The Mindful Designer will break everything by going beyond the surface behind, beneath, and between the comps because we used to build forts and your brain on creativity understands the potential impact of design and that it moves.
3. Editorial
SIMON COLLISON

4–5. Speakers (Biographies)

6. Topics

7. Workshops

9. Schedule

10. Why Designers are Time Travellers
CHRISTOPH RAUSCHER

11–14. Interview #01
WITH FRANK CHIMERO, DENISE JACOBS AND TRENT WALTON

16–17. Design is the conscious effort to impose a meaningful order
ALEX FOWKES

19–21. Interview #02
WITH DAN MALL, CAMERON KOCZON AND TRAVIS SCHMEISSE

23–25. Interview #03
WITH BEN BODIEN, NAOMI ATKINSON AND ROBBIE MANSON

26–27. Sponsors

28. Attendees

29. Colophon & Credits

31. Conference Map

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One wet afternoon in April, I was sat in The Gladstone with my good friend and collaborator Greg Wood — making light work of pale ales — when the conversation came around to New Adventures. Despite the success of the first event, I’d pretty much decided not to do it again. I was proud of the conference, and it’d been great fun to put together, but logistically dealing with PayPal had threatened the whole event, and I couldn’t imagine jumping through those hoops again. Besides, it was a unique day so maybe it should stand as a one-off.

Greg seemed surprised. Even so, I wasn’t for turning. It was at this point that he convinced me to stay, for yet more beer, and over the next hour or so I was brainwashed. Initially I resisted, knowing I couldn’t do it alone this time around but he was more than happy to offer his help. And so that was that, and here we are. In fact, Greg’s responsible for many key aspects of this whole event, and you’re only here today because of him. If that makes you happy, be sure you give him credit. He won’t welcome it, so please do it to annoy him.

Reflecting on 2011

In last year’s paper, I described New Adventures as an experiment, and an opportunity to facilitate discussion, ask questions, and seek outcomes. The response was wonderful, and in some ways we succeeded. Yet, in other ways perhaps we failed. On the day, discussion was limited, the Q&A was hard work, and we made a few mistakes.

However, I do think we found outcomes, and it was incredibly rewarding to see ideas resonate beyond the Albert Hall and out across the industry. It’s likely that these topics would have found traction without New Adventures but we created the platform and it was a thrill to see ideas such as Mark Boulton’s New Canon, and Dan Rubin’s explorations into web vocabulary permeate other events and publications throughout 2011.

Above all, what hit me the most was the generosity of all involved, and I don’t just mean the speakers, sponsors, suppliers, or volunteers; each vital component of this whole circus, to whom we are extremely grateful. No, I’m referring specifically to you, the attendees. Everyone who bought a ticket invested in us, trusted us, and wanted the thing to work. That alone is reason to do it all over again. Look around you this year and again we have great support from across the UK, but also folks have travelled from all corners of Europe, yet more from the States, and even one from Australia (do say hello to Kylie).

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I was fortunate to travel a lot myself last year, and everywhere I went people would ask about New Adventures. That we could fill a hall in a provincial English city and have people take notice across the industry is incredible. Many speakers really want to come here and share their ideas with you, but we’ve again been very careful about who we invite to take our stage. There’s a mix of established and new presenters, many flying in especially for the event, and we’re very excited with the content we have for you. Our speakers have worked incredibly hard to match, and hopefully exceed, your expectations and they’re also super-nice, so don’t be afraid to catch them for a quick chat.

Last year, I also wrote about how valuable conferences treat audiences with great respect, assuming a level of shared knowledge, with talks that make attendees work a bit harder; the full impact not necessarily hitting us until days, weeks or months later. For the most part, I think we achieved that last year, but there’s always room to take things up a notch.

Alongside the talks, there are a few nice surprises, and new events in the program. We’ve introduced workshops for deeper learning and sharing of ideas. Also, most of the speakers will be available after their talks for Q&A in smaller groups, so you have the chance to get a little closer and ask your burning questions directly.

Ultimately we want you to get real value for your ticket, so, alongside all of that we’ve again got the incomparable Erskine Bowling, the inaugural Frootball championships, screen printing classes and, last but not least, there’s the world’s best after-party. For those of you who are coming along on your own, remember that web conferences are truly very friendly, and the social side is arguably just as important as the presentations. We hope you’ll go home having made a bunch of new friends, just as we will.

And finally

Finally, we know you loved the newspaper, and we wanted to try something different this year. So, instead of articles, we’ve collaborated with our speakers to bring you three in-depth interviews covering a broad spectrum of mind explosions. Huge thanks to each and every one of them for giving up their time whenever I cracked the whip and asked for more.

So, welcome to Nottingham and thanks for joining us. We want New Adventures to feel fresh, relevant, and be full of opinion. Just like you, we need to feel excited and energised by web design, and start our year with a myriad of reasons to embrace creativity and strive to make meaningful things.

I know that when I take to the stage at 9.30am to kick things off, I’ll look out at 650 very good reasons and realise that Greg was right after all. I’m glad you’re all here.
Naomi Atkinson

Naomi is a designer and illustrator passionate about creating beautiful, intuitive user experiences for the web and mobile. Active in the design industry for almost a decade, she has held senior positions at three leading brand, web, and advertising agencies in London with world-renowned clients such as Audi, British Telecom, Macmillan Cancer Support, and Aviva. She’s a regular contributor to .net magazine, been branded as a Rising Star by Design Week, and awarded The Next Big Thing at The Critters.

An avid photographer and gallery-goer, Naomi is co-founder of web animation startup Animatable, runs her own design studio in Newcastle upon Tyne, and always wears a coat in winter.

@NAOMISUSI

Frank Chimero

Frank Chimero is a designer, illustrator, and author. He makes pictures about words and words about pictures. He’s been recognized by Print Magazine as a New Visual Artist and the ADC as a Young Gun. His work revolves around storytelling, wit, creative process, and visual experience, and he is the author of a book called The Shape of Design. He doesn’t know where he’s going, but he’s on his way.

