from space*

### CANVAS

*The art of the magazine cover with Jaap Biemans of Coverjunkie*



## I write this coming from a dark place.

My dearest *lola* (grandmother) who lived to 78 has passed on. Cancer. In the midst of producing an issue about starting out and pursuing ones passion, I had to face an ending. It was devastating and, for a while, it drained all the optimism within me. My *lola* was equal parts authoritative and nurturing; she was not an easy woman to love for a lot of people but her toughness hides a caring soul. As her favorite male *apo* (grandson), I could fondly recall so many moments of tender compassion and selflessness from her; my *lola*, by default, never wavered in putting the well-being and happiness of her loved ones above hers. Her slow but imminent departure nevertheless still left me with a sense of disbelief that this formidable woman, our family's 'anchor' has gone. That it had to happen just a few days before her birthday and Christmas, both occasions of great festivity, made it all the more difficult to understand the general atmosphere of happiness and the hope that blanketed the world at that very moment. I won't pretend to feel much better as I write this but in the spirit of this issue's brazen optimism, one I had to helm despite the odds, I am opening myself to the opportunity to slowly stand up and start again.

Decisions to begin or initiate things often begin during moments of great loss, of realizations that things could be better, that one has the power to effect change and fix things. It is a hopeful thought that I cling to especially now in these trying times. As long as we persist and hope to make things better for ourselves and others despite the odds, we will never run short of starters. There should be no shame in beginning things; every courageous undertaking requires that furtive first step before great things can proceed. One needs to set foundations first before building. But one also needs to absorb the loss and the pain; understand the situation first, before gathering strength to start again.

For this issue, we have gathered a stellar roster of talents to start the year, everyone a daring starter that sought to effect positive change be it small or large. We also have our very first creative on the cover, graphic designer and illustrator Dan Matutina, who together with his studio Plus63 and an equally daring group of design practices from various fields, made the decision to band together into a stronger and better whole, resulting in Hydra Design Group.

May this issue inspire you to make that leap into the unknown. Learn. Start something. #StartStrong. Have a blessed new year!

This is for you Lola Paz. ●



**Patrick**

@patrick\_kasingsing



**On the cover:** Dan Matutina in his studio  
Photographed by Lawrence Carlos @\_lawrencecarlos

# Kanto

CREATIVE CORNERS

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# Awesome People

WHO MADE THIS ISSUE POSSIBLE



Jay Asiddao is a reader of philosophy and comic books. He spends his time wrestling with the pages of his library and his five-year-old dog Stan. **What are you starting this 2018?** This year, I'm currently applying to MA programs. Hopefully I can start further studies and learn a lot more about risk and ethics to advance my career.



Lawrence Carlos is currently an architectural writer for *BluPrint*, a Philippine title on architecture. Trained as an architect in the UK and Germany, his architectural photographs were featured in the RIBA London Awards and the Architects' Journal Small Projects Award. He is an avid vinyl record collector and has a penchant for film photography.



Rina Caparras believes that the answers to life's most difficult questions lie at the bottom of a bowl of *pho*. Her articles have been published in *appetite* and *Asia Food News*, while her literary works have been published in the *Philippines Graphic*. **What are you starting this 2018?** I would like to start amicable yet insightful discussions on food.

Vida Cruz's stories have been published or are forthcoming in *Lontar: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*, *Expanded Horizons*, and various anthologies. A first place winner of the 2017 Writers of the Future contest, she also attended the 2014 Clarion Writers Workshop. She likes giraffes and the color purple.



Joy Ngo is an interior designer by profession and a traveler by passion. She was formerly a stylist for One Mega Group and faculty member at SoFA. She holds a masters degree in Home Luxury Collection Design, Fashion Interiors & Luxury Branding at the Instituto Marangoni in Milan, Italy. **What are you starting this 2018?** I plan to finally establish my own brand of luxury design services and hopefully start designing my own home and lifestyle products.



Sibyl Layag is a bookworm and a traveler, an animal lover and a beach enthusiast. Although now a straight-edge business news reporter, her first love is writing features. **What are you starting this 2018?** I will start building toward stability—beginning with a solid skincare routine.



Mark Ngo is an advertising creative director by day and a leather craftsman by night. In 2016, he enrolled in a basic bag making course at SoFA and learned other techniques via YouTube. Mark dreams of becoming a furniture and interior designer, and a film director someday. **What are you starting in 2018?** This 2018, I will be developing more new products and will fully update my Instagram and Facebook page.



Kit Singson is a freelance writer, photographer, designer, and all-around creative who enjoys the water as much as the mountains. She spends her days in coffee shops and plans to give her #coffeeshopdreams another go. **What are you starting this 2018?** I would like to develop my personal style this year as a way to grow in my craft.



Kara Gonzales will be celebrating her second year anniversary with Clinical Depression and Anxiety Disorder in May 2018. She tries to speak out and stand up for those silently suffering from mental health disorders like her. She does it every time she can, sometimes even during job interviews, which is probably why she works freelance.

Jedd Sy's journey in photography started when his journey through life was literally put in peril. When he was diagnosed with cancer, he craved for an outlet for all his depression and confusion—a creative outlet with he eventually found in photography, albeit purely by happenstance. **What are you starting in 2018?** Jedd travels around the Philippines with his friends, in search for its elusive secrets and grandeur, where beauty is more than meets the eye. For 2018, he plans to offer photography classes, to share his love for the art to other aspiring photographers.



Denise Gesilva has had more than 12 years of graphic design experience. Her most notable stint is four years art directing magazines for One Mega Group. Based in Manila, she is currently working as an independent contractor for clients overseas. View her portfolio on [behance.net/denisefgesilva](http://behance.net/denisefgesilva). **What are you starting this 2018?** Studying After Effects, to be even more multi-skilled and stay competitive.



Patricia Herbolario is a fun-sized content editor for print and digital. Her biggest life achievement (to date) is surviving 2017. **What will you start this 2018?** Choosing myself, my happiness and sanity over anything else









Chetian Culture Centre, 2015,  
photographed by Jingsong Xie

ANGLES

# Placemakers



Guizhou-based  
*West-Line Studio*  
embraces the  
distinct cultural and  
topographical character  
of western China  
through architecture

**INTERVIEW** *Patrick Kasingsing*

**PHOTOGRAPHY** *Courtesy of West-Line Studio*



Haobo Wei and Jingsong Xie

## Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Hi! We are Haobo Wei and Jingsong Xie from West-Line Studio. We graduated from Chongqing University and Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology respectively.

With the practice we founded, we have been focusing our work in our native province, Guizhou, in southwestern China. Our architecture is informed by and appreciative of the region's rugged and complicated landforms, and seeks a conversation with our rich and diverse subcultural heritage. We feel that the combination of traditional handicraft skills unique to the region and modern production methods create an effective, memorable and relatable architectural design output. It is identifiable as belonging to its surrounding community.

**Can you tell us a bit about how the firm started? What were some of the challenges you encountered?**

We founded West-Line Studio back in 2004 and we currently practice exclusively in Guizhou Province. The biggest challenge we encountered is the discovery

of the community's general lack of self-confidence in traditional methods and age-old practices, and this has led to the gradual neglect and decay of some of the distinct subcultural heritage of southwestern China. We fear that in such cases, regional integrity will get swallowed up.

**What made the studio decide to limit practice in the southwestern part of China? What makes the region special and especially accommodating for your brand of architecture? Are there plans to eventually expand to other parts of China or even Asia?**

Guizhou province is our home, and we feel a strong connection towards it. We also feel that is a place of great potential to champion the cause of contemporary vernacular architecture because of the region's character. In terms of topographical features, Guizhou is unique in that it is where the karst landform is most concentrated in China. From the perspective of social character, Guizhou historically has been a place of migration, where different ethnic settlements co-exist. As a result,

**“It is our aim to develop a more culturally sensitive practice of modernism, to find a contemporary paradigm of architecture that straddles tradition and the future.”**

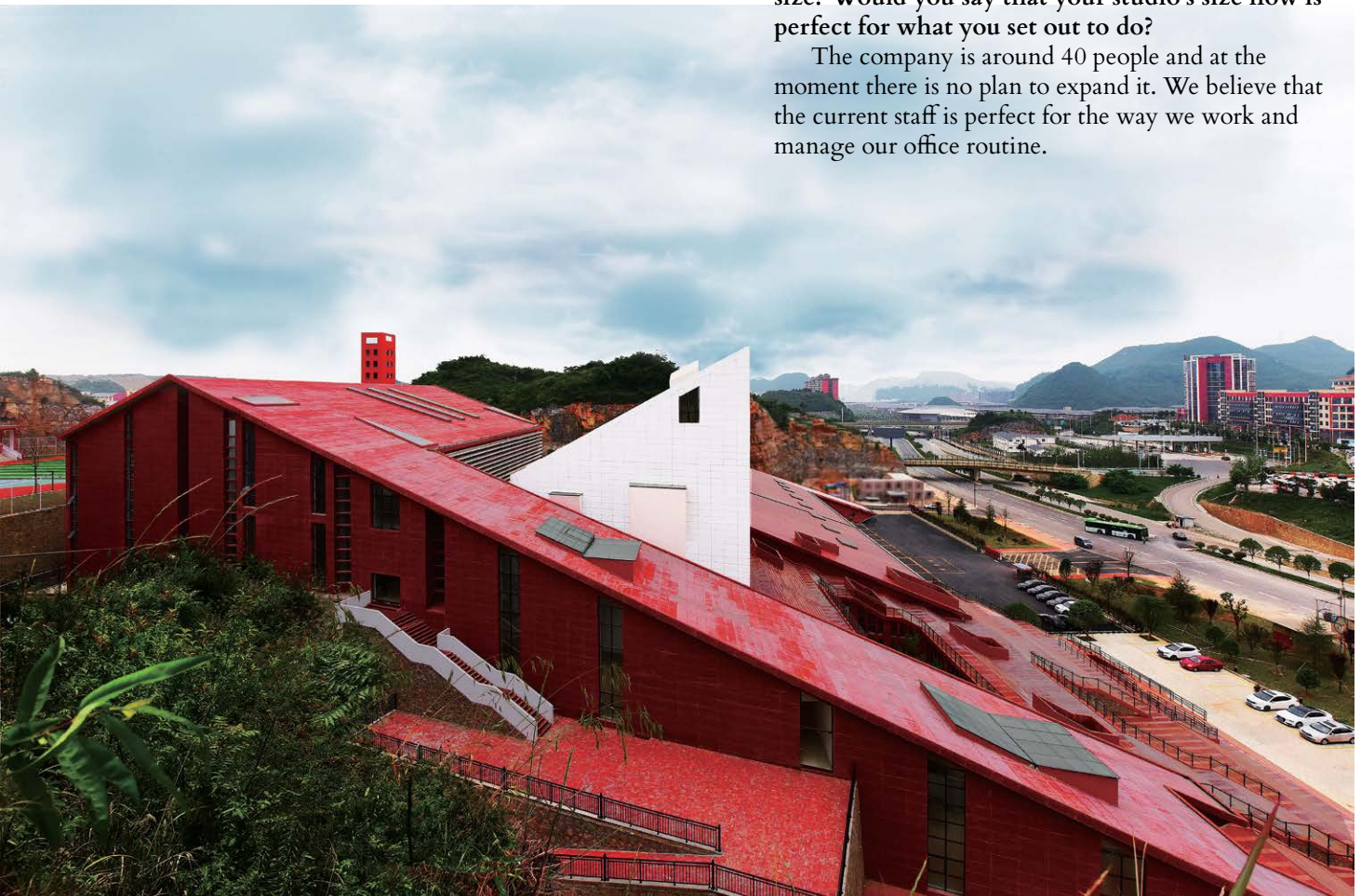
Guizhou Fire Station, 2017, photographed by Haobo Wei

we find many unique subcultures and traditions at play. Finally, in terms of the architectural landscape, modern Guizhou has developed a half-industrialized, half-vernacular and half-traditional construction model, a somewhat typical construction reality in contemporary China.

This region is both the best and most challenging collaborator towards our goal. It is our aim to develop a more culturally sensitive practice of modernism, to find a contemporary paradigm of architecture that straddles tradition and the future, one that respects and integrates the past with present technologies to move forward. We are considering the possibility of validating this *modus operandi* in other regions in the future.

**How big is the firm? Are there plans to expand in size? Would you say that your studio’s size now is perfect for what you set out to do?**

The company is around 40 people and at the moment there is no plan to expand it. We believe that the current staff is perfect for the way we work and manage our office routine.





With this team we feel we can achieve originality and construction quality for large and medium-sized projects. In this environment, the lead architect can easily communicate and discuss with each and every designer face-to-face.

**Is there a typology that you've always wanted to do but haven't? Why this in particular?**

We would like to explore other architectural typologies, in particular, churches and temples, or concert halls. We look for working methods which trigger resonance among the different types of communities we work with by way of combining place and atmosphere.

**What is a material you wish more architects should use?**

More than specific materials, we think architects should consider combining the usage of more local materials together with contemporary ones. It is important to explore and discuss chemistry between these two types of materials as their interplay can add more texture and character to spaces.

**What do you want to champion or bring to public consciousness about vernacular architecture in China?**

We'd like to heighten appreciation of the singular and context-responsive brand of traditional vernacular architecture that we have in western China; it is a completely poetic tectonic system that marries complicated topography and the social character of its subcultures. It is centered on human relations (social structure), the wild (unorthodox), poetics (moments and scenes that bring back memories) and the geographical relationship between mountains and rivers.

This we interpret into the contemporary setting by emphasizing body perception, dealing with the relationship between man and nature in a formalistic and emotional approach. We are trying to redevelop the essence reflected by these traditional vernacular spaces with the prevailing technical systems while addressing contemporary needs. We hope our end-users feel a connection towards culture and place by experiencing our spaces.

**What do you want your end users to gain from their interaction with your architecture?**

We hope the people who experience our architecture can obtain the *genius loci* of a place, as well as develop a sense of community. ●

To view more of West-Line Studio's contemporized ode to vernacular architecture, visit their website at [china-west-line.com](http://china-west-line.com)



“We hope the people who experience our architecture can obtain the *genius loci* of a place, as well as develop a sense of community.”



**Opposite page and above:**  
Shui Culture Center, 2017,  
photographed by Jinda Zheng

**Left:** Concrete Memorial, 2010,  
photographed by Haobo Wei



Museum of Aviation  
Surčin, Belgrade, Serbia



# Brutal Territory

*Blue Crow Media's* Derek Lamberton makes a cartographic appeal to architectural enthusiasts and travelers alike to give Brutalism another look

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

PHOTOGRAPHY *Relja Ivanic*

**Hello! Please introduce yourself.**

My name is Derek Lamberton. Originally from Washington, D.C.. I now live in London, and I am the founder of Blue Crow Media.

**What got you into the mapmaking/cartography industry? Have you always been fascinated with maps?**

My family has moved around quite a lot for a number of generations, and my mother worked at *National Geographic*, so I was lucky to grow up with piles of maps and stories of living in interesting parts of the world.

**What prompted the idea of creating architecture-themed maps? What were you hoping the users would take away from your work?**

I originally began in 2009, publishing map-based, food and drink-oriented iPhone apps. Around 2012 I shared an office studio with a book designer named Jaakko Tuomivaara, and we began working on the maps together. The Brutalist London Map was the first architecture map, and it was really inspired by the lack of quality information and research available about late

modernist architecture in London. For the reader or user, I wanted to present an often ignored or reviled style as something of significant aesthetic value, and to encourage people to reconsider their view of the style and to visit the buildings with an open mind. From a personal perspective, it was to design and publish something with Jaakko that was worthy of the subject matter.

**Why a Brutalist-themed map? What about this architectural style appealed to you and why do you think it's worth spreading consciousness and information about architecture in this particular style?**

Even though it was only two years ago that I published the Brutalist London Map (in November 2015), it's now perhaps difficult to consider how unusual it was then. There have been a number of high quality books about Brutalist buildings published since then, and an unbelievable amount of social media posts, but in late 2015, there was nothing on the shelves. So part of the inspiration was to create something original. But it's such an interesting style and exploring it globally has been a terrific and frustrating experience.



Some of the cities covered by Blue Crow Media's portfolio of architecture and design-themed maps include Paris, London, New York, Berlin, Sydney and Tokyo to name a few.

Not many people like Brutalism, and buildings from the era are being razed regularly. The value of the maps are quickly shifting from exploration to documentation.

**Are there plans to create architectural maps for other styles and typologies?**

I've published a few others including a Constructivist map of Moscow, an overview of 20th century architecture in Berlin, and maps of concrete architecture in New York and Tokyo. Recently, I published the first in a new series featuring the design of transit systems with the London Underground Architecture & Design Map.

**What factors inform your selection of cities to create maps for? I really think you should consider Manila for your Brutalist maps series as we have quite a collection.**

I'm up for it! Obviously, margins are thin in map publishing and some maps do well while others take a loss. It's a matter of balancing this to keep the business afloat but also to ensure that the titles are interesting. I look out for cities with a robust number of independent book shops (the maps do not sell in chains) and interesting, under-appreciated architecture.

**Tell us about the process of putting an architectural city map together. How do you create the maps?**

Once I've decided on a title and found an editor, we discuss the buildings to potentially go on the map, the editor does her research, and I commission a photographer to shoot a selection of buildings. Meanwhile, Jaakko works on the design. If sales are good from the previous map, we'll visit and explore the city with a rough draft of the map and tweak appropriately. Then off to the printer.

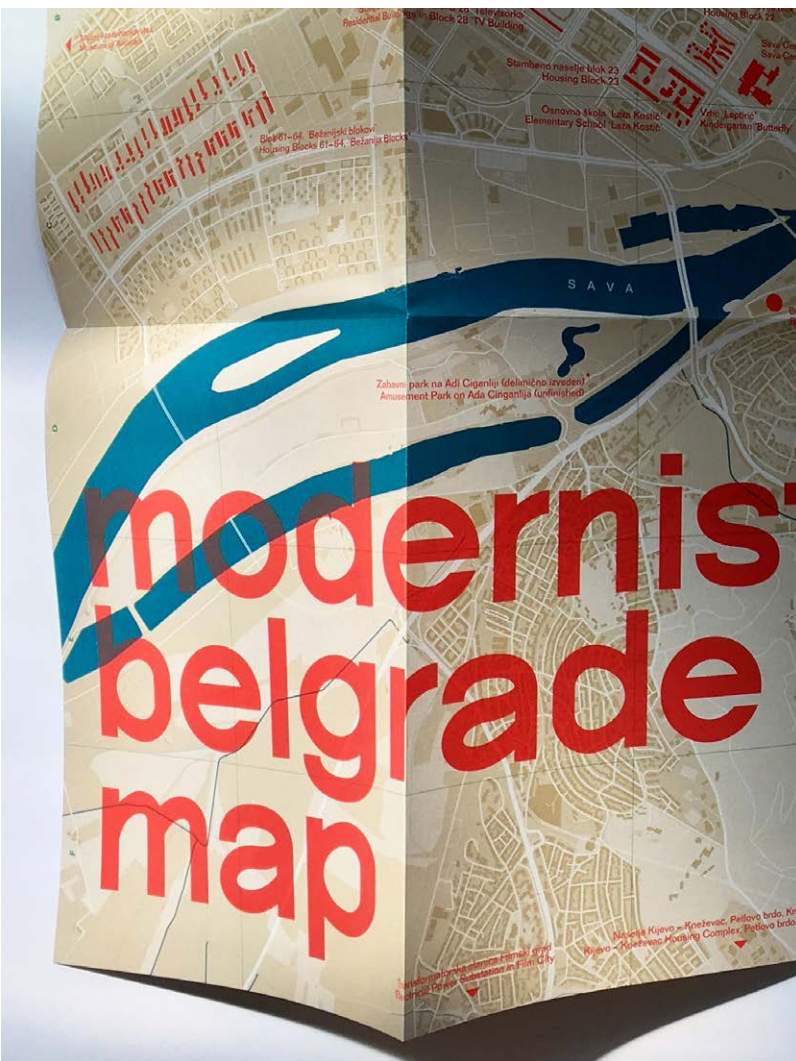
**How were the company's early days? Did the idea of architecture-themed maps generate your desired figures on the first try?**

I'd been publishing as Blue Crow Media in a few mediums and with a variety of subject matters before the architecture maps, so I knew what I was doing by the time I published the first Brutalist map. It's taken a while to build up to a place where I don't have to constantly check my accounts, but I'm aware that what I am doing is very niche and could easily stop generating revenue one day. So I have to stay on my toes and ahead of the curve.



**“I think we've come to a point where print is the preferred medium for quality or distinctive work.”**

Belgrade Modernist Map



Is there anything you would do differently should you be given a chance to restart this venture? What would that be?

The financial insecurity when starting a business is really hard, so I have been very focused on keeping costs to a minimum from the start. I was lucky in that I had some great friends who helped with advice and skills. I suppose I would have spent less time building up the social media side of the business early on. I think that side of things is pretty overrated and extremely distracting.

In this age of digital maps and GPS, what pushed you to make the decision to create printed maps? What are the advantages of maps in print?

I'm comfortable publishing in print and digital, but I think we've come to a point where print is the preferred medium for quality or distinctive work. Digital lacks longevity, and that is unappealing when you are putting a lot of effort and care into something.

