

Interview with Theo Rosendorf, owner of Matador

1- Tell us a little about yourself. How did you become a Graphic Designer?

I started in the early 90's with pencils and paper, drawing whatever. There were many days and nights spent at the local photocopy shop. All this led to my producing absolutely terrible designs for local small businesses.

I didn't become a proper graphic designer until I realized typography was the single most important aspect of the trade. This happened when I was setting financial tables for Coca-Cola's 1996 online annual report.

Jump to the present: I recently wrote The Typographic Desk Reference (TDR) <<http://bit.ly/171B4e>>, a dictionary of typographic terms and form. The TDR's in its third printing and we're hoping to start translations before long. At the moment, we're on the hunt for a European publisher. As for my design practice, I now work as a design consultant for my company Matador <<http://bit.ly/dB7soS>>.

2 - I've read you work from home, is it true? How is your routine? I see you have big clients. Have you faced any resistance from clients because of that?

I do typically work at home but I rarely get resistance from clients for it. I think it's important to point out that some things can't be done from home. If you're to direct a client's design team, you have to go on-site. If the client is intimately involved in the design process, meeting face-to-face may be the only way to do it. When a client requests I come to their office, I always honor the invitation, but subsequent on-site meetings are rare since my own design team is typically composed of people in multiple cities. At the moment I'm working on projects with talent in Atlanta, Berlin, and New York City.

My average day:

11:00 Breakfast + coffee + news + email
01:00 Work
02:30 Eat
03:00 Work
04:00 Conference call
05:00 Work
06:00 Eat
06:30 Conference call
07:30 Work
09:00 Gym
11:00 Eat
12:00 Email + strategy + administrative work

3 - Tell a little about your creation process.

Number one: work to get the client and myself on the same page so we're all working for the company's (or product's) success. I counsel the client to avoid their becoming emotionally attached to concepts.

All graphic design starts and ends with content. The content and the visuals have to support one another, else you'll end up with a parody. It's amazing just how many design solutions can be had through copyediting.

Ask stupid questions. Seriously. I try to get at the most effective, most equitable angle of the concept. First I begin by looking at the client's sector to see what not to do. Then I find what can stand on its own as different and exploit that angle. All this requires a very different way of looking at things. Asking stupid questions works well for me.

Typography. It's simple enough: bad designers don't know how to set type. My business is acutely focused on typography.

Know when to break the rules.

Know when your own ideas are bad.

4- How is the life of a designer in USA? Are people and companies really aware of the relevance of Design?

I pay little attention to what other graphic designers are doing, but I do believe there is a bit of public design education currently happening. As more designers enter the market, some would complain of homogenization, but it's important to note that overall quality also gets raised. What's considered shoddy today was professionally done yesterday. It's no longer just a handful of design superstars, but a global army of design professionals. People and companies in the US are absolutely aware of the relevance of design because design is now a force to be reckoned with.