

TRITTENHAUS

d e s i g n

## Full Circle

I didn't set out to be an entrepreneur, even though every member of my immediate family were all business owners. You could say it is in my blood because my dad, grandmother and grandfather owned pre-cast concrete companies, my mom owned a clothing and jewelry boutique, my maternal grandfather owned a gas station and diner on Route 66 and even my great-grandfathers were self-employed blacksmiths.

Growing up, I loved to teach. Playing school was something I took to the next level by keeping a classroom set up in our basement. One of the best Christmas presents I ever received was a box my mom filled with school supplies, including my very own REAL grade book.

Fast forward to 1984 and Northern Illinois University. As many incoming freshmen, I had no real idea what I wanted to major in, so I chose Communications. Communications was followed briefly by Psychology, which was followed by Advertising (getting closer!). NIU was in the process of phasing out that department, so I almost transferred to Columbia College. Frankly, the big city frightened this Quad City girl, so I opted to stay in DeKalb. I've always loved architecture, so when I found the Interior Architecture department in the School of Art and Design, I thought I'd give that a try. Due to the fact that I'd changed directions so many times, I stayed in DeKalb for summer school in 1986. I sublet an apartment and roomed with a girl I had met in the dorms. Even though I was in the art department now, I really didn't know what the school had to offer. My friend and summer roommate, Gayle, was a Visual Communication major and one day we strolled over to Gallery 200 to look at some her work that was on display.

It sounds dramatic to say that walking into that gallery changed my life, but I had that light bulb moment. What is this major??? This is what I was meant to do! I officially took on my 5th and final major: Visual Communication, which is our fancy name for graphic design. I loved every second of my time on the 3rd floor. I was at home with my fellow designers, many of whom I am still in touch with today, including one of my best friends, Gayle.

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I graduated in 1989, excited to start my first “real” job as a designer right away, and it wasn’t fantastic. In hindsight, it was probably just not a good fit. Teaching was what I always loved, so maybe teaching design at the college level was what I was supposed to do! I left my first and only job in less than a year, and headed back to NIU to get a Master’s degree in Visual Communication. To pay for it, I secured a graduate assistantship in the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS). My graduate assistantship turned into a full-time job that lasted for eight wonderful years, putting thoughts of teaching on the back burner.

Toward the end of my tenure at CGS I started to get a little bored creatively, so I took on a couple of freelance projects. It took no time at all for me to realize that I loved every second of it—finding new clients, estimating projects, designing, invoicing, networking, etc.

When I left NIU in 1998, I was the Director of Publications and had a Master’s degree. With the full support of my family, Trittenhaus Design was born. If you have ever wondered about the name, the Tritt family is from Switzerland and are known both as Tritt and Tritten. “Haus” is the German spelling of house, and the business started in our house, hence Trittenhaus.

The business grew rapidly and two years later moved to the location on West Elm Street that would become my work home for 21 years.

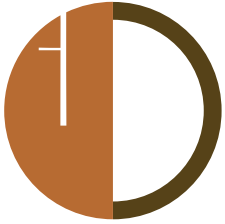
I am forever grateful to Northern Illinois University and this community. I was well educated in a field that I love and was able to not only support my family, but the families of my employees. I had five talented full-time designers over the years: Erin, Cara, Mike, Jeramie, and Kelly, the designer that stayed with me the longest. I was also able to additionally fulfill my love of teaching by employing 15 interns from the VisCom department.

Of course, I wouldn’t have success without amazing clients. I can’t thank all of you enough for trusting me and Trittenhaus Design to visually showcase your individual projects and businesses.

I would like to thank a few long-time clients that have literally been with me since the very beginning: DeKalb County Community Foundation, The National Bank & Trust Company, School Tool Box, Sweet Earth (even way

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back when it was Ben Franklin), the Balli Family: Rosita's and Eduardo's, Chicago & Beyond (formerly Northern Illinois Tourism), Sycamore Chamber of Commerce, Doty Concrete, Illinois City/County Management Association, Patricia Sims (in so many capacities), Laurie Guest (as Hauser-Ross and all her previous entities) and Tami Armstrong (as Sycamore Chamber, Kish College, NB&T and IMSA). When I went through the boxes and boxes of projects that I had kept, I was overwhelmed by the quantity of work I've designed for these clients over the years.

Now fast forward to Fall 2019. A friend of mine, Bonnie, asked if I had any interest in teaching design that semester at Kishwaukee College. It was somewhat late in the game, as the current instructor wasn't available. Always up for a challenge, I said "Yes!" right away.

The first day in the classroom I remembered how much I loved playing school. I enjoyed the experience so much that I reached out to my alma mater, NIU, inquiring about adjunct opportunities. In the spring of 2020, I walked into the classroom on the 3rd floor of the Art Building where I first started as a student 35 years ago. It was like stepping back in time, except now I was the one sharing my knowledge and my experiences. My office in the School of Art and Design, 314J, was once occupied by my mentor, Mr. Jerome Bell. I'm sure he's looking down on me with great pride. I owe so much to him, John DeLillo and Frank Kulesa. They served on my Master's degree committee and provided me not only with guidance, but also as examples of what makes a great professor.

I'm not fully giving up Trittenhaus Design, only the building on Elm Street. This past year has shown us that we can work from anywhere! I still love my business as much as I did the first day, but my focus is now teaching.

I've come full circle. After taking a detour to run a design studio for 23 years, I'm finally using that Master's degree.

To everyone that has been a part of my journey, thank you so very much!

Wendy

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