What can we look forward to from Blue Crow Media?

The second title in the transit design series will be out soon, Moscow Metro Architecture & Design Map. I'm particularly excited about that one. And I have four North American maps out next year, including Chicago, Toronto, another New York map, and others. Plenty to come! ●



Go on architectural treasure hunt and view the rest of Blue Crow Media's map portfolio at [bluecrowmedia.com](http://bluecrowmedia.com)



ANGLES

# Labor of Love

Leather goods store *Labrador* goes back to basics with sustainably-produced creations that spotlight impeccable design and craftsmanship

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

PHOTOGRAPHY *Courtesy of Labrador*



## Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Hi! This is An Bermejo and Benjamin Mendoza. We are Labrador Factory Philippines Ltd. Co. and Labrador Leather Australia. We carry the brand name of Labrador Co. Ltd. as exclusive distributor for the well-designed, minimalist leather and paper company from Nonthaburi, Thailand.

### How did you learn about Labrador? What pushed you to consider distributing its products here in the Philippines?

We went to Thailand in 2013 to source and visit several factories of modular furniture and cabinets for a Batangas hotel project we were designing. During breaks, we would sometimes find ourselves in malls within Bangkok. We then came across this beautiful shop that sells leather and paper products, particularly geared towards designers and discerning creative types. On our overseas trips, we would usually look for well-designed items for personal and office use, like paper holders, envelopes and minimalist bags that could accommodate bulky paper and A3 documents. It's actually really difficult to find these in the quality and the design aesthetic we want so finding the Labrador store was almost providential. The first Labrador item we bought was an A3 documents holder called the Humble bag.

Clockwise from left: Pocket; Cardholder  
Below: Humble bag



We were blessed to meet the owner, Anek Kulthaveesup, the design director and founder of Labrador, who was manning the shop at the time. We got to know him a little better and discovered that like us, he was an architect. He got tired of trying to please his architectural clients and with his love for crafting leather, eventually decided to establish a business out of his passion. Nevertheless, his philosophy in product design is no different from his architecture, which exhibits clean lines and possess sustainable qualities. This is best seen in the Labrador factory which Anek designed. His core mantra for his design practice involved the usage of recyclable and local materials, which are produced with low energy consumption and with low wastage.

We immediately fell in love with Anek's products and design philosophy from that short visit that even without a background in retail, we made a no-brainer decision to be the official distributing partner of Labrador in the Philippines. Such as is our belief in the product's strength and quality that we have also decided to expand distribution to New South Wales in Australia as of the moment.

**What sets Labrador apart from other leather goods products out in the market? Who are your target buyers?**

Our products are reflective of a responsible design philosophy that values craftsmanship and sustainability. Every Labrador product is well-thought out and designed; it is anti-consumerist in that it is produced with societal and environmental well-being mind—sustainability is prioritized from the beginning of the design stage, to material use, and eventually less-to-zero waste target during production. This also prompted the creation of a sub-category of Labrador called RElabrador, short for 'Recycled-Labrador', which carry a line of products true to material use, with impeccable product design with a conscience.

Our target buyers know no age, but we specifically appeal to users who express great appreciation and fascination for good product design. We target buyers who find beauty in simplicity and disdain for excess, those who are environmentally concerned and aware that leather is not only a beautiful and luxurious material, but

**“Our products are reflective of a responsible design philosophy that values craftsmanship and sustainability.”**

Left: Factory visit, 2016, Right: The Labrador factory in Nonthaburi, Thailand



also a make that promotes item longevity and therefore less wastage; Labrador's products are definitely not disposable items. They could last for a significant amount of time provided good care and usage is accorded it.

**What informed the decision for the company to sell leather products? Why leather in particular?**

Anek: I've always appreciated honesty in material use whenever I design or appreciate other design work. I'm also appreciative of revealing the patina of time and age, an element that adds further interest and texture to products, adding to its story. This is a quality that leather possesses. It is one material that when aged exhibits another dimension, another truth to itself. Leather gets more interesting over time.

**How is the design process like for a Labrador product? Can you give us a quick outline of how a product is created?**

Anek: It is very similar to the architectural design process. Our product designs always begin with research and generous sketching. We would produce hand sketches or even paper folding mock-ups of the product to finalize form, function and to understand how it's going to be made. Several mock-up productions follow, including packaging design. During production, we ensure that there is little to no application of chemicals. We bring out the warmth, hue and textures into leather through tanning. All products are then assembled by hand and sold in recyclable packaging. It normally takes us two years to design and test out a new item from its conception to actual product launch in the market.

**Are there any plans to further expand Labrador's footprint over to other countries?**

Anek: We are now present in 20 countries with further expansion plans in the horizon. We can also be reached from anywhere in the world through our online shops.

**Tell us about the brand name. Why Labrador in particular?**

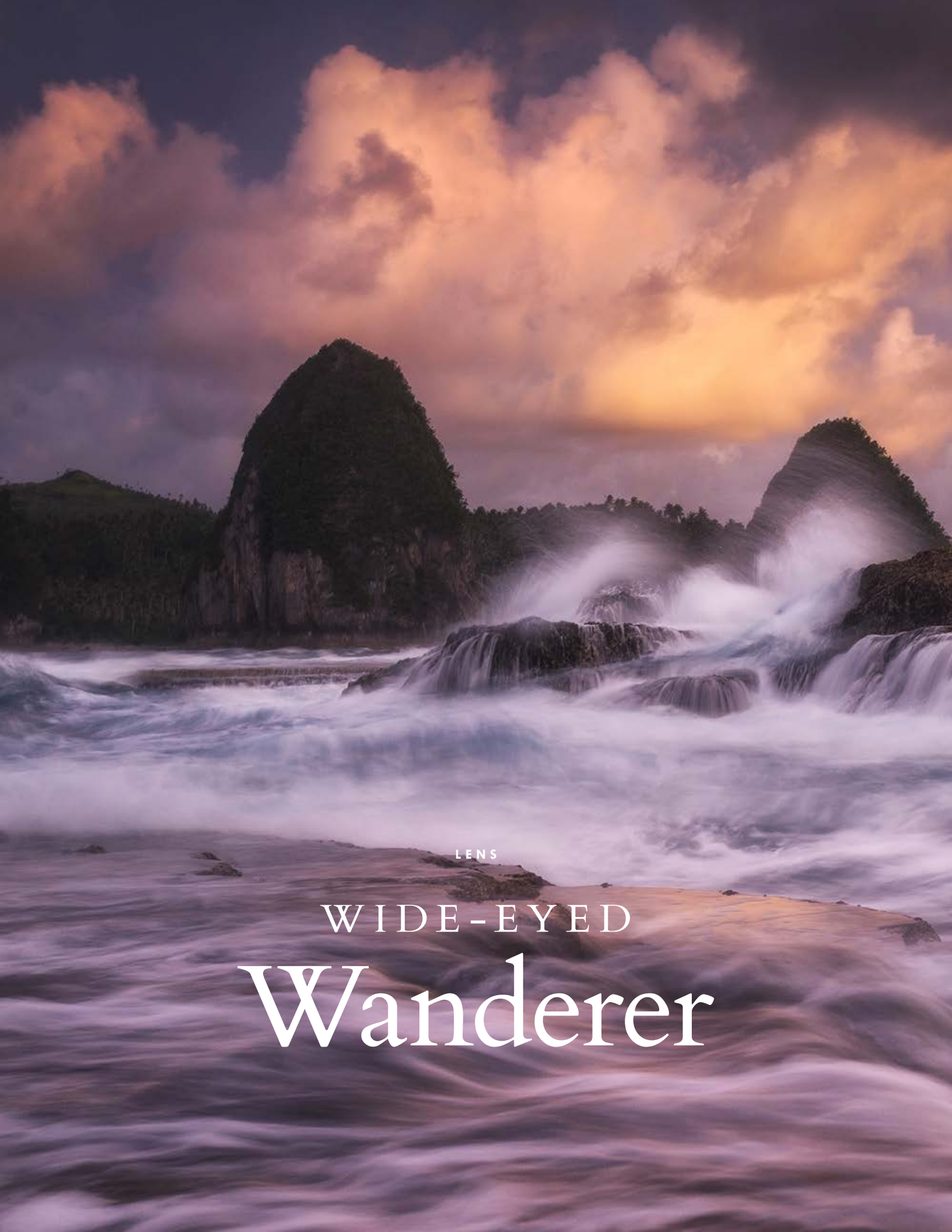
Anek: *Labrador* is the Spanish word for "farmer", a laborer, what is considered the first ever occupation known to man, a calling that prioritizes simplicity and only what is essential. This back-to-basics quality is what we aspire to achieve with our products. Our creations do not scream for attention. It grabs at you with its humility and genteel nature. ●



Labrador Store Alabang Town Center, Metro Manila, Philippines  
Top: Labrador Store Central Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand



Get to know more about the brand and browse Labrador's product portfolio at [shoplabrador.com](http://shoplabrador.com) for Philippine and Australia-based users and [labradorfactory.net](http://labradorfactory.net) worldwide.




LENS

WIDE-EYED

# Wanderer

Samar, 2017

A photograph of a person standing on a rocky outcrop overlooking a waterfall and the ocean at sunset. The person is silhouetted against the bright, orange and yellow sky. The waterfall is in the foreground, and the ocean waves are crashing against the rocks. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds.

Travel photographer  
*Paul Quiambao* finds joy in  
discovery and community in his  
exploration of the Philippines

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*





# Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Hi! I'm Paul, a passionate landscape photographer with a thirst for travel and a desire to reach and explore the remote corners of the Philippine archipelago.

## **How you fall in love with photography? What made you pursue it as career?**

It all started during college in UST (2007). I was appointed by the UST secretary general to be the quadricentennial photographer, and my task was to cover all the events that will transpire during the 400-year celebration of my alma mater. After I accomplished my assignment, right after graduation, I went solo backpacking to the islands of Batanes. That journey became a turning point for me and led me to where I am now. I was enraptured and in awe of the raw beauty of the place, that something like this existed in the country, and I was eager to document it with photography. That visit was able to help me develop a unique vision and approach towards landscape photography that I still adhere to now.

## **What about landscape photography attracts you? How would you describe your approach to photographing landscapes and nature?**

The journey, the people you meet, who will often touch your soul with their stories and experiences, and the fleeting moments with Mother Nature that will make you appreciate life and what it is all about. I would describe my approach as raw and real.

## **You were part of the *Philippine Road Trip* project in 2016, along with Alfie Agunoy and Francis Sta. Romana, where you aimed to travel to as much of the Philippines as possible on a 45-year old Volkswagen Kombi, and of course, document the whole experience with photography. What inspired the project?**

The project was inspired by the thriving travel culture in the Philippines. We wanted to go on an expedition that could inspire the future generation of

Filipino travelers, and at the same time, undertake it for a greater purpose.

At the end of the day, you need a purpose in life to keep moving. Our mission was to give solar lights to the communities living in the far-flung areas of the country. The roadtrip took us 10 months to complete and was riddled with quite a number of challenges along the road as expected.

## **Aside from the advocacy, what else do you want to accomplish with the project?**

Explore the Philippines with a purpose. We want to help inspire a new breed of local travelers who are not just in it for the sights and scenes, but are also responsible enough to appreciate and respect local culture and practices, as well as acknowledge the issues faced by the places they visit, and if able, help and bring attention to their plight.

Self-portrait

**Opposite page:** Batanes, 2012



## “Beautiful photographs put you in a particular moment in time. They tell a story and speak to your emotions.”

The issue of excessive post processing of images is especially prevalent in the genres of landscape and travel photography and this causes issues of inaccuracy and false realities. What is your take on this? How much is enough post processing in your opinion?

It depends. If you're shooting for a travel magazine, then you need to take minimal processing as you would want to keep it as real as possible. But if you don't have a client or you're only shooting for yourself, then you can do any post processing you want on your photographs. Post processing adds an identity to the voice/style of a landscape photographer.

**What to you makes a beautiful image?**

Beautiful photographs put you in a particular moment in time. They tell a story and speak to your emotions. Beautiful photography possess heart and soul, and a sincere and authentic quality about it.

**Advanced technologies, ease of use and the advent of social media channels have made it easy and accessible for non-photographers to take and share their images. Should professional photographers have anything to worry about?**

No. Trust your art and stay true to your art. Don't let society or social media dictate what you want to do. Just never stop making good art.

**This 2018, what do you intend to start? Any projects or shifts that you plan to take?**

I want to continue my explorations around the Philippines, to travel to some of the untouched islands, and hopefully to publish a book about it soon.

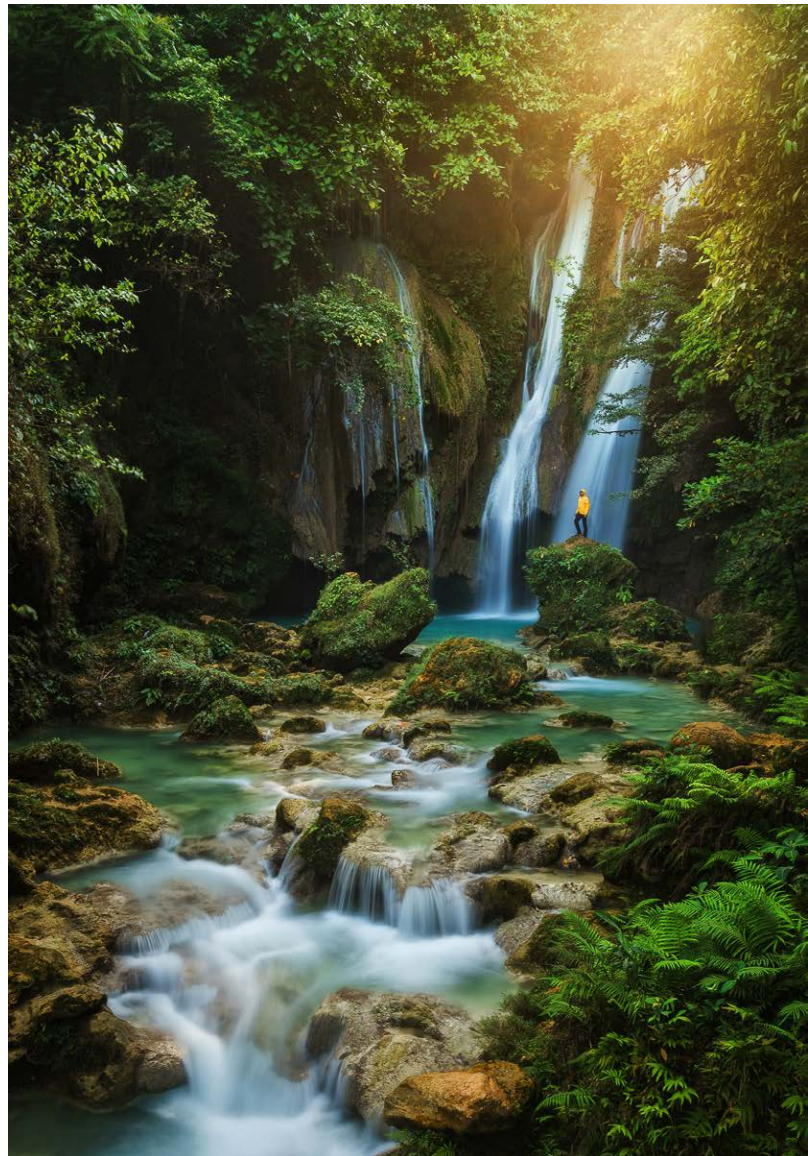
**What realities about human existence has a career photographing nature and landscape revealed?**

Always be human before pressing the shutter.

**What realizations or insights did this travel project reveal to you?**

That you can't be on the road forever. One needs to find their way back home. ●

Negros Occidental, 2016



Keep track of Paul's journeys through his Instagram at [@paul\\_quiambao](https://www.instagram.com/paul_quiambao)

Sagada, 2014

**Below:** Quirino, 2015

"It was hard at first as we had to deal with the practicalities and logistics of such a trip," remarks Paul about the *Philippine Road Trip* project. "The biggest question in our heads being how to survive several months living inside the Volkswagen Kombi."



LENS



# Down To Earth

The *Daily Overview's*  
Benjamin Grant unveils a  
revealing portrait of human  
existence only visible  
from the cosmos

INTERVIEW *Patrice Kasingsing*

PHOTOGRAPHY *Daily Overview*  
*Satellite imagery © DigitalGlobe*



0-000434°, 40-364929°  
Dadaab Refugee Camp, Northern Kenya

LENS

52.276355°, 4.557080°  
Lisse Tulip Fields, The Netherlands



40-786981°, -119-204379°  
Burning Man, Black Rock Desert, Nevada



## What pushed you to start Daily Overview?

About four years ago, I learned about the “overview effect” from a movie that I watched. There were interviews with astronauts who spent a significant amount of time in space—an experience that fundamentally changed them as human beings. They came back to Earth with a greater sense of connectivity with others and an understanding of how fragile the planet was, and they wanted to share this shift in perspective to other people. I became obsessed with the idea and couldn’t stop thinking about its potential to change the way we see the world and treat each other. I was inspired to bring it to more people.

### How did you go about making the project a reality?

I had no idea the project was going to grow to where it is now. I couldn’t have expected those things (museum exhibitions, book) to occur when I started it. But what I discovered was that I needed people to follow along with the progress and to stay interested.

We started sharing the images on social media, primarily on Instagram and Facebook, where we built an audience and a following. The media wrote about it, which was great, and that kind of got it off the ground. That led to the book happening. It’s gone from one step to the next slowly but surely.

The most important thing at the end of the day is that we had very good content. Every single day trying to get a good new picture up for a number of years, it gave people something to look forward to, something that they are excited to receive.

### How do you source or create the satellite imagery used for the project?

We work with a few satellite companies that provide us access to the raw image files, which we artistically manipulate and clean up. There’s a research, curation, composition and a writing process to make the whole thing come to life.



46-407676°, -87-530954°  
Iron Ore Mine Tailings Pond,  
Michigan, USA

**“I am hopeful.  
In addition to seeing  
all of the negative  
things and all of the  
destruction that we’ve  
caused, it’s also clear  
that solutions exist.”**

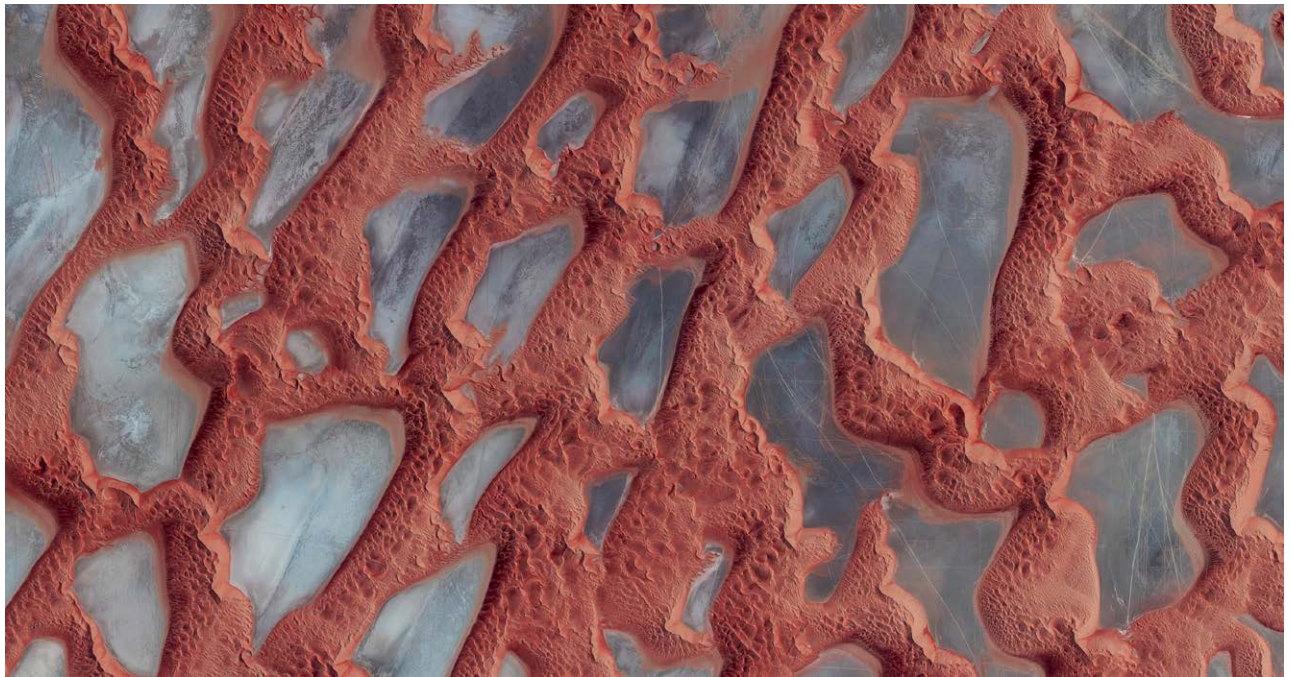
**What is the biggest insight that you gained in initiating such a project?**

I’ve learned so much about human nature and our activities around the world. That has been the focus of the imagery pretty much all the time, showing the places where we impact the planet. Nearly every single day for four years, I’ve tried to find new and interesting stories to show. The different themes that would come up—agriculture, energy, mining, urban planning, transportation or waste—these are all prominent parts of modern civilization as we know it. But these are often things that we don’t think about on a daily basis. My knowledge about the world and what we’re doing to it has been greatly expanded by doing this project. And we’ll continue expanding it.