@FCHIMERO

Denise Jacobs

Denise Jacobs adores being a Speaker, Author, Consultant Web Design Trainer, and Creativity Evangelist. Denise wrote The CSS Detective Guide and is a co-author to Interact with Web Standards: A holistic approach to Web Design. Denise has also developed curricula for the Web Standards Project Education Task Force (WaSP InterAct) and was nominated for .Net Magazine’s 2010 Best of the Web Standards Champion award. She aspires to encourage more people from underrepresented groups to Rawk The Web.

@DENISEJACOBS

Cameron Koczon

His real name is Cameron Koczon but he goes by Fictive Cameron on the Internet. Cameron runs a web company called Fictive Kin based in Brooklyn, NY. They’re currently working furiously on an app called Gimme Bar which is, as they say, neato torpedo. He co-created a to-do list application called TeuxDeux and co-organizes a web conference called Brooklyn Beta. Cameron likes co-creating things because it’s more fun to work on amazing things with awesome people. He sometimes posts to his off-kilter blog. He smokes a pipe.

@FICTIVECAMERON
SPEAKERS (BIOGRAPHIES)

Dan Mall
Dan is an award-winning interactive art director and designer. He is an enthralled husband, soon-to-be dad, Art Director at Big Ship, former Interactive Director at Happy Cog, technical editor for A List Apart, co-founder of Typedia, and singer/keyboard player for contemporary-Christian band Four24. Dan writes about design and other issues on Twitter and his industry-recognized site. @DANIELMALL

Robbie Manson
Robbie is a designer based in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he creates interfaces at FreeAgent. Having started out as a one-man band before moving to a digital agency and now designing for a single application, he’s drank from the fiery chalice on both sides of the client/product divide. He takes care of the details, because he’s a good man, and thorough. @ROUGEBERT

Travis Schmeisser
Travis Schmeisser lives in Brooklyn, NY and is a Senior User Experience Designer for 80/20. He focuses on designing next generation products for the web, desktop, television, mobile and tablets with clients including Comcast, Skype, Vodafone, Motorola and Nokia. Travis maintains a personal site at rockthenroll.com and thinks there’s a very valid reason Springsteen is referred to as The Boss. @ROCKTHENROLL

Trent Walton
Trent Walton is founder and 1/3 of Paravel, a custom web design and development shop based out of the Texas Hill Country whose wife has put him on a font allowance. In his spare time, he writes about what he learns at his blog, and is co-creator of and contributor to TheManyFacesOf. @TRENTWALTON
**DAN MALL**

Design-ish: Behind, beneath, and between the comps

Great pixelcraft used to be the mark of a great designer. Now it’s barely cost of entry. Let’s investigate what the modern-day designer’s job really is and uncover some treasures more important than our Photoshop canvases.

**NAOMI ATKINSON**

Going Beyond

Being a true success in your art, industry, or day to day job requires pushing beyond what comes easily and naturally to you. It’s about making yourself stand out in an otherwise endless crowd of others striving for the same.

I’m going to look at how people stand tall in an industry distanced far from ours — the land of celebrity. What behaviors and patterns can we learn from their successes, and how can we bring this into our everyday work ethic?

**TRAVIS SCHMEISSER**

We Used to Build Forts

We’re one of the world’s most technically inclined, connected and creative industries, but we’ve lost a great deal of our sense of self expression within the craft. Let’s figure out how we can get that desire back and band together to create great experiences purely for the same reason we started creating things in the first place - because we have to.

**ROBBIE MANSON**

The Mindful Designer

We face a challenge: to ensure our design responses are informed more by our thinking than the tools we use. Absorbed by day-to-day execution, we can forget the importance of mistakes and accidents — of balancing intent with experimentation. Failure is valuable, provided we’re mindful of why. Embrace the unpredictable nature of everything, and stay mindful. It’s how we lace our actions with meaning.

**TRENT WALTON**

Break Everything

What value lies in pushing the web to the limits by looking beyond current convention and complete browser compatibility? By getting our hands dirty with things like web fonts, responsive web design, and experimental CSS properties we shape the current and future web. It’s time to embrace its everchanging nature, and, in the spirit of fearless ingenuity, break the web. We learn what works best by first trying everything that doesn’t work at all.

**CAMERON KOCZON**

The Potential Impact of Design

Design is at a moment of unprecedented attention, demand, and interest. Let’s talk realistically about the level of impact that design can have on the world and how the individual designer can take advantage of all this demand to drive big change. Spoiler alert: Every season of LOST after the first one is terrible.

**DENISE JACOBS**

Your Brain on Creativity

While creativity seems ethereal, mysterious and often capricious, there is a biological side of the creative process that underlies the sense of being animated by the divine. Creativity is not just a state of mind and soul, but is also complex symphony of neurobiology, neurochemistry, and neuroelectricity. What is happening inside our craniums, amongst the cortex, hemispheres, and neuroglia when we create? How does the science of the creative brain turn concepts of ways to approach things like work, order, serious concentration, focus, and productivity on their ears? If we better understand the brain on creativity, we can hopefully leverage it’s power for increased ideation, innovation, productivity, and flow.

**FRANK CHIMERO**

It Moves

What is the primary quality of great design? It moves. It moves us emotionally, it moves from person to person, it moves us forward toward something better. Designers shift like the trickster across the borderlands, tell productive untruths, then toil to make them reality. Design shifts like a shadow and moves the target, and when it does so well, the products of the design get passed on like a story and turn into a gift. Pass it on.
WORKSHOPS

Trent Walton

You already met Trent on the previous pages. Well, we’d like to add that he’s incredibly generous with his time, and eager to share. That’s why he’s also running a workshop at New Adventures, indulging in his love for type and creative typography on the web.

@TRENTWALTON

CONTROLLING WEB TYPOGRAPHY  
WITH TRENT WALTON

From the practical to the progressive, we’ll be taking a look at everything you can do with type on the web. Starting with a basic web font implementation, we’ll then dive into applying basic typographic principals as well as using CSS to target & visually enhance web type. And to be sure no stone is left unturned, we’ll also be implementing the Lettering.js and FitText jQuery plugins to gain to-the-letter control responsively. Bring your computer and be ready to dive into your HTML & CSS happy place!

