2 Years Since Shillington New York: Wyatt Welles, Freelance Graphic Designer

After moving to New York to pursue a career in theater production, Wyatt Welles started working at an Off-Broadway theater company. He knew he wanted to advance his design skills and push himself as a creative, so he decided to enroll on Shillington’s part-time course while working at his full-time job. During his time at Shillington, Wyatt worked on a wide range of briefs and developed a diversified portfolio, ready to advance his career forward. Since then, Wyatt has

worked on the creative direction for print and digital at the plant company, The Sill, and is now freelancing in Los Angeles. He's developed brand identities and artwork for an impressive list of clients such as VICE, Adidas, David LaChapelle and Vogue Italia!

Keep on reading to hear about Wyatt's experience in the part-time course, discover his current passion project centered around typefaces for entertainment and learn about the creative scene in Los Angeles with some tips on his favorite places to visit (once we are out of quarantine).

What were you up to prior to Shillington?

Before Shillington, I was working for an Off-Broadway theater company and school. I originally moved to New York to pursue a career in theater production. During my two years doing so I wound up designing a lot of posters and promotional assets for the company I worked for, as well as friends in the business. Naturally, this helped me realize my full passion and potential for graphic design.

Did you have any previous design experience? What motivated you to enroll in a part-time course?

There's a saying that goes something along the lines of "whatever you do to procrastinate should be the thing you get paid for." Obviously, I'm oversimplifying this quote otherwise I should be paid a ridiculous amount for watching Gilmore Girls reruns but the sentiment remains! I found that I was constantly tinkering with illustrator and InDesign instead of focusing on my professional theater goals and Shillington was the gesture that allowed me to take my graphic design skills seriously. I was really excited to push myself as a designer, but I didn't want to choose between theater and design, and thanks to the part-time program, I didn't have to.

Did you make any meaningful connections with teachers or students while studying at Shillington?

Absolutely! Shillington teachers offer their support far beyond the program and I still reach out to them for design advice.

> ***They’re such role models in their skills but also their desire to create an inclusive and exciting community for designers.***

With my class, it really felt like a little community and after graduating I’m still very close with two classmates who are my sounding board whenever I get stuck on a project. We almost started a studio together, actually! Unfortunately, I

moved cross country before we could make it happen and we still debate it often. Who knows, maybe one day…

What was your favorite student project?

This is an easy one—handmade! When I was researching Shillington, the handmade projects were always my favorite so I was chomping at the bit for the assignment. When it finally arrived in the Spring, I knew I wanted to incorporate my personality and the influence of theater within a design context. I ended up designing an album cover for Donna Summer's Bad Girls.

We only had about twenty minutes to shoot, so I was so anxious when the time came. Luckily I had two classmates who allowed

me to paint their entire hands and really seemed to click into my concept. It was exhilarating to work with my hands (pun intended) and design my own mini “stage” of sorts.

> ***I think it’s really important for a designer to be skilled at composition both on and off screen. Handmade tested those skills to the extreme!***

If you could give one piece of advice to someone starting at Shillington, what would it be?

I would tell them that Shillington is only about 70% of what will make you hireable to companies. The other 30% is the work you do on your own time. I think it’s imperative that you go to museums, surf design blogs and try exercises for yourself. Shillington does a great job teaching the programs, design theory and giving exciting briefs, but they can’t teach you what your taste is.

> ***The most hireable designers are the ones who know the design landscape and the role they play in it.***

After studying at Shillington part-time, you got a job working as a designer at The Sill. Can you talk about your work there?

Working at the Sill was an incredible experience! I joined the team as a Junior Designer. Between myself and the Art Director, we covered every outward-facing visual. It was a great crash course in all areas of design like digital campaigns, printed advertisements, way-finding, product photography and interior design to name a few!

It was also so motivating to work for a company that I believed in and was growing so fast. Spending so much time around plants and greenery in a design capacity was such a gift! As they say, “plants make people happy!”