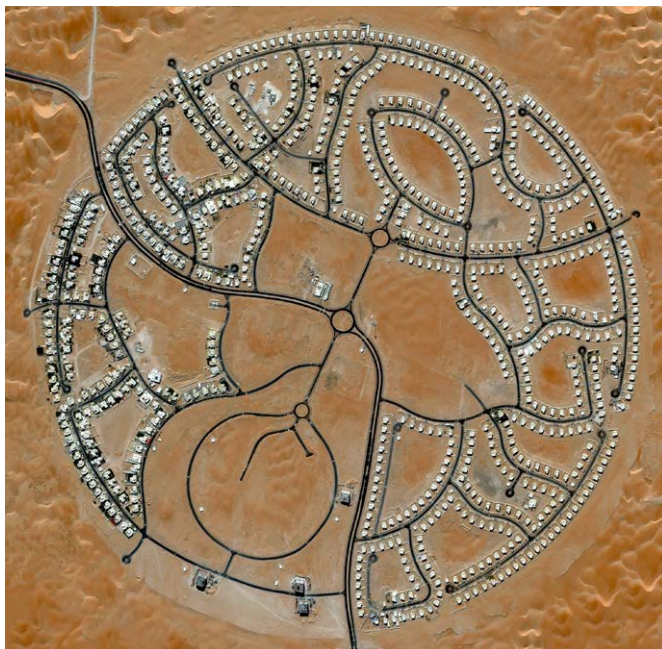
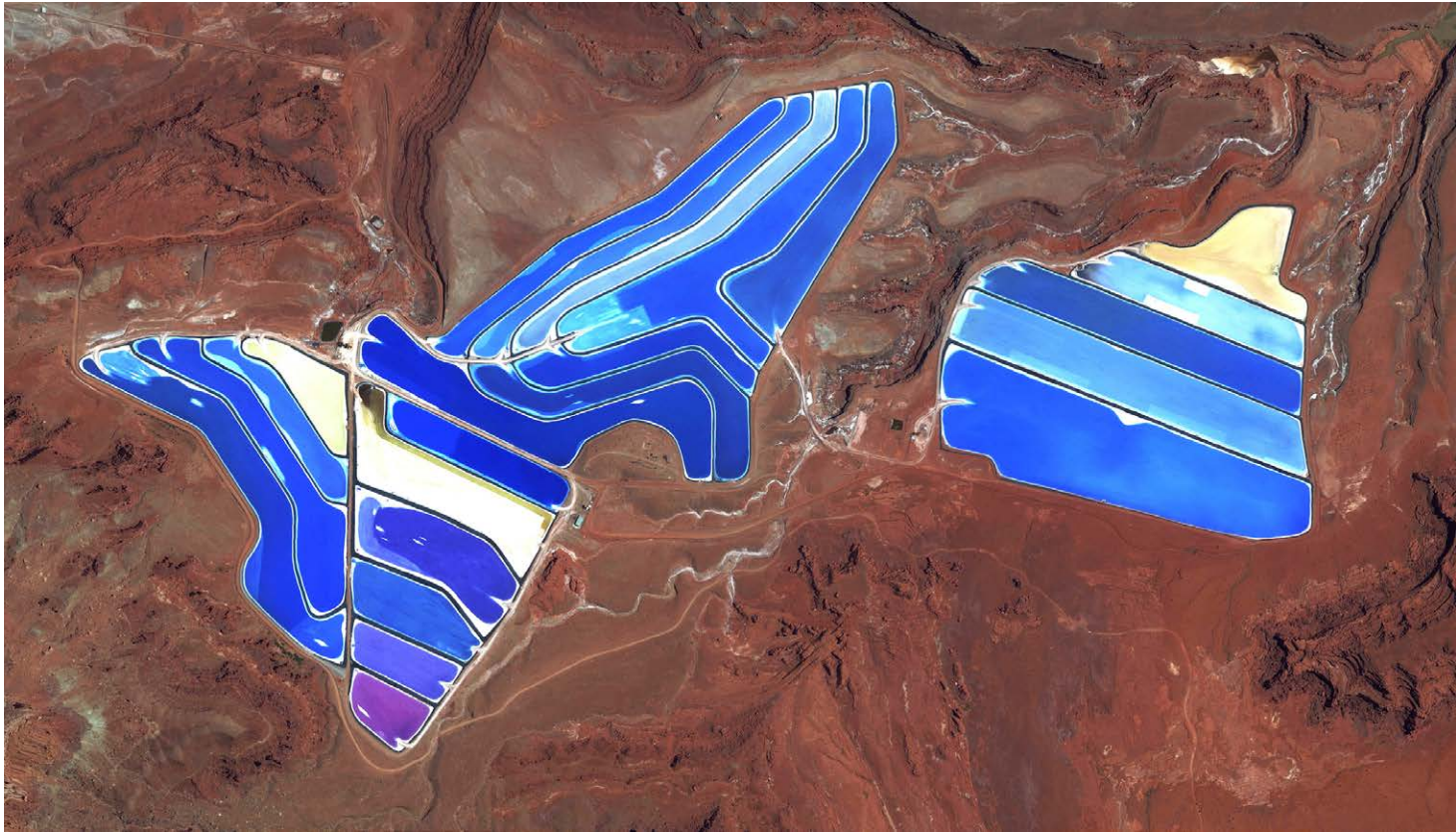
**Are you hopeful about the future of the planet based from these photos?**

I am hopeful. In addition to seeing all of the negative things and all of the destruction that we’ve caused, it’s also clear that solutions exist: renewable energy instead of dirty energy, or thoughtful, sustainable agriculture versus something that is monoculture and destructive, and there’s smart city planning. From these images, you can glean that there are solutions and new directions that we can take things. I’m inherently an optimistic person, as you can probably guess by doing a project like this. Some scientists might disagree, but I think you have to be optimistic if you want to create a better future.





22-182760°, 55-134184°, Rub' al Khali Desert, Saudi Arabia  
Top: 40-782997°, -73-966741°, Central Park, New York City, USA



**Top:** 38.485579°, -109.684611°  
Moab Potash Evaporation Ponds, Utah, USA

**Left:** 23.610424°, 53.702677°  
Marabe Al Dhafra, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

**“A lot of people said they loved the book, but that their children loved it more. They're reading the books to their kids at night.”**

**What were some of the Overview images that made a lasting impression on you? Why so?**

I would have to say it was one of the ones I discovered first, of a refugee camp in Kenya. It was a beautiful image with reds and browns and symmetry set amidst a stunning landscape, but then when you learn about what you're seeing in the image—the world's largest refugee camp with more than 450,000 displaced refugees—you have to take a step back and consider the fact that you can enjoy the aesthetics of something that you're looking at but also struggle with the fact that you still like it. I think that is exemplary of what the project has become. It's a new and interesting way to often show things that are destructive or negative. It's made me realize just how powerful imagery could be.

**What inspired your decision to create a book out of the Daily Overview project?**

I've always thought of doing a book. I think it made a lot of sense to bring together what I've done so far in a cohesive, beautiful and tangible way. It's amazing to have something physical and solid to show your work rather than something that just exists digitally. It's a wonderful feeling to be able to hand someone a book and say that it's representative of what you do.

**Are there any interesting anecdotes or instances related to the project and its viewers, perhaps how they reacted to the images, that made a mark on you?**

One thing that happened that I love to talk about is when the book came out, a lot of people said they loved the book, but that their children loved it more. They're reading the book to their kids at night. And they were able to teach them new stories about the environment, about what we're doing to the planet, and then teach them the concepts

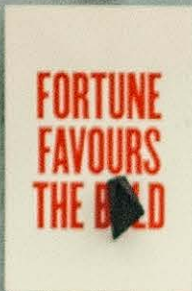
and it was just so interesting to hear that the kids were loving it so much. And this inspired me to start another conversation with Penguin Random House to explore the idea of doing a children's book, so it was an idea that came from other people and now it is potentially going to happen. This is an amazing example of putting an idea out there and getting to see how people react to it and who might like it, to find that it's very different from who you imagined it to be, and that it can lead to new and exciting opportunities.

**Where do you intend to take the Daily Overview project next?**

I would love to open a physical space. A gallery in San Francisco, where I live, to not only have somewhere to display our imagery and our art but also to hold events and talks related to the overview effect. I don't necessarily know what the timeline is for a project like that, but that's where I see it going.

**This is our Starters issue, basically where we celebrate that initial stage, the stage where you start things. However like all things that begin, there is an end. Have you foreseen the end of the Daily Overview project and are you considering starting off a new one?**

I would love to. I think I need to get this project somewhere that is self-sustaining, where I can kind of move away from it, or end it at some point. But I don't think the project will continue to exist exactly as it is now. I see it changing and doing a whole number of different things. That's a decision for me to make over time. It's a great question. I'll have to make a decision as I go along to see what makes the most sense, but I can see it going either way. ●

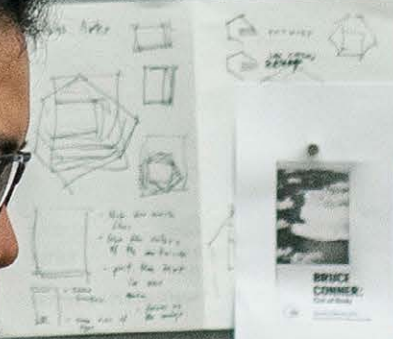


ON A GING  
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BELLAS RAIN  
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CANVAS



Many heads are  
better than one, for  
*Dan Matutina* and  
others who make up  
*Hydra Design Group*

# Hail Hydra

**INTERVIEW** *Kit Singson*

**PHOTOGRAPHY** *Lawrence Carlos*



## How did you get started in the design industry?

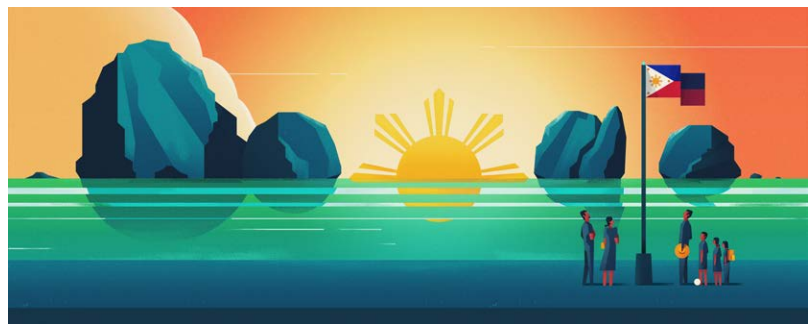
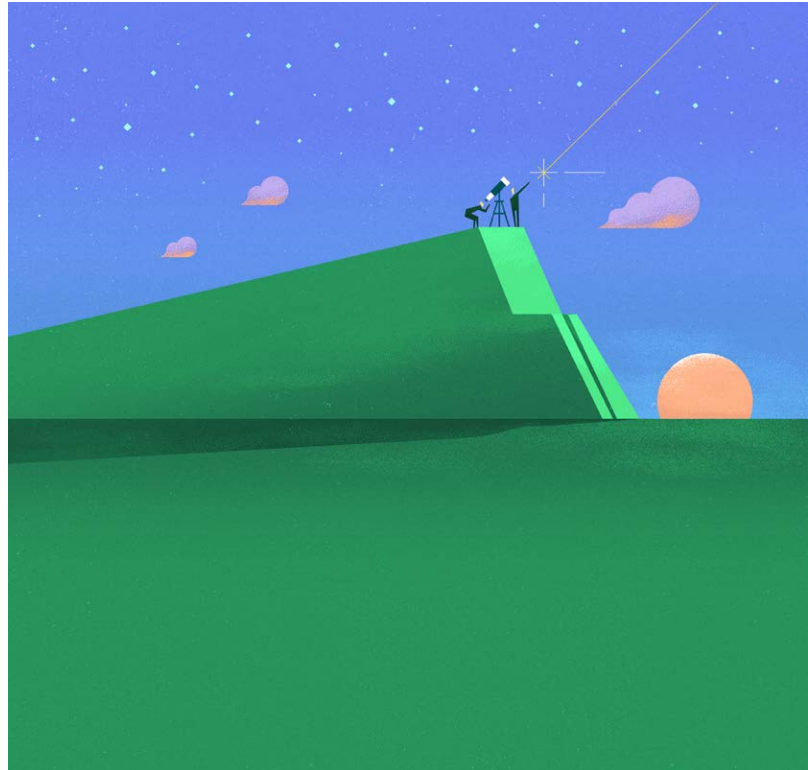
Two of my friends—John Lucas Reyes (Riverspoons Studio) and Nicc Balde—helped paved my way to the design industry. I was in my third or fourth year in college at the UP Fine Arts; it was a good time for graphic designers/web designers in the Philippines. Inksurge (founded by Rex Advincula and Joyce Tai) had [halfproject.com](http://halfproject.com), which was one of the most popular design portals back then. Nicc, John and his brother were also pretty active in the web design community. *Sobrang nagkaroon ng interest. So nag-web design ako* and posted stuff online. I never got any professional work out of it, but I was becoming more active in the online design scene. After university I went into advertising. I was there for three years. After *no'n*, I left and started my first design studio. When I was in advertising as an art director, I decided that I liked more of design work than advertising.

### How did Plus63 begin? What was your objective for setting it up?

After advertising, I set up a design studio focused on non-profit. My partners and I wanted to do design for social causes and non-profits. We were doing it for five years before going our separate ways. It was then that I started with Plus63 with Berns and Rhea. When we were doing it for five years, I noticed that even though we were designing brochures and logos, we didn't make much effect on the actual project. We didn't have that much input. My dream at a time was to create a critically-acclaimed design studio that could make a bigger influence on a project. We wanted to be more involved in the efforts and, of course with other design work too, even the commercial ones.

### What inspired the creation of Hydra?

That's a funny story. I can't remember how long ago, but I thought “*Uy! Parang magandang April fools' joke na yung mga design studios sama-sama* into one complete collective. Picture *tayo, gawa ng fake website.*” (“Hey! How about, for April fool's, let's have all the design studios come into one complete collective. Let's take a picture and make a fake website.”) But it didn't materialize straight away. One day, Mara Coson shared that there was a space here at Karrivin and she was figuring out her tenant mix.



Below: Telescope for Google, 2014

Bottom: Google Doodle Philippine Independence Day, 2017

*Nag-usap kami—gaano kalaki ang space, magkano ang rent, pwede ba ang design studio?* (We talked—how big was the space, how much was the rent, could it be a design studio?) I thought of pulling in Kaye Llanto (KM Interior Design Manila) for interior design, so we really could become multi-disciplinary. If we're banding together, we might as well have different expertise and specializations. We set up a meeting with Charles Paw (Tasteless); for some of them, it was their first time to meet and have chat. Together we checked out the area at Karrivin, and it was then that we decided to do it. It was an impulsive decision to move in together.

**How does Hydra run as a collective? Can you describe the process to us?**

We've been trying different things. Most of the time, the project comes from me. I (Plus63) do the brief and general directions. Then all of the studios pitch in. Whoever comes up with the best work, *siya yung* project lead. Everyone else provides support. If there's a project that requires the full collective, we will do it. We try not to limit; we don't stop them from working with each other as Hydra.

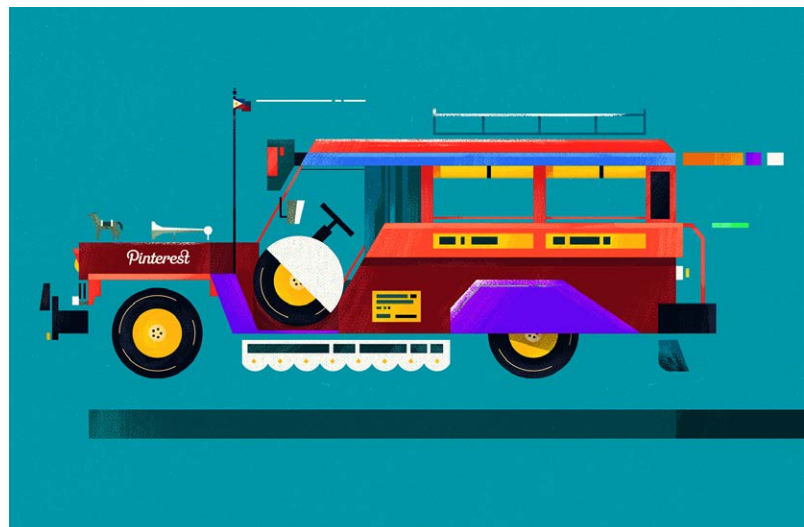
The other thing is forming a team. One head from Hydra would get members from other studios to form a team.

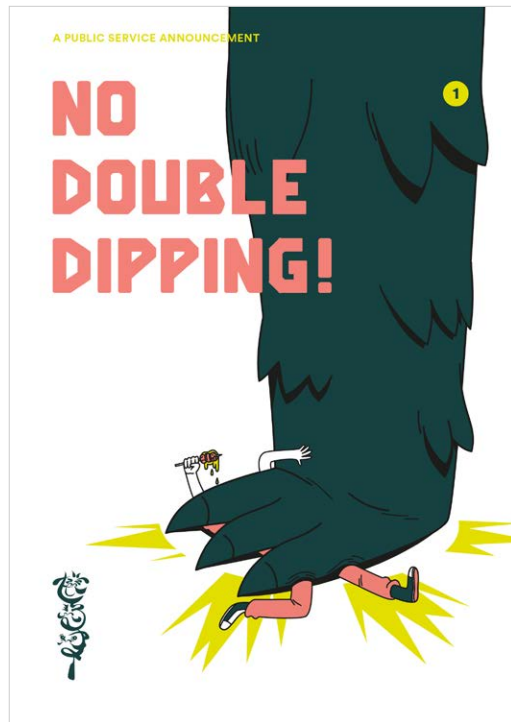
We found that it's inefficient for everyone to have their own pitches all the time, so what we did was to make sure there's one head for a project. We would all make studies and have it checked by everyone, ask for comments or suggestions. That's one way to do it. We're still finding the best process for us, but we're enjoying figuring it out. There's still a lot to learn. In a way, we get competitive, especially when we pitch against each other and we see work that wows us. It makes us want to do better for the next project. It raises competitiveness and creativity within Hydra. Our ideas and work always different from each other. Acid House, for example, are primarily focused on motion design and broadcast design. It's a first for them to

**“In a way, we get competitive, especially when we pitch against each other and we see work that wows us.”**



Formula E Championship Beijing for Qualcomm, 2015  
Bottom: Jeepney for Pinterest, 2015





work on a restaurant, Cuba Libre at Serendra. It's also good for the client. If you think about it, they get to have four different design studios looking at their business. And most of us [that make up Hydra] are relatively established in our fields. From the start, we sell to them the idea that they're hiring different studios in one.

In terms of challenges, so far, I guess having so many heads could slow down a project. We have deadlines, and it's hard to balance having many comments. So we make sure that at the end of the day, it's the assigned project lead that really has the last say. The lead has the power to ignore what I say, for example.

**What does Hydra Design Group want to achieve in the next couple of years? As a consortium? As leaders in your respective fields?**

We're trying to band together; be pioneers. Nobody's tried it before. *Lahat kami coming in, 'di namin sure paano mangyayari.* (None of us were sure of how to make it happen.) We all do well on our own; we didn't have to do this. We're thinking it might be a five-year project. If it works out, *eh 'di*

Kushikatsu Daruma brand identity

Bottom: Adobo Design Awards 2015 trophy design





*tuloy-tuloy siya.* (If it works out, we might see this carrying out longer.) The idea is to do really big-scale projects.

*May mga ibang sobrang laki ng scale*—the problem is if we work on it, for example as Plus 63, it demands more time. But with everyone, it's scalable. Together, we may also be able to pitch against multinational design agencies like the ones from Singapore, Japan or China. That's the goal. I've worked with brand and design studios abroad, and I really think we can go against them. We just have to build the trust. There were instances wherein the client wasn't sure if we could do it, and we weren't either, but we just went and did. And we can have that confidence because we could rely on each other for support. We got each others' backs.

**What is your reading of the local creative industry? How is it different from five or ten years ago? Where do you see it going in the next five to ten years?**

There are more designers now. There are more design schools. It's good for the industry. More people practicing means promising *yung* design as a profession. *Pero siyempre sa dami ng design school, mahirap din maghanap ng jobs. Konti lang din kasi design studios dito.* But there are opportunities in games and animation.

The next five years would be significant. There's one group called the Creative Economy Council of the Philippines. We're involved because of Communication Design Association of the Philippines. *Yung estimate mung research is mawawala na yung BPO sa Pilipinas* because of AI. Call centers and other skill-based BPOs. *Sobrang dependent pa naman natin sa BPO pero sunset industry na siya. Made-deads na siya soon.* Not in the far future but very near. The Creative Economy Council wants to give the creative economy a push—graphic design, animation, advertising, gaming, etc. based on the research, the least affected industries in the AI is the creative industry because you can't AI creativity. You can automate layouts, basics and production, but the creative part of it, *di siya maaapektuhan ng AI.* If so, *parang SKYNET na tayo* (Terminator).