Ben Bodien

Ben Bodien is Co-Founder of Neutron Creations and a front-end development specialist, and sometimes dabbler in interface design (when there are no grown-ups around to stop him). With employers and clients ranging from video game companies to hedge funds and from bedroom startups to publicly listed multinationals, he fears no design nor browser of this Earth, and with his help, neither will you.

@BBODIEN

FRONT-END CRAFTSMANSHIP  
WITH BEN BODIEN

Scientists project that by 2014, even household pets will be building their own websites (or at least blog themes)*. However, as the web evolves and clients and visitors demand more from the sites and apps we build, it becomes increasingly vital to ensure that we are crafting, not just assembling the web’s interfaces.

This workshop will teach practical techniques for crafting front-end code designed to be robust but flexible and maintainable (even by someone’s pet). Topics include defining a build and markup plan, tricks and tools for writing flexible, clean CSS, and proven methods for implementing responsive web designs from the ground-up, for both content and functionality.

* — May not be true

The Standardistas

Christopher Murphy and Nicklas Persson teach interactive design at the University of Ulster, Belfast, where they have been active in promoting a web standards-based curriculum for almost a decade. As tweed-clad duo The Standardistas they write and speak regularly on standards-based web design and the importance of improving web design education. Authors of the seminal beginners’ guide “HTML and CSS Web Standards Solutions – A Web Standardistas’ Approach”, they’ve written for a variety of publications, including 24 Ways and The Manual.

@STANDARDISTAS

PAPER IS YOUR FRIEND  
WITH THE STANDARDISTAS

Great designers have one thing in common: their design process is centered on ideas; ideas that are more often than not developed on paper. This workshop, delivered in the tried and tested Standardistas’ style®, explores the importance of paper prototyping as a critical, though often overlooked, stage in the design process. We explore a number of questions, including: How do you get ideas in the first place? How do you capture these ideas and turn them into real, tangible design prototypes? (and) How do you create original designs that that aren’t mere carbon-copies of the most recent (1% noise) design trends.

Using nothing more than pen and paper the Standardistas will show you how to revolutionise your design process that saves time, money and heartache.
Friday 20th January
Kick-off at 1 pm

Five-a-side football tournament, raising money for the fine folks at the RSPB.

Come along and cheer for our teams of unfit geeks, including Netscape United, Camp Nou Adventurers, N.A Galaxy and many more.

Forest Recreation Ground,
Gregory Boulevard, NG1 6HH

Catch a tram to The Forest stop. Or grab a taxi or bus. It’s only a mile from town.

Follow the fun @fr00tball
**SCHEDULE**

**WEDNESDAY 18TH JANUARY**

**WORKSHOPS AND WARM-UP**

0800  Registration
0900  Workshops
2000  Erskine Bowling

**THURSDAY 19TH JANUARY**

**THE CONFERENCE**

0830  Registration
0930  Opening remarks

0945  Design-ish:  
     *Behind, beneath, and between the comps* ....  Dan Mall
0950  Going Beyond  
     *..............................*  Naomi Atkinson

1115  Refreshments  
Sponsored by Hoefler & Frere-Jones

1145  We Used to Build Forts  
     .............................  Travis Schmeisser
1230  The Mindful Designer  
     .............................  Robbie Manson

1315  Lunch

1415  Break Everything  
     ..............................  Trent Walton
1500  The Potential Impact of Design  
     .............................  Cameron Koczon

1545  Refreshments  
Sponsored by Hoefler & Frere-Jones

1615  Your Brain on Creativity  
     .............................  Denise Jacobs
1700  It Moves  
     .............................  Frank Chimero

1745  Closing remarks
2000  After-party at Escucha

**FRIDAY 20TH JANUARY**

**WORKSHOPS AND WIND-DOWN**

1300  Frootball
1000–1200  Screen printing workshop #1
1200–1400  Screen printing workshop #2
1730  Real Ale Walk
WHY DESIGNERS ARE

TIME TRAVELLERS

WE THINK IN THE
FUTURE

WE CREATE IN THE
PRESENT

WE LEARN FROM THE
PAST
For the first of three interviews with New Adventures speakers, Simon Collison got together with Frank Chimero, Denise Jacobs, and Trent Walton to talk about teaching, collaboration, the way design moves, and the ebb and flow of the web. So, grab a cuppa and strap yourselves in: it’s a big one.

SIMON: The three of you all teach, to some degree. What is it that matters to you about getting in front of people and sharing your ideas?

DENISE: I can’t help it. I like to share stuff. I like to help people. So, if there’s anything that I feel like I’ve captured or come across that’s gonna somehow help somebody else in some way, then I want to talk about it and share it. It’s a big part of the fabric of who I am.

There’s almost this very strange paradox of selfishness and selflessness about pursuing something which you’re passionate about. When you find out that you’re good at something and you enjoy it, there’s a kind of selfish pleasure from engaging in that activity. And one of the things I think is really important is that engaging in that kind of selfishness. You then become selfless because you’re really helping people, like a form of service to give back to people this wonderful gift you’ve been given.

SIMON: It’s an excellent compulsion! Frank, you teach students on a regular basis. Do you learn things about yourself by doing that?

FRANK: Yeah. I initially started teaching because my mentor retired, and he didn’t like any of the candidates for his job, so I kinda slipped in and played dress-up-like him for a year! That was a really nice experience. One of the reasons I feel compelled to teach is because I enjoy being a student, and once you start to teach you sorta figure out that it’s not a one-way bridge of information; it’s actually a back-and-forth — conversational, at least in the way I run my classroom!

I get 15–20 hard-working people showing up every single day for class; working and chiselling away at problems that I think are interesting. It’s like I’m helping them but there’s a big selfish part of it, like Denise was saying. I don’t necessarily think that the benefits I get from it are the same as the students get from it. But the perks of being in an educational environment — a conference or a classroom — for the speaker, the teacher or students, their needs don’t need to be parallel; they just need to be complimentary. The best experiences I’ve had teaching and speaking were when it was a mess! Everyone’s interests were so complimentary, it was kind of hard to deduce who’s teaching who, and which way the information was moving, because it goes out and comes back in and weaves together.

SIMON: Trent, do you see it the same way? Distilling your inquiry to reach a conclusion that you feel comfortable sharing with others?

