

Ten Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me 12 Years Ago

A n n H o u l d - W a r d

1. Learn to find a strong personal center to calm you during both feast and famine. There will always be too much work or not enough work freeloancing.
2. Realize that, as you achieve, it will always seem you are at the bottom. As you climb, you enter a new group that is already established and working within itself. So a major "break" may be followed with a year or more of no equal quality work.
3. Determine what is the base of your own design aesthetic, even though people will always question it (especially under pressure). If you have an artistic foundation that you start from and believe in, it may change with life experiences but it will always be there when critics or fellow collaborators begin to question you. It will also allow you to question yourself.
4. Call yourself (at least interiorly) an artist rather than thinking of yourself as merely a conceiver of plans. Be someone whose conception and execution is governed by imagination.
5. Find within your profession friends and mentors with whom you can share your problems and successes. They will be the sounding board for troubled times and will help establish your life as well as career criteria.
6. Always present a project to yourself in such a fashion that you are the one choosing whether or not to be involved. You are expected to be an active member of the team that creates the artistic statement. If the circumstances—intellectually or physically—will not allow you to contribute, the project would better belong to someone who can create in the circumstances.
7. Care for yourself just like an athlete. Your body and brain are what will go on creating and imagining for you. You must take time to exercise and rest, physically, artistically and emotionally.
8. Find other things to care about and react to. You must read and study the world about you. This is where your response as an artist and your responsibility begin: If you are to create, you must open yourself to the world.
9. Recognize that what you ask of those around you who share your life will be equally as difficult as what you ask of yourself. The circumstances of our profession dictate that, as we move from pillar to post, there must be a lot of clean up work that comes after us.
10. Accept the fact that, as a collaborative artist, you will spend huge amounts of your time alone, either at the drawing table or in a hotel thousands of miles from home. Learn to enjoy being alone and utilize each place and time for what can be gained toward becoming a broader person. Every place has something to teach you.