Our neighbors started long ago. We're late in the game; we're pressed for time. It also means that there will be a lot of

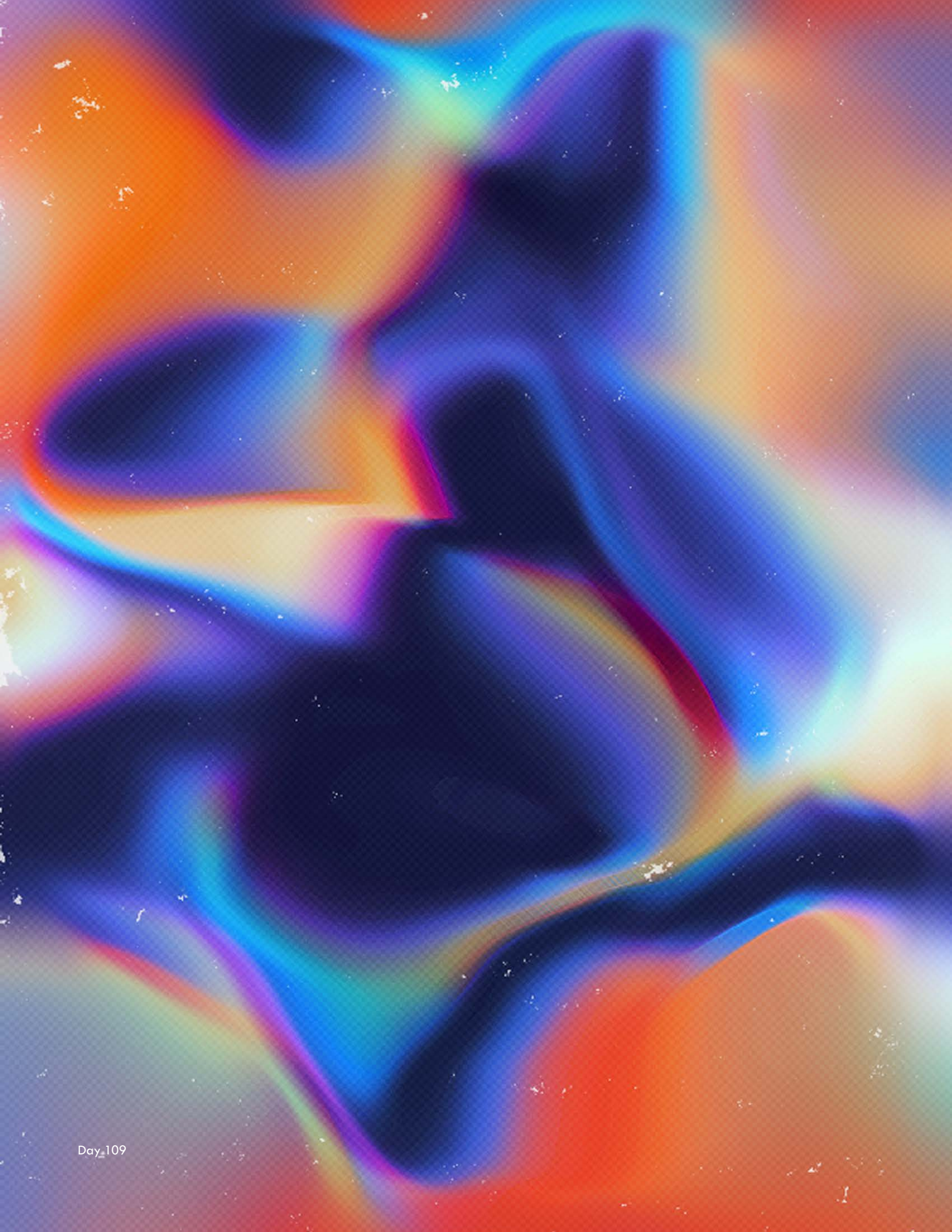
development and action in the creative industry. Everyone is trying to organize. It's one of the reasons we organized CDAP: to represent illustration design and graphic design and other industries. These fields, animation and gaming, *malaki yung maco-contribute nila sa economy ng Philippines* in the future. I've never seen a branding studio become so big locally. *Pero may possibility siya. Kailangan lang talaga paano mo iba-balance.* In every country, *may magagaling na designers, nasa studio naman talaga.* But they're never big contributors to the economy, the big contributors are the big design agencies. But sometimes, the big agencies are too commercial. The work of the design studios become the guide for the whole creative industry. Everyone should look to their work. if we ever have a big branding agency here, *then okay siya, magiging malaki siyang industry.* Exciting *siya* most definitely. *Sobrang daming action.*

You can't not involve yourself in associations even if they're exhausting. *Mukhang walang choice, kailangan may magbuo at gumawa.* (It seems we have no choice; someone has to organize these things.) *Parang obligation to do it for the whole industry.* ●



**“We’re banding together; be pioneers. Nobody's tried it before.”**

Hydra Design Group is made up of Acid House, Inksurge, KM Interior Design and Plus63.  
Follow their work on Instagram [@hydradesigngroup](#) and [heyhydra.com](#).



CANVAS



Graphic designer  
*Edwin Capalla* finds his artistic  
voice through an experimental  
year-long poster series

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

# Hello! Please introduce yourself.

**Previous page:** Day 316

Edwin Capalla



Hello, my name is Edwin Carl Capalla, a graphic designer based in Iloilo City, in tiny Iloilo island in the Philippines.

## How did you find yourself in the realm of graphic design and illustration?

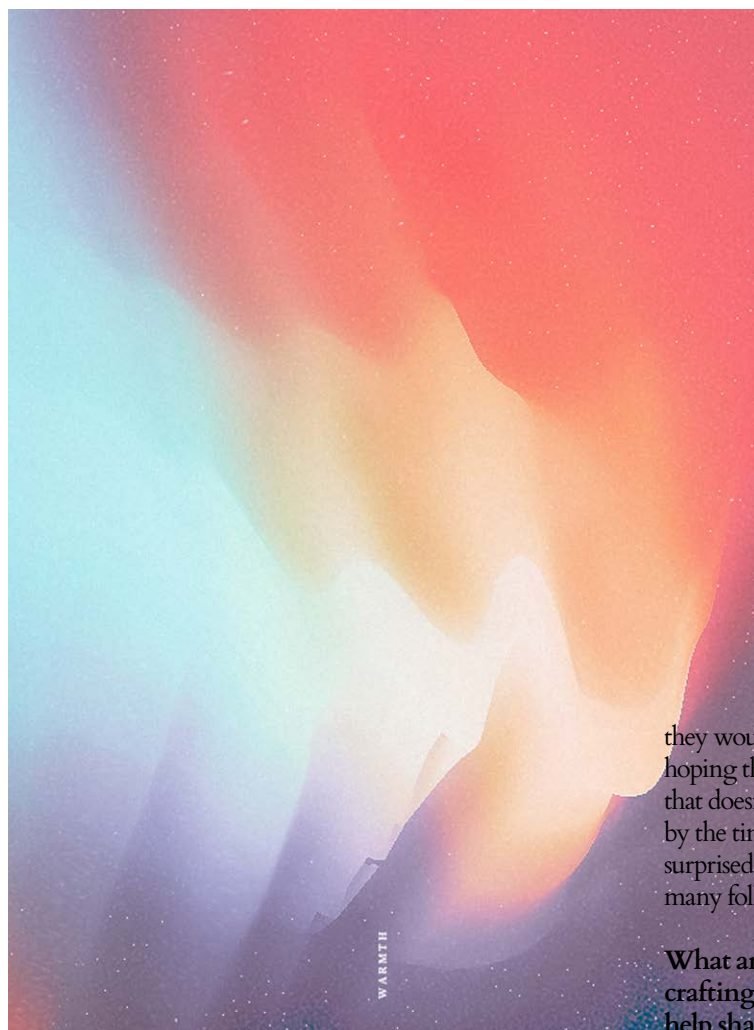
I've always had a thing for fashion when I was young; the act of dressing myself with colors, patterns and fabrics and choosing what to wear was a fun task, so maybe that played a part in developing an early interest. I only took on this fascination towards graphic design seriously in college, during a web design class. I noticed when we were tasked to do web pages that I was more interested in the layout rather than the coding aspect. Fast forward to the end of the semester, I got drained by all the coding and found web design rather tedious. After the class ended, I decided to stop pursuing it and thought of giving logo design a try. It was pretty easy to learn the tools of the trade with the help of YouTube and Google. Logo design also had a faster workflow which I liked. I also generated most of my portfolio with logo design which led me to good job opportunities but after a year of work, it started getting slow. I decided then to take that opportunity to invest time on Instagram and start a poster series. This is the time when I could truly say is my "graphic design phase."

## Your poster series on Instagram is captivating. What made it even more special was you used this medium to help you better your skills in Photoshop. What insights did you gain after a year of creating poster designs?

There are three things I learned from this series: First, Photoshop is pretty easy. You do not need an expensive tablet or an overwhelming depth of knowledge of Photoshop to create good artwork. Great artwork can be made as long you have a good imagination and the eagerness and curiosity to learn new tools and techniques. Most of the pieces I made for the series only used very basic tools and techniques which anyone can do, given that they know the basics of Photoshop. So don't be intimidated.

Second, if it's ugly, still upload it. Let's face it: not all of our efforts will end with a perfect output. Rather than invest all that time into "making stuff perfect", go to a bookstore, read, watch videos on YouTube or search different artists to be inspired. Inspiration won't come to you, you have to find it. Because by the time Designer A has finished making an artwork "perfect", Designer B has already improved miles ahead from Designer A.

Lastly, focus on growing as a designer and ignore the 'gram. When I first started this series, I didn't think of followers or likes but used Instagram as a medium to monitor my progress. I have seen numerous Instagram pages where



Day 285, Right: Day 260

**“Second, if it's ugly, still upload it. Let's face it: not all of our efforts will end with a perfect output.”**



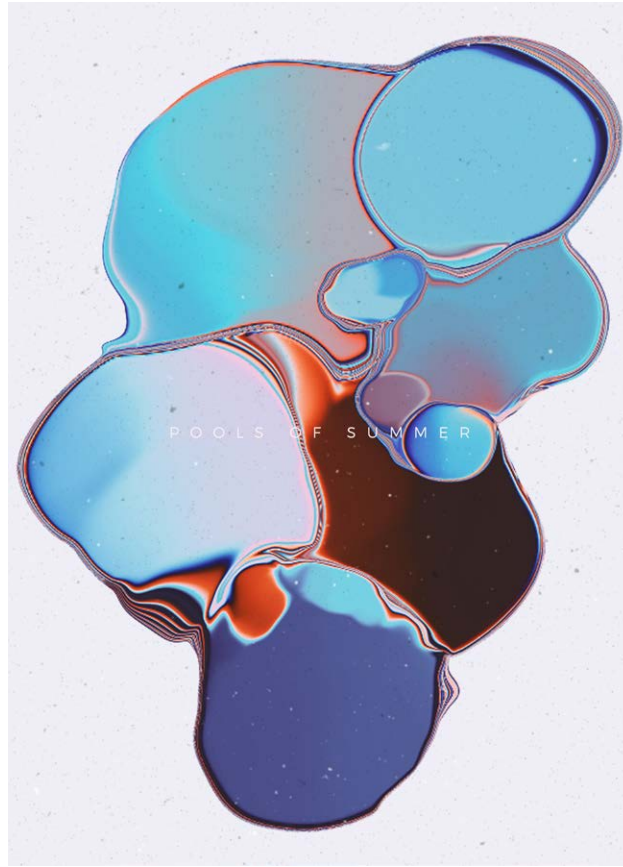
they would just copy the 'look' of other successful pages hoping their likes and followers would follow suit. Sad to say, that doesn't work out. Focus on growing as a creative because by the time you have made your 200th artwork, you will be surprised by how far you've improved and shocked by how many followers and likes came with that journey.

**What are some of your influences and inspirations crafting your artworks? Do you have artistic idols that help shaped your aesthetic?**

Most of the inspiration that I get comes from the internet; my second go-to source would be books. The Internet is good and all, but having a physical copy of people's artworks in your fingertips is an amazing feeling. It's a total immersion without the online distractions.

One of my idols would be Baugasm. He was one of the first guys that inspired me to take on this daily poster series; he ran a similar project as well. Another would be Grif. I first came across his abstract close-up photography with liquids; he also produced graphics with organic neon-like forms and pieces which I liked and tried to reproduce.

There are two more artists whom I admire not just for their skills but for their usage of muted, pastel color palettes that give off a warm and nostalgic vibe. First is Owen Davey, who creates complex-looking geometric illustrations at first glance which are actually composed of tiny basic shapes.



Day 253

**“I really urge designers to pursue personal projects whether it be digital or physical, since it really helps in finding one’s artistic voice or style.”**

Keep up with Edwin's experimental forays into graphic design on Instagram [@edwincarlcapalla](https://www.instagram.com/edwincarlcapalla).

Then, there’s James Gilleard. He is a beast when it comes to creating gorgeous landscapes just by using simple shapes, blurs and overlays. You also have to see how he controls light which is pretty amazing.

**Your posters seem to me like personal reflections on life in general based from its captions. Are there any particular themes or motifs that you often utilize for your artworks?**

I don't really have motif per se but I try to inject as much emotion into my posters as I possibly can. That is why most of my posters are desaturated and I make use of a lot of pastel tones. I like the idea of remembering the good old times; Nostalgia is a theme I often come back to. Emotion is also a great source of energy when it comes to art in general. Throughout the series, there were days I would feel tired, drained and would hit a “wall” but as long you have a source of energy or inspiration that you can cling on to, then the journey is going to be less of a sprint but more of a jog.

**What quality would you say attracted people to your work?**

Maybe it’s the cheesy captions about love and life that comes with every poster. Kidding aside, I honestly don't know. I always try to convey emotions with my posters which is always open to viewer interpretation, and this may be one of the reasons why the series resonated with them. Abstract art is always up for its viewer’s to decode but underneath the lack of form, or rhyme or reason, lies the emotion and intent of the artist. That emotion will find a way to transcend the piece and touch the viewer, whether that may be emotionally or design-wise.

**What would you say is the value of starting personal projects?**

You really get a sense of value and appreciation for your art. I really urge designers to pursue personal projects whether it be digital or physical, since it really helps in finding one’s artistic voice or style, helping you grow as an artist. When I started doing this series, I was mostly inspired by other people's creations and went about trying to see if I could replicate their gorgeous work. But as the series progressed, I started to see their work as “their art” and not as my “own art”. I found my own voice with abstract illustrations, a style which I really liked and something that I want to continue as much I can. Starting personal projects also helps you form your portfolio if you lack one, as well as build a following to which you can promote new work to a larger audience, who can act as both viewer and critic. ●



Day 295



#46



J A A P B I E M A N S

# Coverjunkie



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# COVER STORY

*Coverjunkie's Jaap Biemans* talks career, print in the age of digital and his addiction to 'ace' magazine covers good enough to lick

**INTERVIEW** *Patrick Kasingsing*

**IMAGES** *Courtesy of Jaap Biemans*

**Hello! Please introduce yourself.**

I'm Jaap Biemans in the real world, but in the digital world you may know me as Coverjunkie haha! That's a blog where I celebrate the acest cover designs from all around the world. During the day, yes in the real world, I'm the art director of *Volkskrant Magazine* based in Amsterdam and the father of two happy kids.

**What got you hooked on graphic design? Did you know early on in your life that this was what you wanted to do?**

I've always loved drawing. I was that kid in class that was always carrying a pencil in hand. That may have something to do with it.

Graphic design in its purest form is structuring or arranging elements of information. The thing that I love about it is that allows me the power to create a whole new atmosphere by using illustrations, typography and photography.

**You are currently art director of the Dutch publication *Volkskrant Magazine*, which has reaped multiple design awards for its beautiful and thought-provoking art direction. How did you start your career in *Volkskrant*?**

That was easy; I just sent them an email. My luck there was that at the same time they were searching for

someone who can deliver a whole new look and approach. I remember my first cover was a close up of a mouth that was sucking a popsicle. That was such a beautiful contrast to the old grumpy looking people they mostly carried on their covers before.

**What inspired the design direction of your covers? Can you name some of the design influences you had that pushed you to pursue such a direction?**

Definitely David Carson, the notorious art director from *Ray Gun* made me realize the potential of spectacle with covers. I remember when he launched a cover upside down. That was in the middle of the nineties when I attended art school. I was flabbergasted! In 2018, nobody would blink an eye but back in the day this was a shocker (refer to opposite page).

**How would you describe your approach or art direction for *Volkskrant*? What design principles, themes or motifs do you often utilize in your work?**

I always abide by this line: a cover has got to smack you in the face or make you wanna lick it. What I really mean here is it's got to bring some emotion out of the reader, be it a look of surprise, a laugh or amazement.

I like covers that don't carry too much fuzz. I think you can say the Dutch design approach is also like that. That also means that everything within the cover has got to be perfectly situated, as there's no hiding possible behind graphic elements. As for the rest, I start my day at 9:30 and work, read, watch; inspiration does not come to you by doing nothing so get yourself inspired!

**Name a favorite cover you have done and quickly dissect the design process behind it.**

My all time favorite Volkskrant cover is this one (opposite page, top left)

This cover is about an academic survey about beauty preferences amongst men. What do men prefer? The image of a bellybutton got stuck in my head. I centered it on a cover but was looking for an addition to make it more approachable. I sent a raw cover sketch to the fabulous artist [Paul Faassen](#) and he drew this little figure with a boner next to it. It was done in 10 minutes and it still makes me laugh to this day. I feel lucky to work with talented people like Paul, truly one of the highlights of my job.

**What for you are the hallmarks of excellent magazine cover design?**

You know it's easy to make one ace cover, but the truly excellent ones are the art directors that have created 50 ace covers a year, now that's inhuman! Like *New York Mag* or the *New York Times* magazine, they often create a buzz. Readers are always happily surprised with what they're bringing every week. That's a good feeling. There are many good ones out there: *Metropoli*, *Zeit*, *Suddutsche*, *Wired*, *California Sunday Mag*... The great thing here is that there's really no formula to create a great cover; it's about talent.

**All this talk of magazine covers will of course lead to the project you started in 2010, Coverjunkie! Tell us a little something about how it started.**

I hated those 'print is dead' statements while I saw all these beautiful stuff around me. Nobody was emphasizing the good stuff that can be done with paper. That's turning a bit now, luckily. I wanted to create a podium for excellent cover design and give a shout-out to the peeps making it: art directors, photographers and illustrators. I think it projects positivity, and it connects magazine creatives from all over the world.

**Ultimately what do you want coverjunkie to accomplish? What is your audience takeaway?**

Haha! there's no goal. I started small and it exploded cause it received a lot of attention. I considered going commercial with it, but decided early on not to; keeping it pure maintains its credibility as a place that does nothing but celebrate creativity and connect the magazine world. I'd love to do even more with it, but then, as a one-man army, I'd need 14-day weeks. But then again, I've reached this audience on my own; the possibilities are endless, particularly if the right publisher came along. Wouldn't it be nice to extend the project with interviews, mags, and even events?

**What lies in the future for Coverjunkie? Any future plans you can share with us?**

Maybe I'm gonna reach out to some publisher, not sure yet; it's an amazing platform with opportunities. There are some plans for a book, would be pretty exciting if you ask me. You know the best thing ever was publishing *Coverjunkie Magazine* five years ago. It is so fulfilling to publish, write and design it all together.