TRENT: Yeah, exactly. I have been doing a lot of just coding random things to see what breaks and how far I can push things, not because I need to for a client, but because when you are speaking or doing a workshop you feel you need a unique or higher level of mastery; you almost get nervous thinking “what if someone asks me about some component of JavaScript and you don’t have a good answer”. Mainly, it’s much more fun to have this environment where it’s conversational. You could write a blog post about something you did and receive comments, but it’s not the same as real-time sharing of information.

There’s almost this very strange paradox of selfishness and selflessness about pursuing something which you’re passionate about. When you find out that you’re good at something and you enjoy it, there’s a kind of selfish pleasure from engaging in that activity.

DENISE JACOBS
The enthusiasm comes across much easier in person than it does with an exclamation point in a blog post. That’s my favourite part about workshops; that you can get excited, talk fast, ramble and wave your hands around and show all these wonderful things that you discovered and see what other people think. That conversational energy level you get with other people is very attractive to me.

DENISE: I think it’s really interesting you say that because we work on the web and we do so much interacting through computers, but nothing can replace that excitement and energy you get from real-life and face-to-face environments.

TRENT: Yeah, like when you’re commenting on a blog, all people see is the goofy smile you have on your avatar. I can make so many more faces than that and when you’re in person so much more can be conveyed.

FRANK: Many of the ways we converse now are disembodied, so it’s actually nice to have a body there whether it’s being able to assess body language or facial expressions. Being able to have a physical proximity to someone is a valuable mechanism because it makes you feel you’re on the same team.

SIMON: That’s a feeling I have with good conferences. There’s a sense that everyone’s in it together. Do any of you consider yourself mentors?

DENISE: From my own standpoint, I believe really strongly in the mentoring relationship, and if anyone asks for guidance I’m happy to give it to the degree that I can. So if someone says they would like me as a mentor, I’d be flattered and I’d do it to the best of my ability, and put them on to whoever I thought maybe people there for the sanity check; to influence things and balance things out. I have been writing a book [The Shape of Design] by myself for about a year, and at this point I’m really close to finishing but I wish there was someone else to take it out from under my hands.

I really believe in collaboration and I feel I’ve been lucky enough that the times when I’ve done it it’s been really fruitful, but if you look at the body of work people know me for, most of it isn’t a collaboration in so far as the work itself. But it is very much a collaboration of the ideas and instigation behind it.

At this point in my career it’s like a mental collaboration about the process of getting to the point of understanding what the work is and what the work should do. But as far as executing it, I haven’t had a lot of instances in the last couple of years where doing the work has been a collaborative experience.

FRANK: Trent and Frank, you’ve collaborated on the Lost World’s Fairs project. Do you actively seek out collaborative projects, or would you rather work on your own.

FRANK: I have been working for myself for a decade and I think what I’ve learned is that I like working for myself but I rarely hate working by myself. It’s nice to have other people there for the sanity check; to influence things and balance things out. I have been writing a book [The Shape of Design] by myself for about a year, and at this point I’m really close to finishing but I wish there was someone else to take it out from under my hands.

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SIMON: Trent, do you up your game or find a greater reward from collaboration perhaps?

TRENT: It’s definitely a greater reward. There’s a challenge there but my favourite component to this is that morale seems to be such a huge part of the work that I do and the way I work, so it’s nice when I have a lot of time working with Dave and Reagan [at Paravel], whether one of us is doing a job with someone else or we’re all together, or bringing Frank in, the more people involved I feel there’s a really beautiful component about interpersonal relationships and how we’re doing, and realising that part of my role in many projects isn’t just “is everything turned in?”, “is everything set up, and are out deliverables set?” But also “How’s everybody feeling?” and “what is everybody thinking?” or “what is your perception on this?” and really at the end of the day, if you do that right, collaboration is a big party.

SIMON: Are you generally satisfied with the things you see being created for the web?

TRENT: The first thing that came into my mind is I have a 10-month old son named Henry, and he has this squinty face he makes when he wants to go somewhere or touch something which he hasn’t before or crawl somewhere he hasn’t been, and he’s super-pissed that he can’t
go somewhere yet when he’s prevented from doing so. I think that’s the proper posture or perception to have of the web; not to say that the work that we’re doing is not satisfactory, but that there’s always “what’s next?”. Everything is always evolving and changing fast. The reason why I like this job above all is that what we’re doing now is gonna be irrelevant, at least from a technical standpoint, in a year or so, maybe more if we’re lucky, and that constant lack of satisfaction and no-complacency there, is really what drives me. It’s always “what can we do better?” or “what do we need to make things work best?”.

SIMON: Are you satisfied, creatively yourselves? Does the ebb and flow of the web energise you all?

DENISE: On one hand it’s very exciting and on the other it’s very frustrating. I’m always experiencing a sense of amazement when I look at what’s being created and how quickly things change. Especially because I’m like the grand old mayor – I’ve been working on the web since 1997?

SIMON: I heard you were about… 64 now? You look good for 64!

DENISE: I’ll tell you guys my real age. Ready? I’m 43, and started working on the web in 1997, so I have seen a lot of change and a lot of progression. There’s so many things you just couldn’t do at all, for a number of reasons – browsers and specifications and languages etc. For me, it’s “wow!” I do get these moments where it’s exciting and awesome and I just don’t get a chance to sit down, so it’s kind of an interesting paradox. I like to see all the innovation and people just coming into it who are in their teens, and all of the innovative energy and awesome amounts of creativity they’re bringing to the table.

SIMON: How do you see it, Frank? In your talk at the Build conference last year, you were quick to acknowledge that you’re not a ‘web designer’, although you know the medium very well. What’s your perception?

FRANK: I think at this point, we all realise and accept the fact that the earth is going to continually shift under our feet. Whether our own personal disposition about how we handle information, or trends in front-end development like responsive design, but just getting to grips with the fact that everything’s going to move. There’s always going to be multiplicity in the number of shortcomings. So what I’m thinking about is “what’s the role of content on the web right now and how do we navigate a multiplicity?” and not just where devices always move and it’s unpredictable how the web site will be accessed, but also how do you deal with the instance where you can’t tell where the user is, and how do you deal with an instance where the user can’t tell the credibility of content based on how it works and how it thrives in a different environment and how it breaks. So everything moves, everything is connected, and what’s that word...everything is deeply inter-twangled.

