

The Loeries Creativity Q&A: Insights from international award winner, Stephen Doyle

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In this week's exclusive Loeries Creativity Q&A series for Bizcommunity.com, Evan-Lee Courie chats to Stephen Doyle, Creative Director of Doyle Partners, New York.

■ ***You are the principal and creative director at Doyle Partners which was founded in 1985, what is your secret to running a successful design studio?***

Stephen Doyle: If I divulged the secret to running a successful design studio, then it wouldn't be secret, would it? But the truth is that there are lots of keys to success, and they form a concentric circle. The first variable is, well, oneself. Passion and imagination are part of the puzzle, but one's ability to recognise one's shortcomings, and make up for them with partners and the rest of the team is critical to being a fully-formed entity. And then the circle gets even bigger, finding clients with whom you are intellectually compatible - and collaborating with them so that the adventure and experiments are created in partnership. There is nothing as fun as taking risks with clients who are close enough to the creative work so that it is a joint venture.



Stephen Doyle

■ ***What advice would you offer someone who is keen to start their own design studio?***

Doyle: When we formed our studio, 29 years ago, my two partners and I created an algorithm of sorts, a filter to determine whether we should take on a client - or not. The very complex formula we developed was, in shorthand, "The Three F's." We would hold up any project on the horizon to this Holy Grail: Fun, Fame and Fortune. Yes, this is what we were after, and few jobs fulfil all three, but our rule was that we had to check off two of those to let a project into our studio. Work for Fun alone? Never. But throw in Fame (or the reasonable expectation that we could squeeze out at least a little notoriety along the way) and we could do it. Work on a project that would offer heaps of money? Not unless there was Fun involved, or some fame. This framework has kept us, over the years, honest, hungry...and happy. Ah, the Three H's!

■ ***What has been your defining moment or career highlight to date?***

Doyle: Well, bragging aside, our studio was 25 years old almost to the day when I learned that I won the National Design Award for Communication. The Cooper-Hewitt, the Smithsonian's National Design Museum cited me for "giving words a deeper meaning" which, incorrect as it was, was still a bit of a thrill. I think what they meant to say was that my work explores the nature of language and power. But who cares about "language" or "power" when you are invited by First Lady Michelle Obama to a festive lunch at the White House with other design luminaries, being escorted through reception halls beneath paintings and among personalities to talk with her tall and gracious self before a five-course seated meal. Career highlight? Maybe just "career high."

■ ***What's the most exciting project you've worked on recently?***

Doyle: Curiously, for a studio that has for so long specialised in the world of print, our exciting new excursions are into the 3-D world of public places, and into the 4-D adventure of animated shorts. Working in environmental design, we have been able to infiltrate parks with stories, plazas with narratives, and our small studio is behind the upcoming facade of the New York Aquarium's exhibit, "Sharks!" on the Coney Island Boardwalk. This curvaceous building which will house a 500,000-gallon tank with 40 sharks as well as skates, rays and turtles and thousands of schooling fish will be covered with over

48,000 small aluminium squares, hinged to rods, and free to swing in the slightest breeze, cumulatively swelling and ebbing, reflecting light and shadow, and creating a kinetic building skin that looks like the surface of the sea. This installation, created by Ned Kahn, will be fuelled by what's free at the seashore-the wind and the sun, engaging visitors and turning the outside of the building into a boardwalk destination in itself.

■ ***What do you think makes award-winning work?***

Doyle: What is it about a design, or a scheme, or the positioning of a brand that can take your breath away? Is it consistency, or is it surprise? An onslaught of colour or sublime restraint... black and, say, pale black? Ultimately, I believe, it is about the power of imagination married with appropriateness that is simmered carefully in the proper context. Award-winning work walks a fine line between surprise and inevitability. It balances knowledge of its audience with being able to sneak up behind them. It is firmly grounded in trust, yet takes the magical leap of alchemy to leave you with a sense of delight, but it emerges only because there is a dialog between creator and viewer. Award-winning work does not shout, "Look at me!" Better, it takes you by the arm, and suggests, "Engage with me."

Don't miss the [DStv Seminar of Creativity](#) at Cape Town City Hall on Friday 19 September. **Stephen Doyle** will be joined by other international leaders including Facebook's Rob Newlan, Unilever's Yaw Nsarkoh, McCann Sydney's Executive Creative Director, Patrick Baron; Arno Lindemann, the Chief Creative Officer of Lukas Lindemann Rosinski; PJ Pereira, CEO and co-founder Pereira and O'Dell, San Francisco and Ali Ali the acclaimed commercial's director from Egypt and former Executive Creative Director and Founder of Elephant.

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