**If you could collaborate with a design legend for a magazine cover, who would it be and why?**

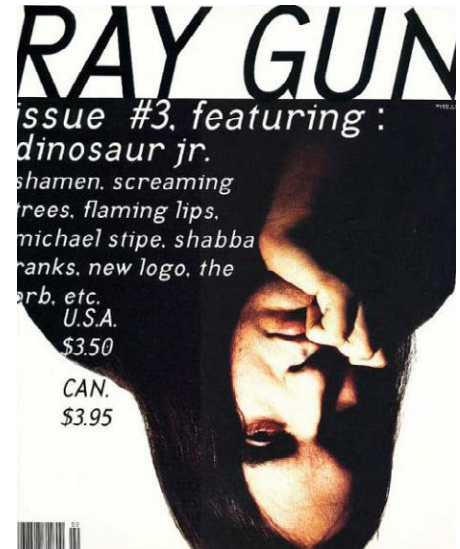
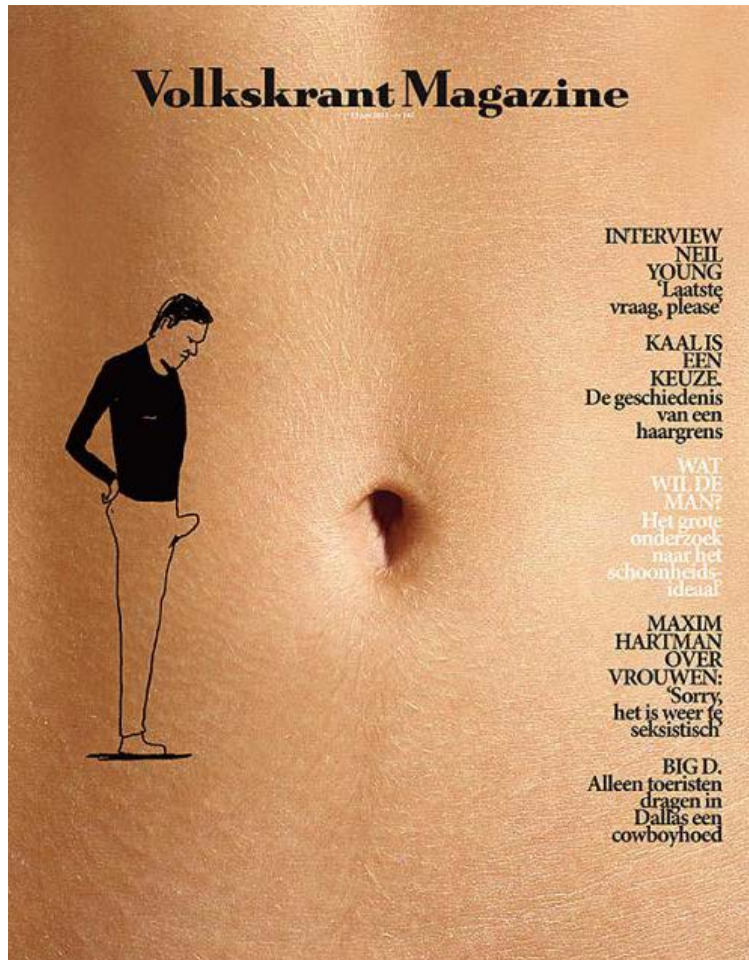
Haaa, many! Arem Duplessis come on! I wanna see more of his work since he moved to Apple. Or George Lois, Richard Turley, Billy Sorrentino, Mirko Borsche from Germany. My biggest wish would be to work, watch, just to be in his neighborhood, the designer of all designers, the late Alexey Brodovitch

**Starting out in a competitive and fast paced industry such as publishing and media can be daunting. What advice would you give upstarts who'd like to pursue a career path such as yours?**

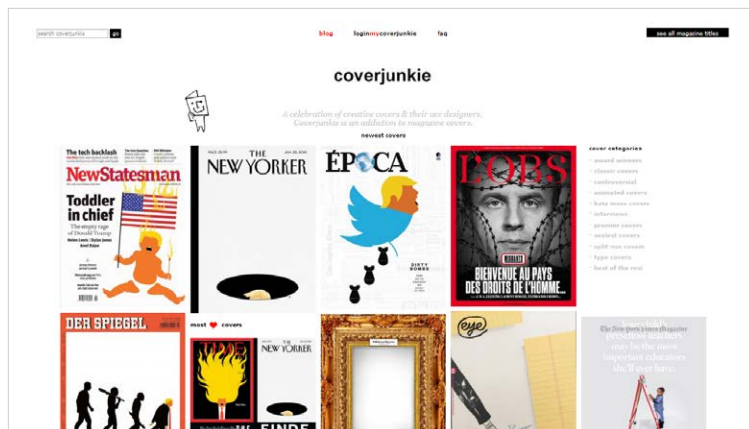
Never settle for the easy approach. Design is about kicking ass, not kissing ass. Always take the extra step. It's that extra step to distinguish yourselves from others.

**How would you describe the editorial/publication design landscape of today? What aspects can be improved? And which publications do you think are doing a great job riding the tide?**

Sometimes I see competition inside a title between media platforms. All platforms must collaborate together, make each other better, as they all complement each other.



“Never settle for the easy approach. Design is about kicking ass, not kissing ass. Always take the extra step. It's that extra step to distinguish yourselves from others.”



Clockwise, from top left: Jaap Biemans' favorite Volkskrant Magazine cover, where he collaborated with illustrator Paul Faassen; Ray Gun's infamous upside-down cover by David Carson; Coverjunkie's webpage



“Allow for the craziness, spontaneity and spirit of adventure that creativity sometimes demands (on designing magazines).”

I love everything that I see and hear about *California Sunday Magazine* (opposite page). It looks so ace. A stunner in photography and typography. They also organize events like their pop-up magazine. Feels like a nice cross-over between events and paper. I love the freshness of this relatively new brand.

It's hard out there. Some mags and newspapers will disappear. Numbers are falling, they don't come back and get used to that, and then settle with new targets. There are just too many titles for the time we, as readers have available. It's tough but it also means there are STILL a lot of good mags out there.

**The advent of digital publishing has without a doubt affected traditional publishing models. What is your take on this? Would you say that this is more of an opportunity than a setback for print mediums to be more adventurous?**

Ha! the future of digital is print. I think it's a sweet job to bring a magazine title to several platforms. I don't care if it's on paper or if it's digital. All exciting but also beware, when you axe your paper magazine and turn it into a fucking website instantly like one billion others. There was this title in the Netherlands and their CEO thought he was a visionary by getting rid of the paper magazine component for web. Their visibility actually narrowed, their charm was gone and it even dropped out of the top 25 in the biz it was in.

**What talents, attributes or traits do you think would make for a successful art director and graphic designer?**

The inherent willingness to set a challenging base as your default starting point. You need to keep surprising yourself on all levels. Furthermore, it is crucial to create a fine team with ace photographers and illustrators who can help you to create the right atmosphere; it's a team effort. But most importantly, create an environment that brings out the best in everyone as opposed to stifling their talent by boxing them in. I don't believe in the strict, procedural approach. Allow for the craziness, spontaneity and spirit of adventure that creativity sometimes demands. A magazine is an organic thing, is it not?

**What do you in your spare time?**

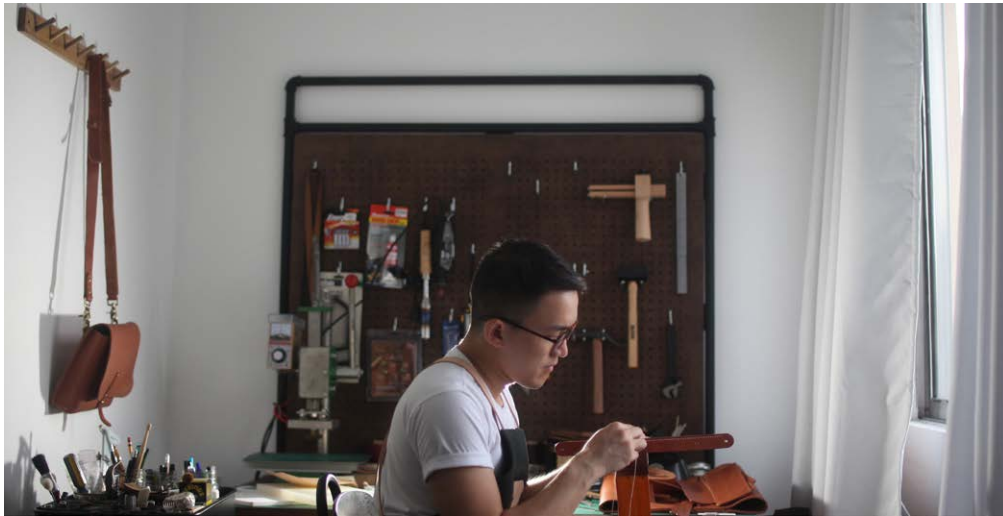
Making espresso hits my sweet spot. I own a Famea President and I'm waiting on a revisited Faema Marte out of 1950. Google that when you have a minute, truly the most gorgeous coffee machine ever built. Creating espresso out of a 1950s-machine makes my heart jump. And it churns out the best coffee ever.

**18. In this day and age where we are bombarded and fed relentlessly with images, visuals and icons, how do you think the role of graphic design has evolved?**

The role and the possibilities also exploded because everybody is seeing 10,000 images a day. We see so much visuals a day that we MUST approach them differently like we did ten years ago. Graphic designers have more opportunities now. Did the emancipation of visuals liberated since the arrival of social media attack our lives? ●



Get into the habit and feast your eyes on the best of magazine cover design around the world in [coverjunkie.com](http://coverjunkie.com). Follow Coverjunkie on Instagram [@coverjunkie](https://www.instagram.com/coverjunkie) and on Tumblr at [coverjunkie.tumblr.com](http://coverjunkie.tumblr.com)



## CREATIVE CORNER N° 3

# Mark Ngo

I developed my obsession with leather bags when I bought my first Topman satchel. It wasn't made of real leather but I still liked how it looked. So I tried looking for more but either they weren't to my taste or were too expensive. I decided to make my own instead.

I started Marked mid-2016. At first, I just bought leather and a few tools but as my projects grew, my equipment did, too. With my wife's approval, we converted our small room into the Marked HQ. I wanted a workplace that was both a constant source of inspiration and comfortable enough for me to do my leather crafting. ●

Follow [@markedhq](#) on Instagram to see more of his leather craft. Listen to his work playlist on [Spotify](#).

# THE STARTERS

# Architecture Without Ego

A budding Manila-based architectural practice seeks to create places not just spaces

INTERVIEW *Kanto Journal*

## What's the story behind the name?

**Adrian Tumang, partner:** We wanted a name that sticks. (If this is your first question, I think we just succeeded!) Naming the firm after the partners is lazy and unimaginative. The name itself should capture our philosophy as architects.

As a starting point, we asked ourselves what kind of architecture we want to create, and it's "architecture with empathy". And we just happened to like the accidental acronym it formed—AWE. Without the acronym, it's hardly memorable. We played with other words to replace 'empathy', but nothing else would fit. Then one night at a coffee shop, we thought, "Hey, [all this time] we've been asking what architecture should have, but maybe we should ask what architecture should NOT have." And the first word that came to mind was 'ego'. Architecture should be without ego.

## Why ego? Are architects naturally egotistic?

Many architects who came of age after the publication of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* have adopted the view of the architect as an epic hero, the omniscient hand that shapes the world according

to his vision. The idea is reinforced by a design education that sees architecture as a top-down process of creating a physical object or a container of human activity, a view no longer shared by the progressive world. Our perceptive board reviewer, architect Emilio Ozaeta, who sees and "experiences" angels, wrote that architecture involves the study of complex human interaction with the designed environment beyond human activities and needs. Recognizing these interactions hinges on feelings of empathy, of putting oneself in another's shoes. It's the enemy of the ego.

## AWE doesn't sound ego-less at all. How do you reconcile these conflicting values?

'Awe' means a sense of reverent wonder or fearful delight. The places that touch us most are those that evoke reverence for forces greater than us. To create such places requires a parallel fear of the laws of nature like gravity and entropy, and all things sacred and divine. Fear makes us better designers. We need to fear the impacts of our work more than we love the idea that drives it. When we abandon fear, we stop becoming agents of awe.

“When we let egos shape our environment, we steal from those we’re designing for that sense of wonder that could only come from a heightened experience of the smallness of the self in the face of the sublime.”

When we let egos shape our environment, we steal from those we’re designing for that sense of wonder that could only come from a heightened experience of the smallness of the self in the face of the sublime.

**It’s such a tall order given that many projects and clients are driven by different sets of values. Is there a project you would not take?**

Being ego-less requires that we do not pass judgment on our clients nor impose on them our concepts of right and wrong. That being said, we do not subscribe to relativism. We believe there are universal values we must uphold with every building we put on the fabric of society. We would not be party to a project that would result in inequity and widen the social divide. These are projects that would displace people, disturb the social order, damage the ecosystem and establish barriers to opportunities for people. Discernment can be difficult but as we go along, the filters will be clearer.

**What are the biggest challenges in putting up an architecture partnership?**

If fornication is sex without marriage, a business partnership is marriage without sex. Partnering with our college friends seemed like a logical choice if only to ensure team chemistry. The downside is we all belong to the same circle and share the same skills set. It made more sense to find partners who could complement the skills we lack and expand our circle of influence. That’s what we did, we professionalized this aspect of our business and got partners who can bring in added value to the company. Such was the biggest challenge. Dealing with government bureaucracy came a close second.

**How would you describe the first few months of the firm? What were the birth pains?**

It’s only been a couple of months since we registered the firm. The timing couldn’t have been more perfect. We are not too young to be accused of lack of experience and not too old to be branded as laggards refusing to adapt to new ways of doing things. Most of our time now is spent on lead generation. The few projects we scored are still in the conceptual stage. Our start-up experience has exposed a gap in our architecture education. We weren’t taught how to put up and run a business. Our professional practice courses are all about marketing. But even marketing involves more than logos and soundbites.

**How do you intend to compete in a saturated market for architecture start-ups?** We’ve always wanted to do ecotourism projects, which we thought could best represent our philosophy. However, we don’t want to be pigeonholed to a specific building type like resorts and hotels. The unique service we’re offering clients is place branding. We believe the image of a place doesn’t just exist; it can be created and sharpened through architecture. Early on, we ask clients how they want their place to be perceived.

Right now, we’re designing a study café patterned after co-working offices but for students. The client is a start-up company owned by friends from college. We like the project so much we are now considering buying a share in their company. Projects from friends are the low-hanging fruits that offer opportunities for us to show a wider audience what we can do. ●

While their portfolio is in progress, keep updated with AWE’s activities on Facebook and Instagram @architecturewithoutego





THE STARTERS

# Focal Project

*Reau Gutierrez of Focal Project never loses sight of his creative vision*

**INTERVIEW** *Patrick Kasingsing*

**Hi! Please introduce yourself.**

Hi! I'm Reau Gutierrez, founder and owner of Focal Project. I'm a photographer, videographer, movie critic, vintage bike lover and a certified Karambit (FMA) instructor. Focal Project strives to create unique solutions for unique creative dilemmas. We have the expertise and knowledge to get our clients' messages across whether it be a local or global audience in the field of photography, videography, graphic design, industrial design, as well as a host of digital solutions.

**How did Focal Project come to be? What did you set out to do by starting it?**

Focal Project started out as a hobby which eventually turned into a one-man photography studio. I first started doing photography projects with clients from my day job, and from there my referrals grew in number. My first major client was Levi's. For them, I did products, portrait and fashion.

After that I started to invest on my skills as a photographer. and I enrolled in different photography and film schools. I also became an apprentice for Tom Epperson, which enhanced my skills as a photographer. After the apprenticeship, I then became a photographer for a renowned media company and its various publications.

What started out as a hobby turned into a growing and continuously expanding passion for art and design. Eventually, I invited my best friend Geoffrey Javierto be the creative director for our venture, and we gathered our pool of artists from various creative fields and it included videographers, web designers, graphic designers, industrial designers, brand specialists, user experience designer, and other photographers. We have now evolved into a creative agency that does a wide array of creative projects for various clients.

**How do you approach each project? Can you give a rough outline of your design process for every project you take?**

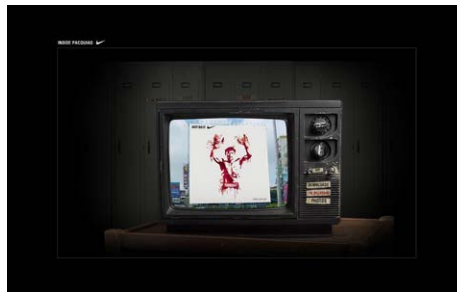
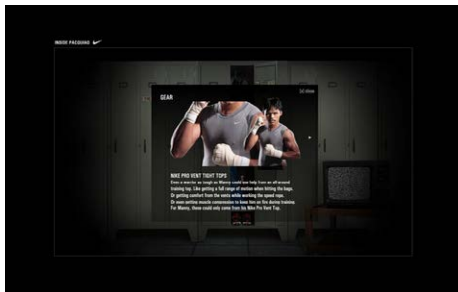
While our design process is both structured and fluid at the same time, we abide by the following steps: INSPIRE. IDEATE. IMPLEMENT. REITERATE.

**INSPIRE.** We start off by gathering all the information we can about the project, we immerse ourselves in the work to be done and the psychology of our clients and their customers.

**IDEATE.** Once we have gathered all the information available and are immersed in needs of the project, we look for problems to be solved and the solutions for them. At this stage, the more ideas we collate, the merrier.

**IMPLEMENT.** From all the ideas generated, this is where we narrow down and choose the most viable solutions for implementation. We then build several prototypes until we again narrow it down to a solution that stands out from the rest and build the current working version of the project

**REITERATE.** We test our current project over and over, and actively look for flaws in our design. We are aware that projects change as time passes. Sometimes the original scope of work may not enumerate all the needs of the project. We may find new needs and new problems along the way, and it is at this point that we learn whether or not our current project is what the client hired us to do in the first place. If it is not, then we reiterate, we go back to the other phases of the process and do it again and again until we get it right.



**Left:** Focal Project was sourced by Ogilvy to develop the flash website for Nike's Manny Pacquiao Flash website. **Bottom:** The agency also offered video and photography services for Banana Republic and Bambike's social media campaign

# We strive to create simple solutions that make people stop and say, “Why didn’t I think of that?”

## Describe your ideal client.

When it comes to work, all clients are my ideal clients. We love challenges, and each project always has its own. It gives us an opportunity to express our creativity and solve each of our client’s requirements. What we don’t like are clients who short-change creative work, and create an environment for cutthroat competition, where other creatives lower their rates and standards just to bag a project.

## What sets the work of Focal Project apart from your contemporaries?

We strive to create simple solutions that make people stop and say, “Why didn’t I think of that?” There will always be someone else more skilled and more experienced than us in certain aspects. We do not strive to be the best creative agency but rather the one that offers the best customized design solutions for our clients. We stay focused on delivering what we were originally hired to do. We take pride in creating work that speaks greatly about our clients, and in turn about ourselves.

## As this is the starter's issue, what advice would you like to offer individuals who want to establish their own studios? What skills and traits would they need to develop?

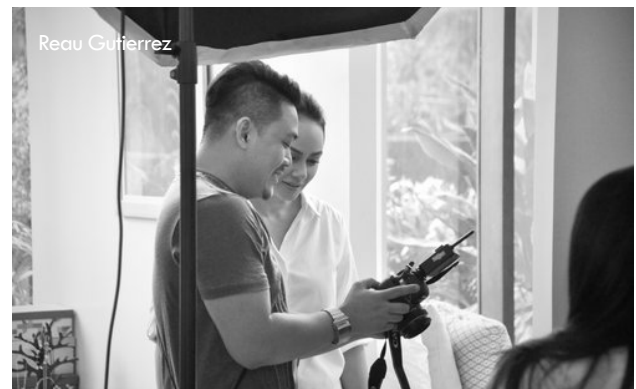
My advice to any creative who wants to put up their own business is to start with a good and stable plan. Lay out all your plans on paper. Jot down everything you have in mind. Any idea, no matter how outrageous, is still an idea. In Focal Project, we have a big corkboard wherein we stick all our ideas. And when we say “all” we mean “all”. Even the most unpredictable and sometimes funniest ones. You would be surprised at how many of these have found fruition.

And of course, be consistent with the quality of your final product always. ●

For more of Focal Project’s multimedia portfolio, visit their website at [focalproject.com.ph](http://focalproject.com.ph)



The Half Project typeface garnered 70,000 downloads and were used in design publications and various media. **Top:** Allison Harvard portrait





## THE STARTERS

# SKINNI

*Meryll Yan* of *SKINNI* provides women of all stripes the confidence to embrace life's adventures with an all-inclusive swimwear line

**INTERVIEW** *Vida Cruz*

**PHOTOGRAPHY** *Dookie Ducay*



**Of all the clothing you could design for adventurous women, why the swimsuit?**

I have always believed that the space for an entrepreneur is where their personal passion intersects with a public need. I have always loved swimsuits and have been collecting them since I was a teenager. However, when I went on adventures with my now-husband, I realized that a lot of the swimwear I owned could not withstand the conditions that we went through (e.g. waterfall climbing in Aguinid, snorkeling in Oslob, surfing in La Union, etc). The Philippines is home to some of the world's best beaches, so it makes perfect sense (even if it might seem overly ambitious) to also design the best swimsuits in the world. There was a very interesting space where those two overlapped and the spirit behind SKINNI is that you can be adventurous and fashionable at the same time. And that one is not a prerequisite to the other. I chose swimwear because it is a product I know by heart, and it could also represent our country in all of its tropical postcard beauty.

And if I must add another intersection to make this a Venn diagram, as a former fashion editor and retail marketer, I longed to do something that would be more inclusive and empowering. A category like swimwear can be so daunting for women and I wanted to change that by creating a brand that promoted body positivity and the kind of values that I think women aspire for.

**Could you describe the kinds of women you designed the SKINNI swimsuits for?**

Haha, I am lucky enough to be surrounded by a tribe of amazing women—women who are strong, beautiful, multi-faceted and complex, so I did not have to look far for inspiration. It was a tall order, but it gave us a very clear picture of who we were making SKINNI for. These are women who know themselves and who are not afraid to take risks; they are the ones who look at the mirror and love their bodies. They are women who are unique and different from the cookie cutter norms one might see on mainstream media or fashion. However, what ties everyone together is a sense of self-knowledge and confidence. My favorite anecdote is how my muses previously did not know each other but they emerged from our three-day shoot as a sisterhood. Everyone just clicked with each other and that's because each one of them represents the kind of values we want for SKINNI.