What does that imply for us, not just those of us who make the stuff that’s so deeply networked, but those people who now have to live with it every day in every capacity?

SIMON: Complexity frightens people, but that’s what we have: a wonderfully complex network.

It’s weird to think that next to air, I consume more of the web than anything else, down to Skype conversations, emails, websites, Netflix, instant. It’s overwhelming to realise that every piece of my life is affected by the web!

SIMON: Trent, you’re really interested in making and breaking things with web type. At Faravel, you and Dave Rupert seem to solve type problems internally as a team, and then share great tools off the back of that.

TRENT: It’s funny you say internally as a team, because these are conversations where I’m like “Dave, what should we do? I need this to work!”. And he says “Well, it doesn’t happen that way”, and I reply “That’s bullshit, let’s figure something out”. And he’ll come back an hour later and says “Well, plug this in and see if it works”. So he is sort of my hero in many ways. It’s all about no limitations with what we can do with web fonts.

SIMON: Denise - your recent articles for A List Apart resonated with a lot of people, and I especially loved ‘Reigniting Your Creative Spark’. What’s the ethos behind that?

DENISE: It’s mostly being very aware of the creative process and your own personal creative process. When you’re very aware of something you can start to control it and guide it, and expand upon it. There was probably a point in time when you discovered you were a creative person.

There are levels of awareness – saying “OK I’m a creative person, and I do this stuff” and then going out in the world and doing things,
and then there’s up a level and saying “How am I creative?” and “how can I manipulate this so that I consistently get to the solutions and ideas that I want to?”. Where does it come from? What’s my brain doing when this happens? What’s the biochemistry happening behind this? You can take that information and leverage that. You find that “Oh, I can control that like I control my breathing”.

SIMON: Frank, your New Adventures presentation is something of a swan song. What is it in particular which excites you that you want to convey on the day?

FRANK: It’s gonna be one of my last talks of 2012. I think I’m most excited because it’s everything at once that I’ve been talking about for the last couple of years. It’s finally coming together into something that can make some sense in 40 minutes!

SIMON: It’s a conclusion of conclusions?

FRANK: Yeah, and the spoiler — the big conclusion — is that I’ve always been interested in what makes ‘good’ design good. And not necessarily what makes it aesthetically good, but what makes it work well, what makes people appreciate it, what makes it effective and what makes it special in its relationship to how it builds up culture and gives us all shared experiences.

The thing I’ve come to is that the way you measure how good it is, is by how much it moves. It starts out with the person making it and the movements they go through, so you can talk about practice and methodology and how it’s made — that’s an aspect of it. I think largely, though it’s what happens after the work is published and how it moves in that capacity and resonates with an audience. How does it stir something inside of the people it was made for; how well does it fit? And also, what do they do after they see it? Do they pass it on? Does it go somewhere? Do they share it?

The hunch that I’ve had, and I think all creative people have, is that there’s an extra value to our work other than the way we make pixels come up on the screen or to the extent that it makes dollars and cents shift from bank account to bank account. I think the way you get that is to look at the way that it moves.

SIMON: I’m going to wrap up with one final question. What ‘New Adventures’ do you hope to have in 2012?

TRENT: I really loved Brooklyn Beta, and a lot of the conversations I had were around building things that aren’t for clients. Things that we believe in personally or for the business. Lately we’ve not really put time aside to work on them, so we’ll be a bit more deliberate about that — building things that Dave, Reagan and I believe in. So more time for Paravel projects.

SIMON: Might we see more updates to ‘The Many Faces Of’?

TRENT: There’s gonna be a side component of that site coming up. It may or not be inspired directly by films like Police Academy.

DENISE: I’m really excited about the whole intersection of creativity, innovation and productivity, and ways of leveling up on that and making it better. It’s worked for the web design community but also how it’s something that’s really relevant for a lot of people in their own work, so I’m really excited about all of the great new concepts that are hopefully taken out of the ether and woven together and put into something that may be helpful for people.

SIMON: And finally, Frank. New Adventures for 2012?

FRANK: Well, I’m gonna publish a book in 2012. So I think this year my big adventure is to re-integrate with the world a little and come out of the cocoon and share what I’ve been working on and just keep my ear to the ground and see what happens, Because on the one hand you’ve got something that you’re incredibly proud of, but on the other hand it feels like you’ve scooped something out of yourself and there’s a space that needs to be filled up.

**LINKS**

FRANK CHIMERO  
http://frankchimero.com/

DENISE JACOBS  
http://denisejacobs.com/

TRENT WALTON  
http://trentwalton.com/

PARAVEL INC  
http://paravelinc.com/

LOST WORLD’S FAIRS  
http://lostworldsfairs.com/

THE MANY FACES OF...  
http://paravelinc.com/

THE SHAPE OF DESIGN  
http://www.shapeofdesignbook.com/

REIGNITING YOUR CREATIVE SPARK  
http://www.alistapart.com/articles/reigniting-your-creative-spark/

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On a cold night in December, three of New York’s finest minds — Dan Mall, Cameron Koczon, and Travis Schmeisser — joined Simon Collison to chat about the Big Apple, working with major clients, releasing products, and the need for more engaging and sensory experiences on the web.

SIMON: You’re all based in New York, but none of you are originally New Yorkers. What brought you there, and why is it such a crucial place to work from?

DAN: I’ve lived in Philadelphia for most of my life and I had the pleasure of working for some really big companies there. When I got married, my wife and I decided to take a chance, do something new together, and come to New York as a first adventure together in our marriage. I had admired Big Spaceship’s work for a long time and I got chatting with the CEO and founder, and our interests really aligned in the type of work I like to do and the direction he was moving the company. So I moved to NYC, and it’s been great.

CAMERON: I’d just started Fictive Kin after leaving a start-up, and having lived in San Francisco I’d wanted to move to NYC for some time. I knew design was an important part of what we were gonna be doing. At the time there wasn’t a lot of excitement around design and I figured more and better designers were in NYC than in San Francisco, which was heavier on the engineering side of things. I wanted to go to this place that would fit with what we’d be doing next.