You’ve been developing brand identities for a range of clients including theater productions, podcasts and film series, plus creative direction for photo and video. Did you have any favorite projects you can talk about?

It’s been so much fun going freelance because it allows a lot of varied work. Some favorites from this past fall include a poster and art print folio for Maurice Harris of Bloom & Plume, creative direction and layout for the magazine Bowl + Plant and artwork for the short film the Shallow End. Though

they all demanded very different inspiration, going freelance and working on these projects allowed me to really explore my style and different forms of collaboration with the client.

You’ve also created illustrations for some impressive clients like VICE, The Bomb, Adidas, David LaChapelle and Vogue Italia. Can you share some of your favorites and tell us about the projects?

Absolutely! In 2018, I had the opportunity to work with David LaChapelle’s prop team on a shoot for Vogue Italia inspired by the ‘It’s a Small World’ ride in Disney World. We created a series of paper props and set pieces inspired by all the different cultures and countries included in the ride. Not all the props made the final spread, but it was really exciting to see the umbrella I worked on featured!

The Bomb is an immersive film, music and art installation about nuclear warfare. I had the opportunity to see the Bomb before I was asked to create a piece in response. While many artists had beautiful and moving depictions of the effects of nuclear warfare, I wanted to explore the tone set by those creating it. What I developed was a macabre postcard for ‘Tomorrowland’ (the Disney through-line here is a coincidence, I promise!), which treated nuclear bombs as an ironic symbol of industry and development.

How do you go about finding freelance work? Any tips for new designers looking to go freelance?

When going freelance, I received a lot of advice along the lines of “practice patience”, “maintain personal passion projects”, and “network, network, network!”. This is 100% true, but I also learned there’s a lot in just asking!

> ***If there’s someone you want to work with or a project you want to work on: ask and always have your work ready to show.***

It doesn’t always work, but it’s a great way to advocate for yourself and continue to put your name and ambitions out there in the world!

What do you love about being a designer?

So much! I love that there is something measurable about the success of your design. It’s not just about making good creative work, but it’s about responding to a brief and finding clever ways to create actionable results from specific groups of people.

I also love the design community online and in person. Coming from a theater background, I was used to a much more competitive atmosphere, but there’s room for everyone in the world of graphic design!

Since leaving New York, you moved to Los Angeles. What is the creative scene like?

LA has so many incredible sources of creative inspiration! I was so excited to see the style and energy that's so unique to this city. For people just to arrive here, I'd recommend the Getty Center and MOCA for museum-going. There's also a lot of great stores and meeting places that really have a finger on the creative pulse of LA such as Tuesday Bassen LA, Bloom & Plume, Poketo, the shops around the ROW DTLA, Individual Medley and so much more. And most importantly, the bookstores specializing in zines and art books! I would check out Owl Bureau, Arcana and Eightfold Coffee.

What creatives are you loving at the moment and what are your go-to resources for inspiration?

I'm an aggressive zine and coffee book collector, with over 60 independent magazines in my collection right now! Although this made moving cross country a little difficult (NINE boxes!), the books and magazines are a constant starting place for myself. I love to see what others are doing in design and it's a really great resource whenever I get designers block.

I also spend a lot of time looking at work from other studios and designers on Instagram like Caterina Bianchini, Chandelier Creative, It's Nice That, Unspoken Agreement (the studio of my Shillo teacher, Saxon Campbell!), Robert Beatty, Vasilis Marmatakis, &Walsh and so much more.

Anything else you want to share?

In the spirit of always maintaining a passion project, I've just begun discovering and documenting typography in television and in film. I wanted to get a sharper eye for typefaces and we're in a great time for typography in entertainment, so I thought I'd bring both those realities together! Follow along on Instagram at @title.type.

Big thanks to Wyatt for sharing his Shillington story with us! Be sure to check out his Instagram @wyattseesthings and @title.type.

Want to study graphic design at Shillington? Learn more about our 3 month full-time and 9 month part-time course in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane.

https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/2-years-since-shillington-new-york-wyatt-welles-freelance-graphic-designer/