**Which underwater creature or plant particularly inspires your swimsuit prints?**

We chose textures and colors from marine life found in the Philippines, specifically dive sites near Dumaguete—Dauin, Siquijor and Apo Island. Our maiden collection was very much informed by creatures you can find around our home, as we wanted to start from a place of love, cheesy as it may sound.

**What made you choose the values that form SKINNI's core?**

Beautiful. Strong. Brave. Good. Powerful. These words are a mantra for me because these are the values that I would like to see more of in this world. For women especially, there is a constant onslaught on our psyches of how we should be, how our bodies should look, and that sort of energy leads to a lot of distress and pain. I know very well that we are a business selling swimwear but it was essential to me that we also impute goodness and kindness into our message. This was our truth and thankfully, the values resonated with a lot of women.

**What's next for SKINNI?**

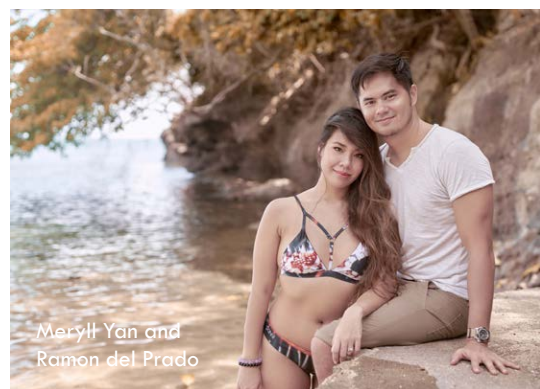
We have been so overwhelmed by the initial response to our launch. Our next goal is to make it easier for our customers to reach us. Stay tuned!

**What message would you like to send to girls young and old, of every body type and skin color?**

Gosh, how much time do we have? Sincerely speaking though, SKINNI is really a love letter to all women. I may have been trained all my life as a corporate girl but I would be

the first to admit that the founding of SKINNI and the essence of it is much more fueled by emotion and sentiment rather than marketing strategies and business niches. While the business approach from SKINNI has benefited from my past working lives, the insight is so much simpler. We just want more women to feel beautiful and confident in themselves, wearing an item of clothing that normally elicits fear or insecurity. We wanted to flip the script, so to speak, so that rather than feeling you need to lose 10 pounds to look good in swimwear, here we are with amazing swimsuits that look good on your body. On every body. And finally, we wish for you—regardless of what skin you're in, what weight or age you're at, or even what life stage or preference you identify with, to feel loved, accepted, and celebrated—stretch marks and all. ●

Know more about SKINNI and its product portfolio by visiting their website at [skinniswim.com](http://skinniswim.com) or Instagram at [@skinniswim](https://www.instagram.com/skinniswim)



Meryll Yan and Ramon del Prado

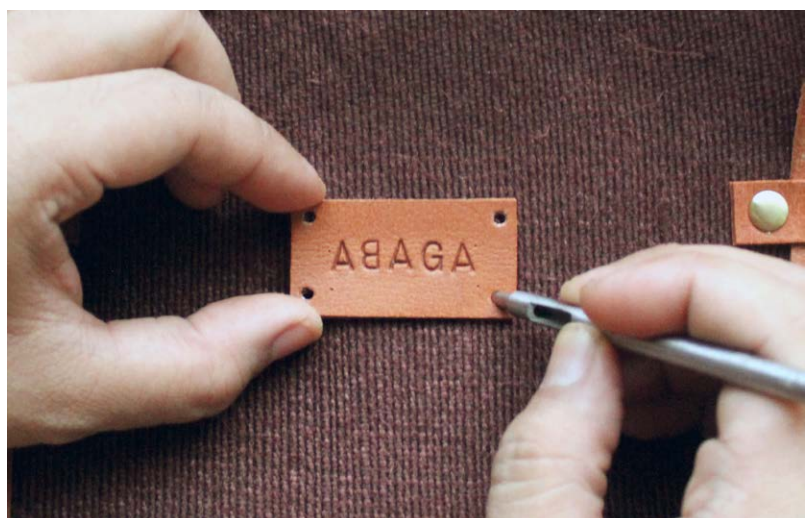


THE STARTERS

# From James

Handcrafted bags with  
a nod to local communities  
from *James (and Summer)*

INTERVIEW *Danielle Austria*





# Hello! Please introduce yourselves.

Hi, we're team *#Jammer*, and we're From James. Basically, we produce bags and other carry-ons that are purely made by hand.

Our flagship line is the Abaga collection—bags that are made of abaca from Bicol province and are assembled with leather straps from Marikina City. The term “Abaga” could actually be a pun of “abaca” and “bag”, but in the Bicolano dialect, “abaga” means shoulder. It makes for a beautiful name and provides a beautiful story for a line of shoulder bags.

**But your background really is advertising. What made you take the leap to start your own bag-crafting business? What has advertising taught you that could be gainful to your newfound craft?**

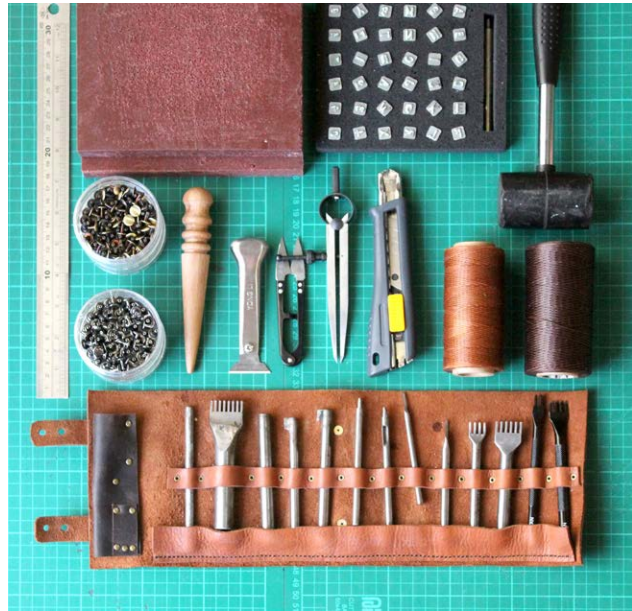
It was all a hobby at first and still is a sort of hobby now. James, along with a couple of his art director friends, got into leather stuff as they watched YouTube videos and browsed and browsed and browsed until it became a much-loved habit. I (Summer), then a junior copywriter, was into calligraphy and sketching and art appreciation. Our hobbies sort of just meshed together. Everything just gradually, if not providentially, fell into place.

Something from the industry that we're using now? Advertising of course! Seriously though, knowing how to present our brand and giving it an image that fits our identity wasn't much of a struggle. Of course we're still building it, but at least we're off to a good start.

**Can you take us through your design and bag-making process?**

The Design: When we go shopping for bags and shoes and things that we want to use for a long time, we always look for three things: simplicity, functionality and durability. These are the same rules we apply (or at least do our best to) whenever we come up with a design. It's sort of a non-verbal checklist that we both try to fill: is it sleek and chic enough? Is it practical to use for everyday errands? Will it last long enough to be passed on from this generation to the next? And just like how it goes in advertising, we make drafts, revise and finalize.

The Making of Abaga: after we finalize the orders, we request our supplier to produce a certain number of bags for us. A craftsman who specifically makes the bags for us then sews the abaca bodies separately (they cannot sew our bags with their usual orders because we modify our design).



When asked about the one thing that can make or break a leathercrafting business, From James points to design. "And when we talk about design, it's not just how it looks but also how it's made."

**“When we go shopping for bags and shoes and things that we want to use for a long time, we always look for three things: simplicity, functionality and durability.”**

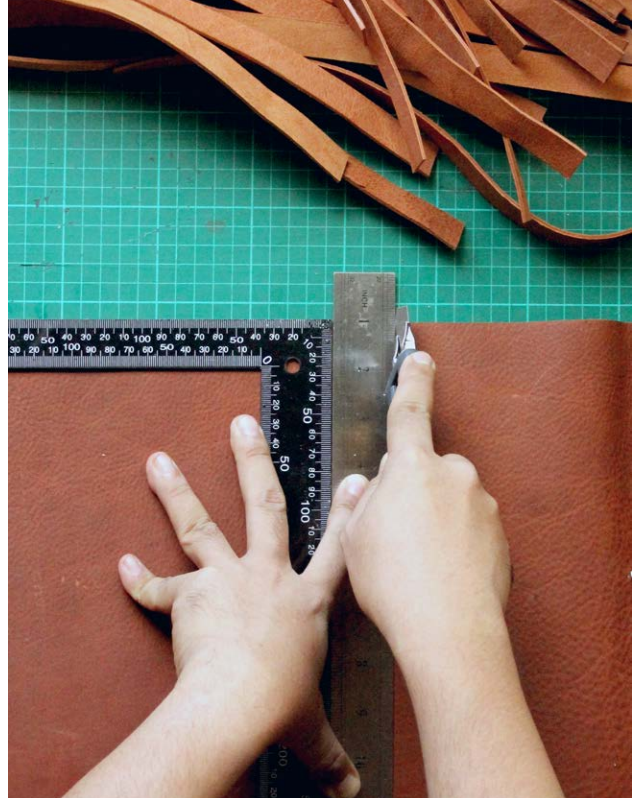
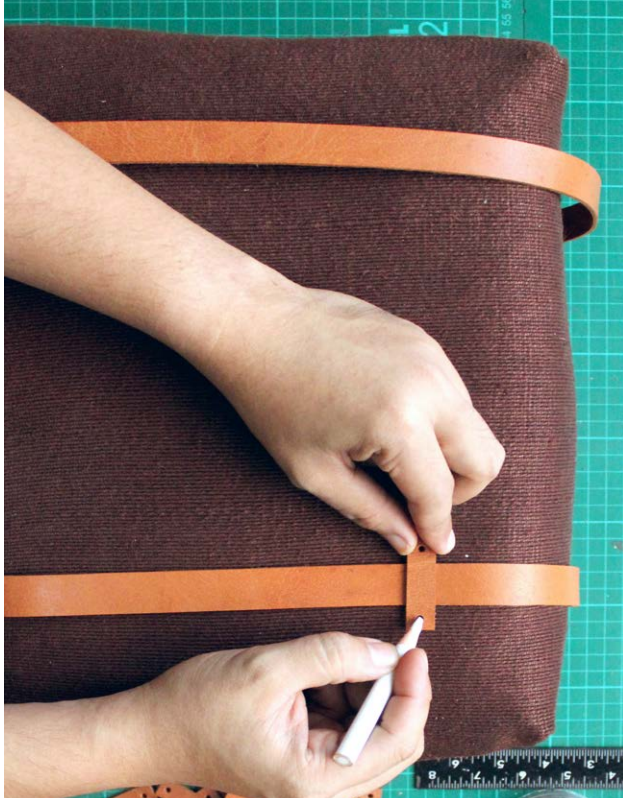
"A well-constructed leather craft has been innovated enough to fit the form and function that the user needs," shares From James. "A failed construction is a failed craft."

The finished bodies will then be delivered to Manila, where we collect and assemble them with straps made of leather from Marikina.

For the rest of the leather products from From James, we have our own standard patterns for standard goods like wallets and passport holders. Bags are usually custom-made, so we derive from a peg that the client wants and then make our custom touches.

**What can you tell us about the materials you're using? What is it about leather or abaca that makes for great crafting? And what can you tell us about the communities that produce these?**

Both materials—abaca and leather—have stood the test of time. They've turned old and are now new again. Old is the new "new"! Haha! Leather and abaca complement each other really well and they look really good together, like star-crossed lovers. *#SobrangBAGay sila!* (They go well together) LOL, but it's true. Where





James Pereda and Summer Manzano of From James



leather is compact, abaca is loose; where leather is supple, abaca is unpliant. But what they have in common is that they can both be tremendously durable and as a bonus, fashionable.

The communities are one of the best and funniest parts of the leather-abaca story. It's actually looking a lot like some cute couple's origins and backgrounds \*wink \*wink. On the leather side of things (Marikina), people are on a quick-paced industrial mood. *Bihasa sa* (accustomed to) hustle and bustle of city life. They are proud of what they have, they know they got it good, so take it or leave it, *ganon*. On the abaca side (Bicol), people are so quaint and polite and easily-pleased. You could feel how much heart they put on what they do, especially when given enough motivation. It's funny once you notice how surprised they are when they see outsiders appreciating their craft.

The thing is, they're both very humble communities that are also very in-demand, that's why they go so well together. They make us realize that we need to take more care of nature in order for us to keep producing local-made stuff with the help of our local people.

#### **What is the hardest part of starting a new craft?**

Everything is so easy nowadays. You wanna learn how to cook, you Google. Wanna know how to make stuff, you Google. There are a lot of channels that help you learn even at home. But the hardest part is knowing where to begin and how to begin. Introducing your brand to consumers is not that simple.

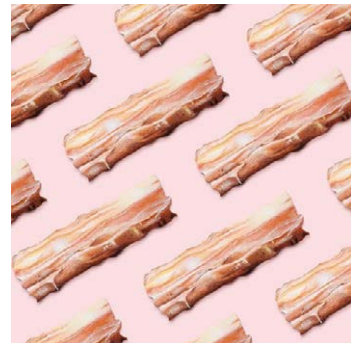
#### **What are three things you recommend a leather crafter get into the habit of doing to achieve more professional finishes on their bags?**

Start simple. Be patient. Keep going.

#### **From one starter to another, what piece of advice would you leave someone who wants to get into the business?**

If it's something that you love, go for it. If you enjoy it long enough to keep doing it for years and years, pursue it. The joy that comes in creating a product passes on to the product and on to the user. So if you're called for it, keep creating. ●

View From James' product portfolio on Instagram at [@fromjames\\_ph](https://www.instagram.com/fromjames_ph). For orders, email them at [fromjames.ph@gmail.com](mailto:fromjames.ph@gmail.com)



THE STARTERS  
James  
Mendoza

An art director touches on  
the importance of personal  
projects in exploring  
purpose and possibilities

INTERVIEW *Danielle Austria*

### **Hello! Please introduce yourself.**

Hi! I'm James Dominic Mendoza—an ambitious visual communicator. When I was in junior high school, I said to myself: “I want to be an ad man!” Today, as an Art Director in TBWA/Santiago Mangada Puno, I asked myself, “Do I really want to be an ad man?” Kidding! I'm living my dream.

### **You kicked off 2015 with a personal theme called #ProjectNewMan, and in 2016 you further explored it with #TheNewManWanders. What mindset did you have entering 2017? And how about 2018?**

Actually, both #ProjectNewMan and #TheNewManWanders started in 2015. These were about getting lost and finding myself again. 2016 was about fine-tuning and sharing my craft; at the same time, secretly building my folio in preparation for 2017. It was that year I decided to take my career seriously. I left my past agency and searched for an aggressive team that will complement my career objectives.

With all the time spent working out my career, my presence on Instagram changed drastically. I'm still figuring out how to balance my time especially now that I just landed a new post in a more (if not the most) aggressive agency in the country. 2018 will definitely still be about proving myself worthy to be in the advertising industry. But if time permits, I would like to work on a new project. Portraits? Film photography? We'll see!

### **What led you to starting these personal projects? Has any of these led to revelations about yourself?**

Back when I was still working with a social media team, I thought of starting a social media-based project to practice what I've been learning at work and explore the medium to know what can still be done. These projects taught me a lot about purpose and possibilities. I learned a lot about myself—my fears, my weaknesses, and my limitations. But what's surprising was how God revealed Himself to me through these projects. How He filled in my weak points and how He twisted events in my life to make me feel #blessed.

### **How do you work on staying on-theme?**

I think having a vision matters. It'll keep you aligned with your goals and will give you direction as to where you're going. It will also draw the line of what your project is and is not.

### **Let's talk about Instagram. It's pretty much your playground for these projects. From sharing your travel photos and digital artworks, you've also**

### **specifically created content for Instagram. You put in a lot of effort to express yourself through it. What to you is its allure?**

Well, when I learned about Instagram, I felt like it was a medium made for me. I think in this day and age, people are becoming very visual on how they consume information. Instagram, being a visual-led medium, is the perfect platform for me to share my thoughts. The power of how a single photo translates to a dynamic story is inexplicable. I also like that Instagram continues to reinvent itself to keep up in this fast-paced digital era.

### **2017 saw you working on commercially successful campaigns, competing in Cannes Lions and speaking at DigiCon—Did you ever dream of achieving any of these when you were just starting in the industry? And what would you say to an aspiring creative who has sights set on the same things?**

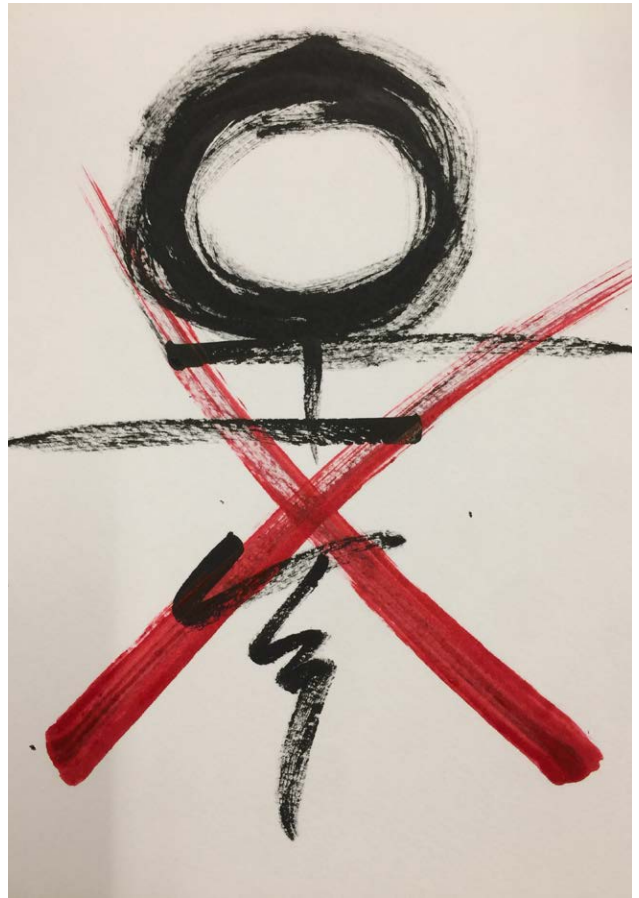
Yes. That was “the dream”. Up to this day, I can't help but wonder what I did to deserve all these blessings. It's overwhelming. I never thought that these will all happen to me during the early years of my career and at a young age.

My tip to those who have the same dreams: Don't fake it. People in this industry always say: “Fake it 'till you make it.” Maybe that's one way to do it. But for me, being raw and real led me to where I am now. I accepted my flaws as a creative and worked on my weaknesses. I still have a long list of things to learn. Until now, I don't even know how to use a pen tab. And worst... the pen tool! Hahaha! I guess it's also making the best out of what you are capable of. Because passion is always more important than skills. Passion can't be forged.

### **What's something about advertising work that younger creatives would be surprised to know?**

The best ideas don't always come from the creatives. I am a strong believer of collaboration and sometimes the best ideas were generated not only through brainstorming with your concept team but through the ideas and opinions raised by an account person or someone from prod or a story told by “*ate* pantry” or “*kuya* guard”. Ideas can be sparked by anyone. You'll be surprised how sometimes these ideas were the ones approved and produced by your clients. So hear out everyone and always bring your pen and paper! ●

What's new for #TheNewMan? Follow him on Instagram @jamesmendoza



QUILL

# Beyond the Script

*Surat Magazine's* Kristian Kabuay takes the ancient script of Baybayin to print

INTERVIEW *Danielle Austria*

# Hello! Please introduce yourself.

I'm Kristian Kabuay, an artist and educator of prePhilippine scripts.

**How did you get started with Baybayin? What was your biggest challenge when you were only beginning to write with it?**

I first saw it on one of the Katipunan flags. I thought the “Ka” was a capital “I” representing “Independence” but when I found out it was our own writing system, I was hooked.

The biggest challenge was writing the strokes since it's quite different from the Roman alphabet.

**In your many platforms, you've touched on common misconceptions people have about Baybayin. (It is a writing system - not a language, and that Alibata is a misnomer.) What other misapprehensions are there that the community could benefit to correct?**

Not specifically to writing systems, but [others tend to think] cultural and artistic practice is impractical. When people say impractical, they really mean that it won't make any money and one cannot live off it. Most of these thoughts come from the Philippines because

of the economic conditions. I and others are proof that there is economic benefit to cultural practices.