When I first got to New York, I attended this panel featuring lots of well-known Italian designers, including Massimo Vignelli. They were each asked why they left Italy, and I loved Vignelli’s answer a lot. He said, “I left Italy because the ceiling was too low. In New York, there is no ceiling”. And I thought that was pretty cool. You know there’s unlimited potential around here.

TRAVIS: I always wanted to live in New York; in a bigger city, and at the time when I left my own company nGen I was moving away from just doing web work and looking at experience and application design. There were a lot of opportunities in New York, and I ended up getting the job I wanted.

SIMON: You all work with other people. What is it about collaborating that matters to you? Why is it a rewarding experience?

DAN: If I work by myself I’m limited, and that’s the best thing about working with others. The better the people I work with, the closer to limitless I become. Working with other people really lets you create things you couldn’t do individually, and things that they couldn’t do on their own, and I think there’s a lot of power in that.

CAMERON: I put Fictive Kin together for the same reasons. In the playground of the web you’ve got all this potential to make a huge impact and there’s no way you’re going to do it by yourself. You need to work with a group of people if you want to have a shot at testing the limits. One person working away at something is never going to be as good as a small team. But you don’t need a huge team to make a big impact. Look at Tumblr or Instagram, or Instapaper where Marco Arment is an example of one guy making a huge impact. I think there’s major gains to be had if you go from 1 to 6 or 10 or something and you can broaden a team of that size out really far I think.

TRAVIS: At 80/20 we’re still small, closer to 15 people, so it’s just a really nice, small environment and our projects are smaller. Everyone has to be something of a generalist and be able to touch all parts of the process, but there are people that are better at one thing than others or good at looking at certain problems in some way so its always nice to be teamed up with people, and I feel like I work a lot better than way. I definitely don’t think I’m any kind of silver bullet who has all the solutions.

CAMERON: Even if you have the silver bullet solution you couldn’t get it done fast enough to keep up. You really wanna be pushing things out quickly, so even if you were always 100% right in your intuition, the implementation side of that would be too slow if you were by yourself.

TRAVIS: Yeah, and it’s great when you are surrounded by such talented people that you get along with and work the same way. It’s amazing to be able to say “yeah, you make a decision”, then someone runs off with it and they come back and it’s often much better than you discussed or thought it would be.
CAMERON: To what extent is that part of the agency appeal? Did moving into these incredible environments and the scale of clients attract you? Did it live up to your expectations?

DAN: It was definitely about the big clients. I really wanted to learn how to do work at that scale. The biggest realisation was that if your clients are not your team, the project is doomed to failure from the start. I find the projects that I’m most proud of and the most fun were the ones where my clients were part of my team and I was part of their team. I find that with big or small clients there’s no difference; if you find a good team, then the work and the output will be really good. If you don’t have a good team, you’re fighting up-hill.

SIMON: Cameron, is this something you miss? Do you feel liberated by the way you work and the kind of work you do?

CAMERON: I certainly don’t miss client work. Working with anyone who’s talented, whether it’s a client or not, is pretty exhilarating. I like that we get to work on our own things, and I think that if you gave most designers unlimited time and financial resources they’d go and solve the problems that most excite them, rather than the ones that get brought to them. There are some major wins when you’re solving your own problems.

But there are all kinds of stresses and problems, like how do you keep the lights on? If you’re building for the web, getting people to pay is a real challenge, or building the right kind of apps that can change the world and make money, so you can keep an A-team around.

SIMON: Is it vital to define strong timescales and keep everybody motivated?

CAMERON: When there’s no outside deadlines driving you, you need to create your own inside deadlines. I work with Tyler Mincey, who was a project manager at Apple, and he’s really talented as you’ve seen. There’s time for fluidity and time for rigidity, and you need to strike that balance early-on in the project; you want it to be pretty fluid and air out as many ideas as you can until you get closer to shipping, where you’ll then want to tighten up the constraints.

CAMERON KOCZON

SIMON: Travis, how do you stay focused and get the best out of your day if you hit a brick wall?

TRAVIS: If you get stumped or have an issue or you’re just not feeling it, there’s so many bits to figure out and parts to look over [such as] data models in the background driving the UI, or you might need to figure out logic for how the system handles something like recommendations, which may be just be writing a message and thinking about how it works. So, if you’re not feeling all that creative or hitting a wall with something, there are all these other outside tasks which tie in and need to be done, and you can move on to them. If I’m really stuck I’ll just walk away and play Mario Kart.

SIMON: How do you bring play and delight into your work? When I think about Big Spaceship I think about surprising and unusual online experiences, and not doing things by numbers. Is there a culture of finding delight and surprise?

CAMERON KOCZON

“which one of these 5 things does this project allow us to do?”. Part of those things is: is it something we’ve done before? If it is then it gets a low grade. Is it something we get to learn something from? If it is, it gets a higher grade. We like taking on projects where we learn something on somebody else’s dime. We’re always pushing ourselves to do something we haven’t done before, and it’s a culture of experimentation where that kind of stuff is encour-

TRAVIS SCHMEISSER

aged in small ways. Good work comes out of passion, and that’s not exclusive to Big Spaceship.

SIMON: You can see that joy and passion and the excitement of the team in the end product.

DAN: Part of it is just indulging in what we wanna do. We had this one project called The Most Awesomest Thing Ever and it started as a lunch conversation where one designer said “this turkey sandwich is the most awesome thing ever”. And another designer said “is it better than a back rub from your Dad?”. The first said “wait, you can’t compare the two!”. The other said “Yes you can! Which is better?”. And the idea stemmed from that. It was just a side project, but all of a sudden people loved it and we were on ABC News and got offers for a TV show, which wasn’t our goal. It all came from a passion, built in a week or two.

SIMON: With something like TeuxDeux or GimmeBar, I understand the business need to make those products, but as they’re crafted with love and passion, people have become quite loyal to those apps, would you agree?

CAMERON: I think it certainly helped that I really wanted those things, for myself to understand them, and see how they might work. It’d be really hard to do a really great job building a web app if it wasn’t something you really understood and wanted.

