

Creative Questionnaire: Steven Levesque

by Justin Kerr, September 2009



Steven Levesque is an award-winning exhibit and retail designer and fellow RISD alumnus. He graduated in 1990 with a BFA in Industrial Design and is currently the VP of Creative for [Bella Group Design Solutions](#) in Coppell, Texas.

Current Project:

Shopping center kiosks. It's a competitive project. We compete against other businesses with our designs in order to win the manufacturing business. That's the way it works in this retail area as with our custom exhibit work. We do custom trade show exhibits. We don't talk about the projects until it's all finalized. It's a serious endeavor so we keep our projects hush-hush until we win or lose.

First step in my design process:

I look long and hard at the environment where our kiosks will reside. I ask the customer many questions. I start to sketch ideas as tiny thumbnails.

Aspect of design I give the highest priority:

We have to think of something clever that we can do with the design so that we will stand out in the crowd.

Method for overcoming creative block:

You just have to put the time in. I just keep sketching ideas and thinking of things and it comes. It's also smart to take a look around you to see what other people have done.

There's lots of ways around the problem. Sit down with a group, start off with some key words and have a little brainstorming session. Ask other people you work with what they envision as a solution.

You just have to get started somewhere and as long as you focus and put the time in, it will happen. Don't put in too much time if it's not going anywhere. There is always one great trick for this. Go to bed and looking at it again tomorrow. It will look different tomorrow.

To be honest I don't ever have a creative block anymore when I have enthusiasm. Sometimes it's just getting up the energy.

One typical myth about design:

The belief that firstly you have to design to impress other designers, friends, and peers. When you can impress everybody, now you've really done something.

Most challenging aspect about design:

Winning a competition against other talented designers.

Most underrated aspect of design:

The filtering process.

At first you just want to make your own creations. You want ownership. As you mature you learn to listen to what other people have to say. People say a lot of things so you learn to filter it out. When you can listen to the ideas from others and still lead your own project, now you are getting somewhere. You still have to make the final decision on what gems to keep and what to politely ignore.

When I first knew I wanted to be a designer:

High School. I came from a great high school art program. I once saw a book of marker renderings from an industrial designer and that was it for me. Never turned back. I think it was copying the style and techniques of automotive renderings that hooked me. As well I was always looking for an advantage in life. I could really draw well so I thought I better do something that involves drawing. I thought my life would be easier that way. I have to admit it made some things easier.

Inspirations:

I like clever, funny, surprising things. I like that giant topiary puppy by Jeff Koons he did in Bilbao in 1992. I once created a giant topiary cell phone for Nokia and it was basically inspired by that.

Bob Dylan. I know it's music, but, the way he knocked everyone over with his ideas in his writing had a powerful impression on me when starting out with my own ideas.

Favorite tool:

I use a papermate black ball point pen with a light gray marker. I smear the backgrounds and they look purple. I love that.

Favorite design resource:

Other people. I like brainstorming sessions using word association and other techniques. I just like getting a lot of energy in the room and blurting out a bunch of ideas, but with structure.

The one typeface for a deserted island stay:

I'm not really a graphic designer, but, I guess I would say Meta. A longtime favorite.

Bookmarks:

Now who wouldn't want a [giant baby robot that shoots fire?](#)

[Car Design News](#)

[Guggenheim, Bilbao](#). Just a great building.

[Solar ink](#). I love this stuff. It's developing.

Design-related book I highly recommend:

[Industrial Design](#) by Harold Van Doren, 1940. It's absolutely old-school and not an ounce of nonsense. "When drawing a cube, make it a little taller than wide. You need to compensate or it won't look like a cube. It will look squat."

Currently reading:

I'm reading a Times best seller called [Dark Mission](#). It's about NASA. It's heavy on conspiracy and hyper-dimensional physics.

Life Lesson

A really good drawing can always save your ass in almost all situations.

If I weren't a designer, I'd be...

I guess I would like to clean up and renovate things. Perhaps that means I'd be flipping old houses. I like old things like old guitar amplifiers.

Favorite (non-design) past time:

I had a band at RISD called The Lunch. I still play guitar.