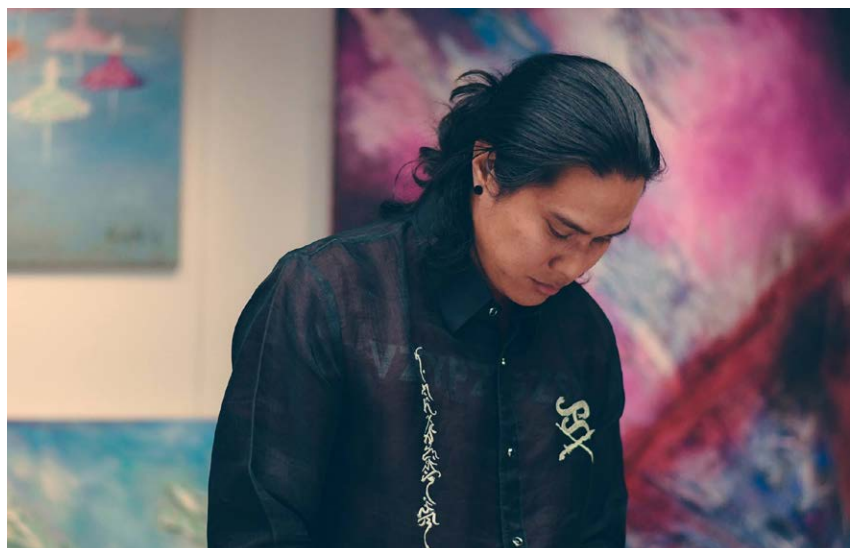
**Can anybody learn Baybayin? If one were to suddenly take up Baybayin, what's the most important thing that they should remember? And how can one start?**

Yes they can. The most important thing is to learn the *Kudlit* (vowel marks), *Virama* (vowel cancels), and writing as pronounced. They can start by checking out my website [baybayin.com](http://baybayin.com) and in the future [baybayinschool.com](http://baybayinschool.com).

**Do you envision a time when Baybayin would be widely used? How far or close are we from that reality? And what can the average Filipino do to help us get closer to that?**

Maybe...We're still far from it because of the social, cultural, and economic conditions. The best thing the average Filipino can do is to be economically stable. Sure, you can do something cultural and economic in parallel but in the Philippine context, economic independence is the main factor. Once they have that, they can have the privilege to explore the culture more.

Kristian Kabuay is a San Francisco-based Filipino artist who has made it his mission to revive and promulgate the nearly extinct prePhilippine script Baybayin via a contemporary interpretation in art and mixed-media.



“The simplicity is what makes Baybayin beautiful. With only 17 characters, you find consistency yet still able to express infinitely.”

How does *Surat Magazine* tie in with your advocacy to keep Baybayin alive? Who's it for, and of all mediums, why a magazine?

1. Validates the interest, 2. Validates the economic value, 3. Creates an outlet for practitioners, 4. Marketing.

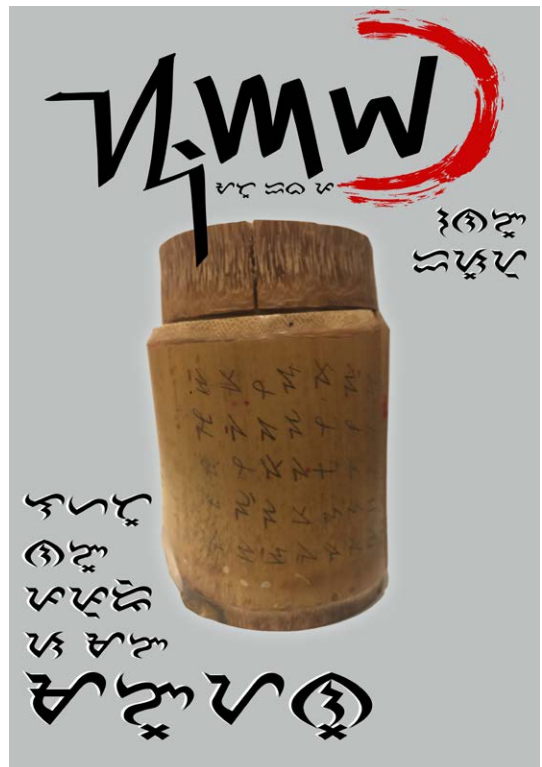
It's for anyone interested in Philippine culture and specifically scripts. I decided on a magazine because it hasn't really been done before (for Baybayin). Some people still like to hold physical goods.

One of the ways our ancient text continues to live in modern times is through art (here in the Philippines, Baybayin tattoos are popular). As an art form, what makes Baybayin beautiful?

The simplicity is what makes it beautiful. With only 17 characters, you find consistency yet still able to express infinitely.

Talk about 2018. What's your outlook for Baybayin in the next 12 months? And what do you hope to accomplish through *Surat* by the end of the year?

It will continue to grow in interest. I'm not expecting anything groundbreaking. With *Surat*, I'd like it to become a quarterly magazine that creates opportunities for people and gets them paid. ●



Learn more about pre-Philippine scripts and Kristian's work with Baybayin on [baybayin.com](http://baybayin.com). Follow [@baybayin](https://www.facebook.com/baybayin) on Facebook and Instagram.

Surat Magazine cover mockup



# Visits

When depression triggers a new beginning

WORDS *Kariza Gonzales*

## It started out subtle.

Barely even there. It wasn't this overwhelming feeling like you see in movies or read in books—I hardly noticed it until I felt it myself, I guess.

I'm not sure when it all really started, but it could have been when my grandfather got sick. I remember I took care of him almost everyday, staying up late at night keeping watch, getting off work so I could go to the hospital. He passed away that summer, and I guess that was when it all began. I didn't realize we'd met at that point already, but looking back, I'm sure we did meet then. Maybe I was just distracted with everything that was happening. I was too busy being everyone else's support system I never really paid too much attention. But that was when we first met.

I travelled a while after my grandpa passed. Out to see the world, out to live life, out to chase adventure. When I got back, things changed. Got a new job, met new people, made new friends—and I'd forgotten about that brief meeting, and my life just continued on. At least for a few months.

When my other grandfather passed away I was at work. I was barely seated at my desk when I got the call. I left, went to my parents' house, made sure things were in order, and then left. We met again then. But I was in such a hurry to get back to my life I didn't really have enough time to spare on other things. I just went back to my apartment, back to work the next day, and that was it. I didn't even attend the funeral this time. I'm sure we would've met there again, but I chose to work instead. It may have been because I couldn't come to terms with the fact that I barely spoke to my grandfather the last time I saw him. Or work was my escape. Maybe

I also didn't want us to meet at that particular point in time. I'm not sure.

Fast forward to a year later. *Onwards and upwards*, I told myself when I found myself in a new role at work. I was dating a guy I liked, I lost weight, and I was doing something I was good at. My life was, outwardly, pretty tight. But at the back of my mind I kept recalling all those times we'd met. I could never understand why we met when we did. But then I'd push the thoughts away. *I'm here now, aren't I?* Things were good.

Until they weren't. After I got dumped, things fell apart at work. Every single day was a struggle to face my inescapably imperfect life. Then I found out that my ten-year-old Labrador was sick. Like, *I'm-sure-next-visit-the-vet-is-going-to-ask-me-if-I-want-to-put-him-down* sick. (He passed before our next vet appointment.)

My life felt pretty much in shambles.

That was when we met again. And this time, I caved in.

I was enveloped in an embrace and I fell into it without any hesitation. It was somewhat comforting, but at the same time terrifying. I cried a lot and I allowed myself to feel. It was finally the right time. It was no longer brief meetings and awkward timings. We were together. And I felt it – the overwhelming cascade of passion, the turbulent storms of emotions, and the starting out of a lifelong relationship.

My psychiatrist diagnosed me with Clinical Depression and Anxiety Disorder almost two years ago now. After I left her office, I thought to myself, *how do you start out after something like this? What do you do? How do you start out after being married to depression and anxiety?*

Well... you just do. ●



COMPASS

# The MAD Ones

*MAD Travel* proves that,  
in tourism, adventure  
and sustainability are not  
mutually exclusive

**INTERVIEW** Patrick Kasingsing

**PHOTOGRAPHY** Courtesy of MAD Travel

# Hello! Please introduce yourself.

I'm Tom Graham, co-founder of MAD (Make A Difference) Travel, a social enterprise I co-founded with Raf Dionisio. We started MAD around three years ago as a travel platform that allows us to create fun and inspiring experiences in partnership with local communities across the Philippines.

**Opposite page:** In Sitio Sagpat, Zambales, photographed by Ayen Dela Torre, **Below:** Tom Graham, **Bottom:** Raf Dionisio

## What inspired you to start MAD Travel?

The idea for MAD Travel grew out of my own life-changing journey in the Philippines. Around four years ago, I was travelling the world and writing business reports. I arrived in the Philippines expecting to stay here only a couple of months until, shortly before I was set to leave, I had the opportunity to meet and interview Tony Meloto, the founder of Gawad Kalinga. A 30-minute interview turned into a three-hour discussion on meaning, purpose and the immense potential of the Philippines. Before we were done, Tito urged me to 'ditch' the shirt and tie I was wearing and to discover the 'genius' of the Filipino poor through spending a year living in GK communities across the Philippines.

I decided to tell the stories of that journey in a book titled *The Genius of the Poor*. But deep down, I didn't want people just to read about these communities. I also wanted them to discover the genius for themselves. That's when I got together with Raf, who was also a GK volunteer at the time and an entrepreneur in the travel industry. Together, we wanted to see how travel could inspire more people to venture outside their regular comfort zones and have truly meaningful experiences.

## How did you put MAD Travel together? What were some of the challenges you encountered along the way?

Fortunately, our business was not very capital-intensive at the beginning, so our main challenges were with finding people who shared our mission and could offer different kinds of skills sets. In fact, there are so many talented people in the Philippines who are also seeking more purposeful careers, that it has been possible for us to grow quite fast so far.

## How does MAD Travel work?

We partner with communities (whether GK or indigenous groups such as the Aetas) to develop fun and inspiring experiences for travelers. Aside from those communities, we also work with other travel agencies, hotels, etc, and work on marketing these experiences to the travel community.



**Right:** GK Enchanted Farm, Angat, Bulacan **Below:** Zambales' Sitio Yangil townfolk, photographed by Brendon Dinglasan



**“We wanted to see how travel could inspire more people to venture outside their comfort zones and have truly meaningful experiences.”**





A MAD traveler takes the plunge near a waterfall in Baler, Aurora. Image by Thrive and Travel

Take part in lifting Filipino communities by booking a tour on [madtravel.org](http://madtravel.org), or follow [@makeadifferencetravel](https://www.facebook.com/makeadifferencetravel) on Facebook.

**What is the greatest insight you've gained from the experience running the initiative?**

That the communities will always surprise you, and teach you something, provided you are willing to be present with them and listen.

**Are there any particular moments with travelers or partner communities that stand out to you?**

Recently, a group from Malaysia wanted to donate money to one of the entrepreneurs we introduced them to at the GK Enchanted Farm. However, the entrepreneur herself amazed our guests by saying that she would rather the money went to someone else who needed it even more than her. That is the spirit of *walang iwanan* (no one left behind)!

**What would you like your travelers to gain or take away from a trip with MAD Travel?**

Through the power of presence it really is possible to change the world, one community at a time, and that if we are able to redefine travel as a search for meaning and greater understanding of the world around us, then change can come more quicker than you imagine.

**How have your partner communities responded to the initiative?**

They have really bought into the concept and now regularly look forward to the next time we will be bringing guests. We needed to show that we are willing to be present in the communities on a regular basis, week-in week-out, and prove that we are not just another outside organization bringing empty promises.

**Any future plans you can share with us?**

I think the outlook for 2018 is bright. The type of tourism experiences we offer are exactly what more and more travelers are looking for. Travelers today, especially the young, want to gain a more complete understanding of country—not just of its most beautiful sites but of its people too, and how they live. They want to explore a country and immerse in its culture while making a meaningful contribution as they travel. Many also long to find a deeper purpose in life. It may be through hearing inspiring stories, or meeting people who are walking the talk and learning from them. This is what “adventures that matter”, our tagline, means. ●



COMPASS

# More is More

*Sibyl Layag* finds calm in the midst  
of a multitude in Myanmar's temple city

PHOTOGRAPHY *Sibyl Layag*





## GOLDEN HOUR

Before sunset, we headed to the top of the Shwesandaw Pagoda along with dozens of other tourists. The golden hour arrived, and we were treated to this glorious view of the surrounding temples peppering the lush plains of Bagan, Myanmar.

## A W E S T R U C K

With the help of our trusty rented e-bike, we weaved through the dirt roads lined with these world-famous religious monuments, wanting to stop at every corner to admire the structures and take countless photos and videos, in an effort to capture not just the image but the feeling of awe the places imparted to us.

## It is perhaps only in Bagan where ubiquity is an emblem of reverence and not a tragedy of the commonplace.

In contrast to the exhausting feeling of oversaturation one gets when bombarded with the commercials and billboards of the same tired love team, or another LSS-inducing ditty; the sight of literally thousands of magnificent temples in what was once Myanmar's most prosperous city inspires an unexpected feeling of peace.

The time has long gone when Bagan was still teeming with wealthy inhabitants whose idea of utmost veneration (or atonement for sins) was to build monasteries, temples and pagodas all across the great plains in which they thrive. The temples were of many kinds, each with features as distinct as that of their builders. There were temples that can fit only one worshipper, with a solitary humble stone Buddha smiling down upon the visitor, and there were temples so massive that it contained several Buddha relics in its corridors, its main chambers housing four richly gilded Buddha figures more than twice as tall as the average man, each facing north, south, east and west. There were temples that came with a twin, temples with frescoes of everyday Burmese life, and temples that had courtyards even more spacious than the inside of the main structure. One was even purported to be haunted by a Burmese king, whose reign was marked with cruelty and violence.

In this manner, Bagan's past inhabitants—by most accounts, a very learned people—were architects in their own right, expressing not just their personalities, affluence or sphere of influence, but their very spirit, their essence of being.

Sadly, only a fraction of the original monuments remain, as steadfast devotion could not impregnate mere brick and mortar and render them immune to the ravages of time and nature. Still, the beauty and sheer number of those remaining, especially when viewed from atop one of the better-placed ones, were enough to strike wonder into even the most well-traveled adventurers. Though we explored more temples than we thought we could explore, the feeling never wavered—an uncanny sensation of tranquility in ubiquity, not unlike the feeling of gazing upon the innumerable stars above us. ●

Find out where Sibyl's off to next on Instagram [@sibyllayag](#).





“The temples were of many kinds, each with features as distinct as that of their builders.”



#### TEMPLE RUN

Some pagodas—usually the grander ones—stood by their lonesome, while others were grouped in a sort of compound. These grouped pagodas had a certain charm to them as well, and these were the ones we couldn't help exploring at random. Nearly all the surviving monuments in the Bagan Archeological Complex had local caretakers and received donations from devotees.



## T H E C L I M B

If you want to witness the beauty that is Bagan's multitude of temples against a sunrise or sunset background, climbing stupas is a must. Rules state that footwear isn't allowed when entering or climbing temples. So leave your fear of heights and germophobe tendencies at home, as you haven't really been to Bagan if you didn't climb a stupa barefoot or take a photo of the plains from above.



### A N I M A L   W O R S H I P

In Bagan, even goats wanted to worship and take in the views. Kidding aside, one of the most memorable moments of our trip was when we chanced upon a herd of cows and goats being pastured, the mundane (animals grazing) and the ethereal (religious monuments) coming together in a completely serendipitous, yet routine, instance.

“The feeling never wavered—an uncanny sensation of tranquility in ubiquity”



#### S U L A M A N I   T E M P L E

In some places, time takes its time, and the wheel of life goes on. Sulamani Temple has sustained severe damage from a number of earthquakes, most recently from the 6.8 magnitude earthquake that hit Bagan in August. The topmost portion of the temple, the stupa, has collapsed and is being restored. Still, it looks as magnificent as ever.



STAGE

# SCENE STEALER



*Faust Peneyra* sets the stage for live art,  
in and out the Philippines

INTERVIEW *Joy Merryl Ngo*



The Addams Family by ATEG, **Opposite page:** Rabbit Hole by Red Turnip Theater



*Teatro Porvenir* by Frances Makil Ignacio, **Top:** *Piaf* by ATEG,



# Hello! Please introduce yourself.

I am Faust Peneyra, a Filipino scenographer (scenic designer, stage designer, set designer and production designer) based in Hong Kong. I graduated from the University of the Philippines Diliman with a BA degree in Theater Arts majoring in Scenic Design and a Certificate in Theater Arts majoring in Performance.

I took further studies in Technical Direction with the Japan Foundation, Lighting Programming with grandMA Asia Hong Kong, and Set Design, Costume Design and Digital Animation at the Central St. Martins, University of Arts London.

## How did you end up in the world of theater production and design?

As a child, I've always been fascinated with storytelling and spectacle. I was also hyperactive with a bit of obsessive-compulsive tendencies which got me into trouble more often than I would want to. My parents would buy me Lego bricks to play with, just so I can sit quietly in one corner and build things. During those times, my older sisters were all obsessed with musical theater and they would spend the whole day listening to cast albums. From there, my imagination would run wild and I would start recreating a helicopter for "Miss Saigon" and a chandelier for "Phantom of the Opera".

Growing up, my interest in theater and liberal arts didn't wane. I would always be involved in our school productions whether as an actor, a stage designer or a director. But I think what cemented it for me, the point where I knew I would pursue theater and make a career out of it, was in 1998 when I saw a video of "The Lion King" performance at the Tony Awards on TV. I was astounded by the sheer scale of the production and the vastness of the artist's imagination in making a live version of this Disney classic with talking animal characters; how Julie Taymor was able to capture the animals' movements and somehow incorporated it with the actor's through puppetry and costume and blending it well with the scenic design. That evening I started researching more on her work and it was probably the definitive inspiration that pushed me to continue further on with stage design. To this day, I am still in awe of that production.

## Would you say that you have a trademark style or aesthetic in your work?

I can't say if I have one, but I have heard from colleagues in the industry and critics that they would know immediately if I designed a show when they see the set for the first time. So maybe I do have.

When I conceptualize a design, I always make sure that it would be clean and balanced; that it would be a force in forging the storytelling forward. I want the audiences to be so captivated with the design that they would feel part of the spectacle. I don't agree with short-changing paying audiences with mediocre designs, whether it is big or small budget productions. There is always room for ingenuity.

Another personal touch would be functionality. I like creating multi-purpose set pieces that would unravel in front of and surprise the audiences. My assistants would usually call these my 'transformers' set. I know am not the best, but I will always cook up something original (hopefully magical too!).



## “I’m proud to say I’ve worked with low budget productions and big-budgeted ones with equal fervor and commitment.”

**What are the usual challenges encountered by a set designer/scenographer during production? What are some of the considerations that need to be addressed?**

In the Philippines it's definitely budget, but it never hindered me creatively. I am very proud to say that I've worked with low budget productions and big-budgeted ones with equal fervor and commitment.

Also, I make considerations on the space/theater I'm working in, the legal restrictions on the materials and theatrical rights owners, and even the collaborators you work with. I tend to gravitate towards directors who share the same ethos, passion and quirkiness as mine as the collaboration would be beneficial and enjoyable to everyone involved in a project.

**How does one start a career as a set designer? What design disciplines should a scenographer/set designer be adept in?**

Passion for theater and the performing arts would be a priority coupled with a great work ethic.

For design disciplines, I would say visual arts, art history, engineering, architecture and a little bit of mathematics. It is never easy but a holistic education on the field and the liberal arts would be helpful to their craft.

Also, I have always believed that the best designers are the best researchers. For any designer to create something original or fresh, one needs to know what has been done before and as much as possible not to replicate it. The dramaturgical research assists in creating design, may it be period or something out of this world. The more you know, the more equipped you will be in tackling a project.

**Was there a particular project that served as a turning point in your career?**

In 2013, I designed “Piaf”. Nobody knew me back then and it was five years since I left Manila to work in Hong Kong. It was the story of French singer Edith Piaf also known as ‘La Mome’ (the Little Sparrow). I designed a set made of dilapidated French shutter windows that violated the rafters and the height of the RCBC Theater proscenium. I designed the set as a bird cage (symbolically) but added the

little surprises like making entrances into doors, windows, shadow screens and wardrobes.

Another one would be “Bridges of Madison County – The Musical” in 2015. The scenic design is a gallery composed of rustic frames anchored by one central image – that of a tree. The imagery I hoped to have achieved were these fragmented frames of memories pieced together in space and somewhat floating; in Francesca’s eyes, a moment in the past, and in Robert’s, a life that could have been. Creating a world inside a frame, both a dream and reality, underneath a myriad of stars using hundreds of Edison bulbs. These individual frames transforms into different set pieces used by the actors like the bed, kitchen, windows etc. Some of the frames have hidden individual projectors that allow the images to morph into portraits in one of the poignant scenes in the finale. This production is a favorite of mine because it was effective in forging the story forward; challenging audience’s imagination with all the surprises on the set and it had a very romantic feel with all the scenic elements combined.

**What is your dream gig? Have you landed it yet?**

I have always dreamt of designing for operas. I have prepared so many design ideas for different operas so when the opportunity arrives I will be ready. A favorite opera of mine is “Turandot” as I’ve always been fascinated by the architecture of the Forbidden City and Chinese cultural history.

**What excites you everyday about your chosen career path?**

It would be the storytelling and creation. Every artist would answer the same; but for a designer to create worlds from an idea translated to paper and constructed to reality that will be enjoyed by audiences on stage is an exhilarating job. I have been so blessed with continuous projects locally and internationally because these opportunities allow my design voice to be heard/seen by audiences and if it inspires a couple of people to pursue arts, that is exciting for me.