GimmeBar was something I’d wanted pretty badly and had thought about for a while. Once you start working on something it just evolves like mad. I wrote the Orbital Content article a while ago, and that was basically a thinly veiled pitch for GimmeBar and where’s it’s going. I didn’t sit down and say “I want to write an A List Apart article”. It was for me to get down on paper some of what was in my head so it was easier to share with the team; so that vision and idea was more tangible and they could use it.

SIMON: Travis, you’re working on “That Song Always Gets Me”. What’s the motivation for that?

TRAVIS: I wanted to do something fun, and see what it would be like to have people do different interpretations of the same thing. Each contrib-
they don’t know, or one that they do. Each person gets two pieces within the project and it’ll be a linear narrative of the song. We’ll see how each person interprets that. I’ve picked a song that repeats a lot; especially at the end, so it has this repetition. I thought it’d be really rad to see the different viewpoints that are brought in.

SIMON: Are you satisfied with the things you see being created for the web. Do you find yourself excited and surprised by the things you see? Is there a strong sense of innovation again?

DAN: Absolutely not. I think the web is really boring right now. I loved the last few years in web design, where people were realising what is functional and what is useful and what is accessible. I think that’s great, because that had been lost and there hadn’t been a lot of clarity. A lot of us got into doing this because we saw something wacky or crazy or we were like “I have no idea how that was done!” There was experiment for experiments’ sake. I remember things like that. A lot of those were weird and beautiful Flash sites, from the likes of Joshua Davis and Brendan Dawes.

SIMON: Making a CSS3 rotating Coke can is not the kind of innovation we want to see. Ten years ago the web gave us some real threshold moments, often made entirely in Flash.

DAN: I’m by no means a Flash die-hard, but I do have a fondness for a lot of things that were done in Flash and the experiential site is being lost. People are doing the same kind of things in JavaScript now, but they’re not experiential sites because they don’t engage your senses. They’re technological achievements, and really impressive, but I rarely see something that engages my senses or something ultra sensory. One thing that comes to mind is the Take This Lollipop site. I watched that again the other night and it gave me chills! I don’t remember the last time a website gave me chills. That’s something missing in web design.

CAMERON: I’m with Dan. I look around and try to get inspired by things that are out there and it’s very rare that those chills happen, but I am excited about what appears to be a trend of folks being unhappy with that situation. It seems we’re going to get a lot happening very soon. We’re maybe a couple of months away from tons of interesting stuff and interesting people perhaps leaving their current engagements and making new and interesting things. If we have this conversation at next year’s New Adventures I think it could be very different.

TRAVIS: This next year’s gonna be about —

CAMERON: Startups! Join a startup!

TRAVIS: Ha-ha! No. I wanna be working on a lot of the personal projects I’ve got kicking around, getting more stuff out there. I’d also like to get closer to New York’s web and technology scene and see more of what’s happening.

DAN: I see a lot of designers nowadays thinking long term. There’s a lot of people leaving freelance or agency jobs and going to work on products. That’s a really great trend to see; people feeling invested in something that they can iterate on and learn from and ship and launch and all of that stuff.

But for me, I want to think smaller and shorter term. Rather than me saying I want to devote a whole year to a product, I want to devote a week to a product and see what I can do in that week because there’s something really powerful about constraints and the constraint of time is a huge one. 2012 will be about doing smaller things and doing more of them.

**LINKS**

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**GIMMEBAR**
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**ORBITAL CONTENT ON ALA**
http://www.alistapart.com/articles/orbital-content/

**THAT SONG ALWAYS GETS ME**
http://thatsongalwaysgetsme
For the final interview, UK designers Ben Bodien, Naomi Atkinson, and Robbie Manson joined Simon Collison to discuss processes, challenges, the principles they work by, and the increasing pull of US tech companies.

SIMON: More and more designers and even whole agencies are heading off to the US to work at Facebook or other big companies. Is this something you’d ever consider?

BEN: It gets talked about a lot. There’s definitely more of a start-up culture in places like San Francisco and New York than there is here. I don’t think that’s really affected the way I’ve approached anything but I’m not averse to moving. Whatever comes, comes.

ROBBIE: I can’t really imagine the core FreeAgent team being based anywhere other than the UK, to be honest. We do have US users, and our plans for scaling the app certainly includes improving the experience for people outside of the UK, but nothing that would warrant a wholesale team move over there. FreeAgent is five years old this year — I’ve been with them for two — and Edinburgh is a bit like our spiritual home. I do like the idea of getting a proper summer though!

NAOMI: I do leave the door open. I’ve been thinking about it more so with regard to Animateable. Putting together a start-up is interesting because a lot of the funding is in San Francisco and New York, but we tend to forget that there’s funding in the UK. It’s not only in London; even in the North-east there’s quite a lot available. So I haven’t really felt the pull. I’ve felt the pull for clients more than anything else. There’s some great start-ups who really like UK input, especially from designers.

SIMON: So there are actually good possibilities for start-up funding in the UK?

NAOMI: Absolutely, and some great incubators. I was asked recently to be a mentor for an incubator in the North East. Funding is there, but we don’t look for it as much as we should.

SIMON: Do you find it easier working with US clients? Is there a greater level of trust from them?

NAOMI: I think that people in the US don’t think about how local you are. I actually don’t have any local clients because I imagine most of them will think of me in a local sense; they wouldn’t take your advice as the best they can get. I don’t know why that happens but in my experience it does.

BEN: I think there’s pride in being a web business in the UK. Half of our clients have almost always been US-based, but I never really think about why. Maybe there’s just more going on over there. You mentioned it’s a borderless world and that’s certainly true because we treat our clients the same during conference calls; we just have different accents. And paying each other is tricky of course but everything else is the same; we speak the language of the web.

SIMON: More and more designers and even whole agencies are heading off to the US to work at Facebook or other big companies. Is this something you’d ever consider?
I like working with the US market; they like the accent so that helps! They seem to have a respect for us already, so it works to our advantage, especially when you’re a smaller studio. The trust and respect is already there, you don’t have to gain it.

