

**DROP
CAP**



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PRECISION, NOT PERFECTION



A NOTE FROM TIRSO

For designers that have spent **too much time on technical skills** and design principles, this issue exists to **reframe design around craft**.



Hi Friends,

My photo was taken just after I got a haircut from my old Vidal Sassoon-trained stylist. What does that have to do with design? Well, Vidal Sassoon's claim to fame in the hair industry was the precision cut, and that's what the theme of this issue is: craft.

I say this all the time, in order to be marketable as a designer, you must be impressive. The way to do that is through craft. Not to confuse it with perfection, but instead, craft is about precision and care.

The cover is my visual parallel for you to think about. When it comes to origami, each fold must be precise for the end result to look accurate. And if the end result looks like you folded it with your teeth, we have living proof you weren't so precise in the process.

The image to the left is the original. There were some gaps in spacing that didn't feel intentional, so I tightened it through retouching. I developed my color-changing process from an Anna Wintour retouching request back at Teen Vogue. The point is, I've mostly focused on craft my entire career, and that skill alone has prevented any dip in quality when the pressure is laid on at work.

Back to that haircut of mine, craft isn't specific to design. You feel it in every creative discipline, whether that's in hairstyling, cooking, acting, or dancing. When craft is missing, clients notice. When it's there, clients pay attention, and they pay for it.

I've learned in the past year that the better-performing videos on my YouTube channel are the ones that are most in-depth. That tells me that you're serious about design. So, let's talk about craft and take your work from hobby to career-worthy.

PRECISION IN PRACTICE

The designers who notice everything didn't get lucky.
They trained for it.

You know how dumb people don't know they're dumb? People who aren't precise don't know either. The number of times I call something out at a restaurant or a grocery store and people say, "How did you notice that?" It's because I practice precision in every aspect of my life, so when something is off, I notice.

By practicing precision outside of design, you'll start to slow down in your design work, and instead of focusing on the details of your design, you'll focus on the details of your process. The result? A repeatable standard of excellence defined by you.

So, how do you practice precision? Here are some challenges to take you off of the computer.

ADVANCED

Find a Pantone chip of what your ideal color of coffee is. Starting with black coffee, pour milk or creamer to match the color.

BENEFIT TO YOUR DESIGN WORK: Color is one of the hardest things to get precisely right in design, and most designers eyeball it. By training yourself to hit an exact color target every morning, you're building mastery on value and tone, that most people never develop. You're practicing discipline in the pour. Too much milk and you're overshoot with no way to recover, which forces you to practice getting things right the first time.

“YOUR EYE IS ONLY AS SHARP AS THE LIFE YOU PAY ATTENTION TO.”

BASIC

Folding your towels neatly.

BENEFIT TO YOUR DESIGN WORK: The most common ways to fold will either require you to fold in half or in thirds. By focused repetition, you subconsciously train your eyes to know what a half and a third look like. When you're designing, you naturally split up the screen or sheet of paper.

MODERATE

Fix your handwriting.

BENEFIT TO YOUR DESIGN WORK: Handwriting forces you to slow down in a way that typing never will. By practicing intention and focus through handwriting, you learn to design things, also with intention and focus. Additional perk? Neat handwriting is something to be proud of, so grab yourself some stationery and send people handwritten letters. Even better, send one to a client and see what their reaction is

NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

Choose a signature dish at an upscale restaurant. Now, guess all of the ingredients that go into the recipe.

BENEFIT TO YOUR DESIGN WORK: Great designers don't just appreciate good work, they understand everything that goes into it. It's unlikely that you have mastery of the taste of a breadth of ingredients. My point in this is for you to understand what the true mastery is. Similar to ingredients, when you look at a design that you admire, but you don't know the inspirations it comes from, or you don't recognize which periods the elements reference, that's the knowledge you're missing and what you need to learn.

Choose a challenge this week and see how long it takes you to master it. When you're doing them, remember the Navy SEAL mantra, "Slow is smooth, smooth is fast." Through careful and calm actions, you prevent errors, which will lead to faster completion of tasks compared to rushing and creating mistakes.

MOTHER KNOWS *BEST*

Nobody sees the closets.
That's exactly why you clean them.

I feel like we all had the same type of mother who, when guests would come over, would make us clean the entire house. Closets, drawers, under the bed, whatever have you. I don't know about you, but I always thought, "Why are we cleaning this place to look like no one lives here?! The reality, or rather my realization later in life, was that it's because she cared about her house and how she presented herself as a host.

There is something more subconscious to it than that. By knowing that the entire house was thoroughly cleaned, she was more relaxed when the guests were there, which means she was able to enjoy the company more. Think about how you would feel presenting a project to a client where you spent the time to make sure all the type was set properly and that the design addressed all of their concerns. You would probably present it with more confidence and enthusiasm.

This is the entire point of practicing care in your design work. It doesn't serve other people, it serves you. Just like our moms, you get to be at ease, you get to be proud of your work, and you get to stand behind it completely. That's not just professionalism, that's integrity. And it's the difference between a designer who delivers work and a designer who owns it.

TRY THIS

Think your craft is up to par? Find out by playing Craft B-I-N-G-O!
(No, you don't get a free square. I want you to be great, not just good enough!)

C

R

A

F

T

I label my layers

I know the history of the typefaces I use

I typeset my body copy manually

I can back up my design decisions

I'm practicing one of the exercises Tirso suggested on page 3

I've never sent a low-res files to a client

I update my portfolio regularly

I design in black and white before adding color

I know my design history

I kern my type

I design with the client in mind

I take breaks, so I can look at my work with fresh eyes

I focus more on the first half of the design process than execution

I can find a previous file for an old client within 10 minutes.

I have a creative hobby outside of design

I use a grid

I never stretch fonts

I get feedback on all my projects

I use a hyphen, an en dash, and an em dash correctly

I design for both format and context

I don't design in Photoshop or Illustrator

I mastered one of the exercises Tirso suggested on page 3

I only use fonts and images that are licensed

Pinterest isn't my go-to for design research

I have a portfolio website (an IG design account doesn't count!)