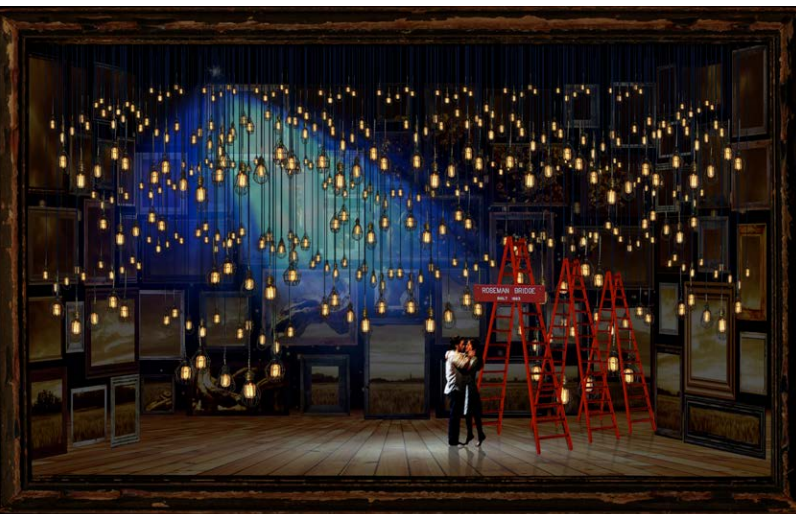
**Who were your artistic idols, and how have they shaped your design choices and aesthetic?**

A Filipino designer would be Gino Gonzales. He is the most proficient stage designer continuously working in the



Matilda set design rendering

**Below:** Set design for *Bridges of Madison County*



industry. He inspired me tremendously and guided me when I was a student in UP.

George Tsypin is my foreign designer hero. He breaks all the rules. He designs with no budget in mind.

**What can you say about the state of the Philippine theater industry today? What do you think is needed for it to blossom/continue its growth?**

Philippine theater will always thrive because of our love for the performing arts. It is ingrained in our culture and society and even embedded in our education system. There is so much talent in our country, and I am so proud of all the patrons, producers and directors who give opportunity to all these artists like myself. Our audiences have grown tremendously for the last decade and I am looking forward to the day when Manila will be the next destination for live performances like West End or Broadway.

Having said that, we also need to have more performing arts institutions for training and instilling technique, discipline and counseling budding artists. Life in art is never easy and we need to support the holistic training of all these artists to become leaders and citizens of our society. ●



Clockwise from top left: Garam Masala, Salted Dark Chocolate, Blueberry Lemon and Custard Brulee

PALATE

ON FIVE

# Poison Coffee & Doughnuts

A deadly,  
delicious secret  
awaits inside The  
Alley at Karrivin

INTERVIEW *Patricia Herbolario*

**Why did you decide to start a doughnut shop?**

**Dan Matutina:** The simple fact that we love doughnuts and coffee! Team Hydra then made a decision to turn our office lobby into a coffee shop. Poison is a collaboration between Hydra Design Group, the Tasteless Food Group (Le Petit Soufflé, Scout's Honor, Wrong Ramen) and La Marzocco.

**Tell us about the name. Why 'Poison'?**

It's a visual pun. If you look back to Greek mythology, Hydra (that serpent-headed slain by Hercules) had poison in its mouth. Also, the food we serve aren't exactly good or healthy for the body (laughs). That said, you can be sure that we serve only doughnuts and coffee of the highest quality.

**How do you decide on the flavors of the donuts?**

**Who makes up your taste test team?**

The flavors are conceptualized by pastry chefs Miko Aspiras and Kristine Lotilla of the Tasteless Food Group. The taste tests were done within Hydra. It can get crazy sometimes because people's taste profiles are so different. It's maddening to get a consensus from such a diverse group but it was also lots of fun!

**Since Poison is on soft opening (upon writing), we're assuming that the full menu isn't out yet. What should we watch out for?**

You'll want to try our tasty egg sandwiches (the sriracha and egg combo is one to watch!), cold-brew concentrate, and some exciting new doughnut flavors are in the works!

**With all the other giant doughnut shops out there, was it scary to start your own? And what would you say sets you apart from the big chains?**

Starting things will always involve moments of uncertainty and apprehension, but things won't get done if one gave in to the fear. Hydra was a leap into the unknown, Poison is no different. Poison is an experiment we're willing to take a chance on. As for the competition, we're here to offer an experience patrons won't get anywhere else. We've said goodbye to café clichés and opted for a dark, neon-lit space that feels more steampunk than French bistro. We also made the main product unique, our dough is different. It's sourdough-brioche, and as far as I know, we're the first doughnut shop in the Philippines to use it. Trust me, it makes all the difference. It makes the doughnut more filling with interesting textures. We also tout unique flavors that you won't find in your run-of-the-mill doughnut places, all hand-made and with natural ingredients. ●



Entrance to Poison Coffee and Doughnuts (Photo from @poisondoughnuts)  
**Right:** Interiors straight from a dystopian sci-fi movie complete with purple neon lighting and industrial furniture pieces await at Poison Coffee and Doughnuts. (Photographed by Patricia Herbolario)

Poison Coffee & Doughnuts, The Alley at Karrivin Plaza  
2316 Chino Roces Ext., Makati **Instagram:** @poisondoughnuts

Looking good is only half the equation. It's always a stab in the back (pocket) whenever you foot the pricey bill for an IG-ready snack only for it to underdeliver. Not cool.





## PALATE

# STRESSED TO IMPRESS

What does it take to impress Filipino millennial diners this 2018?

WORDS *Rina Caparras* IMAGES *Lidye Petit and Ali Inay of Unsplash*

Ever since I got old enough to venture on my own, I've prioritized eating out. If I showed you my expenses tracker, you'd see that 40% of my income goes to restaurants. The same is true for my peers. Food has become the center of millennial culture. If we're not at trendy restaurants or speakeasy bars, we're at third-wave coffee shops or our neighboring food parks.

It's no surprise, then, that restaurants are targeting our demographic. We belong to a generation that's connected to social media 24/7, spending most of our time ogling at pictures of food. We have food apps that let us book reservations with a single click, as well as Uber to take us to places in the most inconvenient locations. We have countless resources that enable us to eat wherever and whenever we want to.

But how do you make millennials happy? What will make us flock to restaurants over and over again?

First, know that we don't enjoy Instagram food as much as you might think we do. By Instagram food, I mean food that is wonderful to look at but is often overpriced, unhealthy and unremarkable taste-wise. At its worst, it's selling us something we can get any day for a really low price, like raindrop cakes, which is basically just gelatinous water. At its best, it gives us something interesting to post on social media, as well as something delightful to drink/eat at least once, and never again, like unicorn frappés.

I'm not saying people should stop aspiring to make food that looks good. But average diners like me can't

eat our Instagram likes. Only influencers can live off the number of likes they get on Instagram.

For most of us, our food should make sense. After we've posted images of our gorgeous but ridiculous shake, topped with pretzels, popcorn, cotton candy, popsicles, and other things, will we go and buy it again? Unlikely.

We look for food that goes back to the basics; food that has well-balanced flavors and reasonable servings. It doesn't even have to be trendy food. Mama Lou's has proven that timeless classics like Truffle Mac and Cheese and Seafood Ogllo can sell when executed perfectly and consistently. The long lines in front of Silantro would also attest to this fact.

We look for food that's effortlessly gorgeous, like ramen, dim sum, pasta and tacos. All would make lovely additions to our Instagram feeds but would also satisfy us again and again, once we stop being mesmerized by the visual appeal of it all. Food, in order to succeed, should satisfy our palates and our appetites, not just our eyes. If we can enjoy food even without feeling the need to post it on Facebook or Instagram, that's the true sign that we loved our restaurant experience.

Find a balance between authenticity and uniqueness. Filipino millennials are a well-traveled bunch. With just a few clicks, we can book trips to anywhere in Asia, the USA, Europe, and South America. While it's rare for a lot of us to be venturing abroad three to four times a month, most of us travel out of the country at least once or twice a year.



"No one take a bite just yet!  
Now Jamie, it's your turn to be  
the hand model!"



**“To be honest, despite having a more critical eye for aesthetics and branding, people from our generation are not that much different from anyone else who eats.”**

What does this mean for our local food scene? It means that you have to strike a balance between authenticity and uniqueness. If a restaurant is too authentic, it risks offering us something that's too identical to whatever we can get (for probably a cheaper price) in another country we could just visit when we're on vacation. Of course, there are still exceptions: Ogawa, Ji Fan Lah!, La Spezia and Ye Dang all offer awesome experiences. But to be truly unforgettable, you must be able to put your own creative spin on the dishes.

The best example I can give is Ooma. While most restaurant groups are bringing in well-known concepts from Japan, Chef Bruce Ricketts boldly creates his own cuisine using Japanese techniques and ingredients. His food is not something you can easily find in Japan or anywhere else in the country. That makes him one of the few standout chefs whose name regular diners like me know by heart.

Know that the higher you build yourself up, the harder you fall. It's common nowadays to see restaurants marketing themselves in the Philippines as if they were the biggest and the brightest in the countries they were from. Some brandish Michelin stars, others go on telling us how many branches they have worldwide. While it's true that these things will truly pique our curiosity

and lead us to walk through a restaurant's doors, it may also prompt a heated rant from people who were disappointed.

What I'm trying to say is that a restaurant's online reputation among millennials is actually more powerful than the number of accolades it has received from an elite circle of critics worldwide. Millennials listen to people who can relate to their experience: fellow millennials. Food review sites like Zomato or Facebook groups like the Masarap Ba? community have enabled every millennial who has a stable Internet connection to voice out their honest opinions about the food they've eaten. And the worst thing to do to millennials is to ignore their opinions. Listen to their feedback, analyze what to act on and what to brush off, and then make the necessary improvements.

All of these points lead me to conclude that when it comes to our millennial eating habits, it's easy to be confused. It's easy to believe that Instagram food charms us and that critical acclaim sways us. To be honest, despite having a more critical eye for aesthetics and branding, people from our generation are not that much different from anyone else who eats. In the end, we're all just looking for the basics: well-balanced flavors, a touch of creativity, warm service and good value for our money. ●

To read more of Rina's articles on the Filipino food scene, visit her website at Manila Food Crawl [www.manilafoodcrawl.com](http://www.manilafoodcrawl.com) or follow her on Instagram [@manilafoodcrawl](https://www.instagram.com/manilafoodcrawl).

PALATE



What you hear is as important as what  
you see in a coffee shop

**WORDS** *Patricia Herbolario*

**Manila, January 2018 — “It’s a pretty simple argument,” Eric Flanagan points out, sipping his coffee straight up black while we’re in this coffee shop in Makati City, Philippines.** “Commune does it pretty well,” the filmmaker adds. Eric is an American director, writer, and professor who has been residing in Manila for a couple of years now and finds one detail in local coffee shops that is often overlooked. No, it’s not the coffee quality or the interiors. It’s one of those miniscule details that have such a huge effect: the music.

### **Coffee and Creating an Atmosphere**

In a city where coffee is considered fuel by some and sacred to even more, coffee shops aren't just places to get your caffeine fix. Cafés are spots, happy places, respites from busy city living. They are places to unwind, somewhere to finish a paper, or have a first date in.

You see the interiors. You inhale the scent of roasted beans. You touch the suede chairs. You taste the coffee. You hear one of Taylor Swift’s ultra poppy songs from *Reputation*. No, there is nothing wrong with the new Taylor but, yes, there is a disconnect.

It’s great that more local businessmen are noticing the importance of creating a visual ambiance. So you have better and well-designed spaces, the perfect backdrop to your mochaccino. However, it shouldn’t stop there. While cafe owners value what pendant lamp to match with that accent chair, they sometimes forget that playing the Top 40 will not make sense with their aesthetic. “It’s a sloppy marriage of what you see and what you hear,” Eric adds.

### **The Starbucks Effect**

Eric cites Starbucks as one of the chains who see the value in curating playlists. “I’m sure they have a whole department dedicated to it,” he states. And yes, the world’s largest coffee chain has Holly Hinton and David Legry curating their music for almost 20 years now. If you think about it, how many times have you gone to a Starbucks and wondered “what song is playing?” If you have, then Holly and David have done their jobs successfully. The music curators shared in an interview that their goal is that moment you ask yourself what that song’s title is. Luckily, Starbucks has partnered with Spotify so you can track the song title and who sang it.

### **The Coffee Shop Playlist Syndrome**

“It’s as if Spotify had a playlist called third wave coffee shop and they’re all playing that,” Flanagan adds and even cites shops that play the same music. If you check Spotify right now, there actually is a playlist called “your favorite coffee

shop” which does remind you of your typical coffee shop. There’s some indie folk in there, some mellow jazz, and sure, a decent cover of some Top 40 Hit. “It’s almost like they all copied off each other,” he rolls his eyes. However, the director sees Spotify as a “net positive because it connects you to the new stuff and it helps you create.” It’s all in the hands of the cafe owners and managers on how they can use it to help design an environment further, not just hitting you visually but also emotionally.

### **Hang the DJ**

Some coffee shops and restaurants actually care to curate their playlists. Eric cites restaurants and cafes in New York and other places in the world will actually pay DJs to create a playlist for them, and for different times of the day.

Locally, Sunnies Café does this. They have a playlist for the morning, afternoon, and night—all available on Spotify. Because obviously, the music you’d want to hear while drinking coffee will be different from the music you’d want to hear over a *Skinny Bitch* sangria.

### **For the Love of 80s Night**

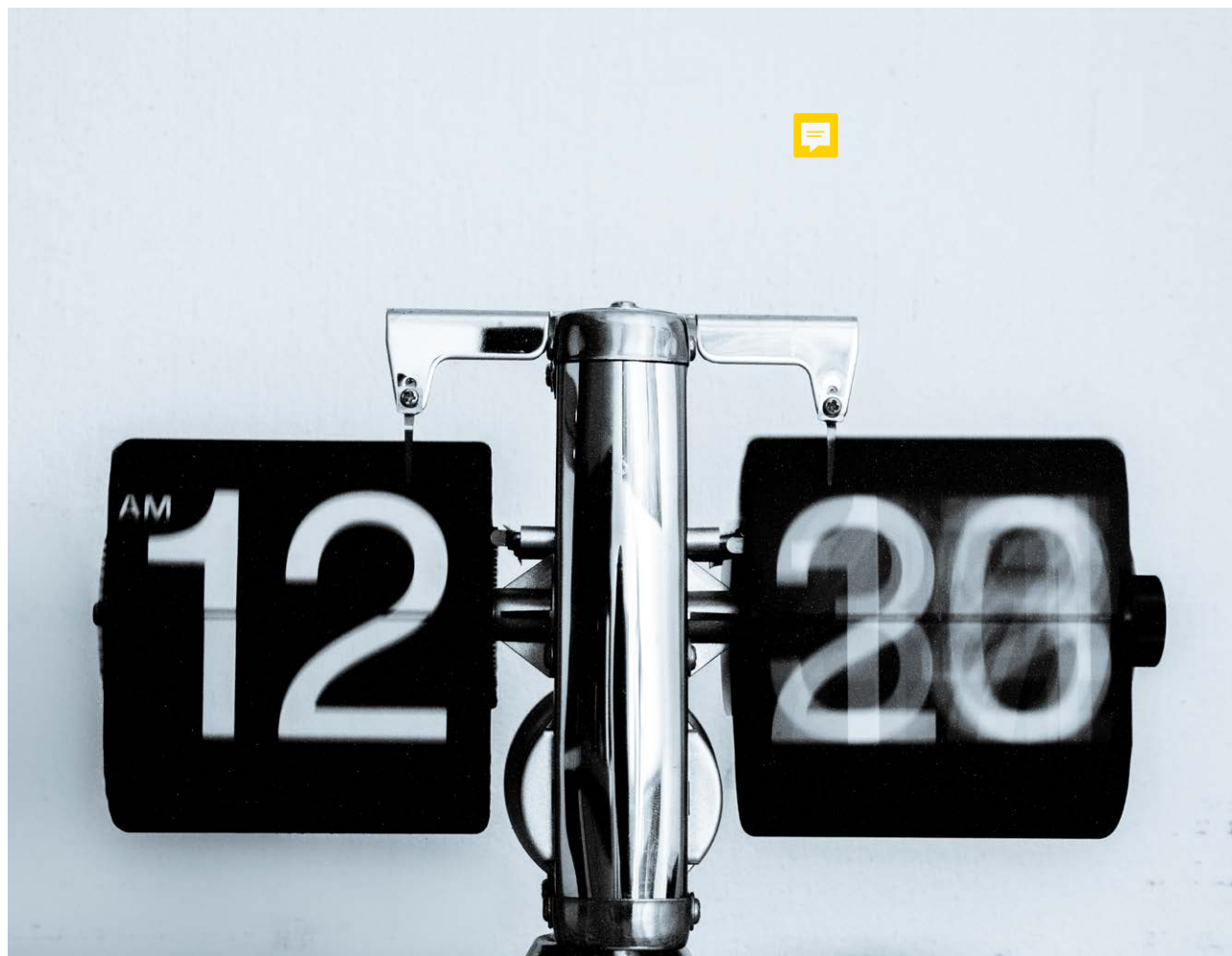
However, the argument stands be it in a café, a fashion store, or a jewelry shop. You wouldn’t play some Frank Sinatra in Salad Stop or Chance the Rapper in Yardstick. Music, with or without lyrics, will affect your mood and experience of a space. “In places like New York, where there’s so many bars, there’s not a huge difference from bar to bar. If you turn on all the lights, all those places look the same, the fucking liquor selection is the same, everything’s the same. But you go to one bar over the other because it’s 80s night here, or it’s reggae night there, or it’s a lounge bar that plays jazz. It’s the experience of the music that is different. And that’s proof that music is important,” Eric points out.

### **Music Matters**

While there is no study that proves a café playlist can boost sales, it can help a café deliver on that experience they want customer to feel. While one can argue that people flock to cafés because of the coffee, most local coffee shops are actually supplied by the same roasters. What makes you want to go to one is probably the good reviews and the interiors. What makes you stay can be a good conversation or a deadline you’re racing. But what makes you feel the space is the music.

“The musical experience of a place should be taken as seriously as any design element and irresponsible not to do it,” Eric cites. “When you go into a space and you’re trying to create an experience, music is the most emotional way to connect with people—immediately!” the director expounds. ●

Follow Pat @[littlemissteapat](#) and visit [littlemissteapat.com](#) for her insights on life, design, and food.



Photography by Loic Djim (Unsplash)

VOX

# Pulses of Time

Be responsible for every moment, as it happens

**WORDS** *Jay Asiddao*

**“If living life is an active choice, then experience is its fuel, and there is no other time to experience one's life than now.”**

**At the time of writing, the holidays are right around the corner.** Everybody is looking forward to Christmas and excited for the prospects of the New Year. We are always eager with thoughts of new beginnings, about leaving the unsavory things in the past and starting anew.

But this is only because we see time as a series of linear events. One event after another, and then another, and then another, and then the end.

When one particular event is traumatic and painful, we tend to want to move onto the next. We fast forward, struggling to shake it off, until the series of (unfortunate) events are behind us; too far away down the line for us to see, or remember.

When we see time as linear, or a chain, it's easy to see running from our problems or keeping them out of sight as a viable solution. We bury our struggles more and more, we forget about it and hopefully it solves itself.

What if we saw time differently? What if we saw time in a way that forced us to be responsible for every moment that came to us?

What if time wasn't linear?

This was exactly how French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas thought.

Levinas saw something fundamentally unique about how we view time and how we experience it. We look back to the past in somber nostalgia or recollection, and we anticipate the future with great expectation.

We forget that we do both contemplations in the here and the now. We often forget the present in

reverence of the past and in fear of the future. This paralyzes us because in the present, we feel helpless that we cannot affect time that has passed and we are uncertain about the future.

However, Levinas reminds us that our experience is not confined to neither the past or future; it is here, it is now. If living life is an active choice, then experience is its fuel, and there is no other time to experience one's life than now. To experience is an action. While it is contained in the past, it is frozen and cannot be affected. The opposite is true for the future, where experience is a total void.

We must remember that our opportunity to experience life is always fleeting because the opportunity disappears almost as soon as it arrives.

The loveliest analogy Levinas gives us is that our present is a heartbeat, a pulse. It is constant only as long as you are living. Every pulse is a call to live, decide, and act. This is the heartbeat of your existence; it is ever present. Of course, he is not proposing to forget the past and race to the future. Consider it a call to action. The time to reflect on the past is now; the time to prepare for the future is now. This allows us to escape the paralysis of regret and fear by simply acting because every pulse is a new beginning. Simply put, he is telling us not to wait and not to wallow.

So dear reader, I'd like to thank you for sharing a pulse of your present with me. At the end, a new pulse emerges. Take what you've read, and ask yourself "what will you begin?" ●



LOCATION *Aurora, Philippines*

# Parting Shot

A VISUAL ENDNOTE

By Jedd Sy

Soon after my cancer diagnosis, I went on a trip to Aurora, wanting to witness the magical sunrise there. The weather wasn't particularly cooperative, and it was raining heavily. Refusing to sulk, I waited out and hoped for the rains to ease up. Slowly, as if on cue, the clouds began to part, revealing a sunrise that blossomed into a full prism of colors. At that moment, in the midst of the outburst of beauty and emotions, I felt that everything will be okay, and that somehow, everything will fall into place.

For more on Jedd and his street photography, or for shoots or lessons, contact him on Instagram [@jeddsy](#)