Recently I was in Düsseldorf, with a group of Germans who were talking about how the UK and US are very much ‘together’ in the web industry. They feel it’s the rest of the world vs. them, which is a very interesting thought coming from a European point of view, and I was quite surprised to hear that they were grouping us with the US.

SIMON: Robbie, with FreeAgent, you’re working with one product. What attracts you to that?

ROBBIE: What originally attracted me is still more or less the same reason I love it. A lot of designers and developers — even some I’ve interviewed for FreeAgent — say that they feel trapped by agency environments, where the feedback loop is just too open. You put everything you can into a project and it goes out the door and you don’t hear that much back from it. It’s only natural for designers who care to want to create lasting things and do more meaningful work. For me, the way to do that was to start working on a product, a long-term project.

SIMON: Is there a level of perfectionism in that process, or an eagerness to get stuff out there?

ROBBIE: There’s a strong level of design-care across the company that I’ve never really experienced before. There are engineers who care just as much as about one or two pixels as I do. The most important thing is cultivating a culture of respect for design. Every couple of weeks, we get together and demo what we’ve made. Everyone opens up their process and there’s greater respect for every discipline. We have a lot of freedom because of the way we’re structured. We prototype and design whole sections or new features before there’s any technical input whatsoever, so there’s great freedom for a designer; it’s very liberating to be a part of that.

SIMON: Ben, you work very closely with Cameron Moll for Authentic Jobs. Do you have a lot of design input?

BEN: We do. It’s definitely the most design-led a project can get. It’s Cameron’s baby and he lives and breathes it. Every single modification or feature he’ll design to some degree first, then we’ll have a discussion about how it’s going to work. There’s been a few cases where we’ve had to change the direction of certain features from a technical point of view, and we’ve worked with him to alter the design, or how a particular interaction is going to work. That happened a lot with the most recent update to the home page, where the design was largely finished in the browser; and we had to figure out how we were going to make it responsive. So, we were involved quite heavily in the process of figuring out how it would look and feel.

SIMON: Is collaboration an important part of your process?

NAOMI: If you don’t collaborate you don’t improve; it’s as simple as that. Working on your own or in smaller teams, you don’t have people around you everyday to bat things to, which is imperative.

ROBBIE: Yes, I think there’s two ways to look at that. One is about mentoring. And one is just being mindful around you everyday to bat things to. Everyone should be around other really smart people who really care and interact with them; step away from the computer and just have a rich conversation with someone.

BEN: We’ve been in the fortunate position that many of our recent clients have been hands-on people themselves, whether they’re a freelancer with their own project or the client is a start-up with their own in-house team and we’re coming in to bolster that; we get to collaborate with those people so everyone’s really super-passionate about that product.

SIMON: What were the biggest challenges with starting your own agency?

BEN: It didn’t take a huge amount of courage because we’d just been made redundant at the height of the credit crunch, so it was a case of looking for a new job or start something of our own; the latter seemed like more fun.

People often ask us how we get clients, and that isn’t that difficult; there are always people out there who’ll pay you to do some kind of job. The bigger challenge is finding quality clients who will appreciate you as an expert. You can create a more professional working relationship rather than just someone who happens to have some money and an idea and just wants you to go off and build it and come back in a few months.

NAOMI: It was quite a brave decision for me. I was comfortable in my job, doing well at a London agency, and pretty much overnight I decided to
go out on my own, thinking it was the best time to just go and do it. Working in three agencies I saw the things I wouldn’t think are the best processes, and I’ve used that to my advantage. Things like designing more than one route for someone. I wouldn’t do multiple approaches now. I’ll show them my thought process, but I’ll show them one thing at the end. Also, there was a lot of un-required documentation which was done to simply bring in more money, so that’s something that again, I’d never do.

SIMON: Let’s talk about principles. Ben, you’re a big believer in craftsmanship.

BEN: We are now. We made some mistakes before; we didn’t quite have that same ethic. Quality clients give you the chance to have some thinking time and work outside the box. We started moving away from repeating ourselves and doing ‘cookie cutter’ processes again and again. We started slowing things down; keeping things simple but not trying to focus on creating something stupidly beautiful and amazing from the outset — that’s a by-product of a good working process.

because you’ll end up drowning out the good aspects. I think there’s a naivety with anyone who gets their first big job. They can be crushed; the purity of a big idea for a project can be easily over-ridden by someone who doesn’t care internally, or a client who doesn’t understand, and there’s nobody internally to talk them around. That naivety is something we should never lose as we gather more experience; it’s our gut thinking, and it’s easy to think too much and not feel. It’s a hard balance to get right.

SIMON: Robbie, you speak about being a mindful designer. What are the key ingredients to that?

ROBBIE: Our obsession with tools gets in the way of good thinking. It’s so easy to just get started in web design and easy to get absorbed with these tools and accidentally focus on things at a micro level and neglect the power of really good thinking; to almost distance yourself from tools. It’s something that comes with maturity. I think we make a lot of mistakes with those processes when we’re young — it’s only natural — and that’s something a good creative director or mentor should help with. It was always emphasised to me to step away from the computer; don’t get too absorbed in it when you’ve got so much around you to bounce ideas off. As long as we’re mindful of what we’re doing, then we can actually start to counteract a lot of the distractions.

NAOMI: There’s an obsession with tools, and I agree it’s about maturity. One of the principles I go by now is making sure that I get to know the client and their objectives the best I can before doing any work. Even if that means taking time off — unpaid time — I’ll do it because I want to make sure I fully understand them and their personality and what they stand for. By doing that I make sure I don’t rely on tools or re-use any work or thinking that went into another project. I saw that a lot in agencies where ideas were re-used a lot, and I think that’s disgraceful.

SIMON: What is your new adventure for 2012?

BEN: We’ve achieved three years of blood, sweat and tears and have good clients that we’re happy with. We have this delicious problem of having too many of them, so my new adventure is to grow Neutron Creations and take on more wonderful clients and have more fun in the process.

NAOMI: Getting Animateable to market.

ROBBIE: We’re growing FreeAgent very fast, so maintaining quality as we grow — growing well — is important. I’ll also be launching a side project, and finishing an album.
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We apologise if you're not on the list. It's not a big deal though, is it?

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18. Nottingham Contemporary

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Thanks for participating – see you in 2013