

4 Years Since Shillington London: Joseph Lebus, Design Lead at Porto Rocha

Joseph Lebus spent four years studying Modern Languages at university but found himself stuck and creatively unfulfilled. Then, four years ago, he joined Shillington London and undertook our three month course. Since graduating in 2018, Joseph has had a meteoric rise through the design industry. With experience at some of London's most illustrious studios, he is now Design Lead at Porto Rocha.

We chatted with Joseph to get his insights on his time at Shillington, how it helped his career and his favourite projects.

Thinking back to 2018, why did you choose to study at Shillington? What made the course stand out?

I had just spent 4 years studying at university, and I wanted to find a course where I could quickly skill up and get an initial understanding of design and branding.

Shillington gave me the perfect technical foundation to get started and the structure itself felt very connected to the industry.

We had guest speakers coming in to share their knowledge and advice for working in the design world. Looking back, it was the perfect way to jump start my career in design.

You had originally studied Modern Languages at university, what made you want to make the change to design? Did you have any previous design experience?

I didn't have any previous design experience, but I had always been interested in design and visual thinking. My mum was a photographer, and as a kid I would borrow her old film cameras and take them with me wherever I went. I also ran nights at university, and would design the posters and flyers for the events that we ran.

An interest in the visual world was always there, but it was only after graduating that this took shape properly. My brother hired the services of a design studio to work on the branding for his company and I loved seeing this take shape.

Moving from just an idea to a fully formed visual system, design was able to help articulate the ideas behind his company and I found this very powerful.

How was the course? Tell us about your experiences.

The course was great in that it gave me the technical footing to learn and progress in the industry. This was really important for the initial jobs I was in, where I had a strong enough grasp of the right tools and resources to learn and develop at a good pace.

I also loved the energy and passion that the teachers had on the course. They really try to install a confidence and belief in you, and I left the course with a palpable energy and

desire to keep learning and developing my knowledge and skills.

Finally, the other students were all so great. Everyone supported each other and pushed each other's work in a positive way, and this also had a tangible effect on giving me a confidence and belief in my own work.

In the last four years, you've gone from strength to strength in the industry—could you talk us through your journey from graduation to today?

Graduating felt like the first step in a long journey to get to where I wanted to be. I had a good technical base, but I enrolled in a couple of short courses at Central Saint Martins

to further expand my skillset. After this, I began working at a handful of London-based agencies, including Otherway, Accept & Proceed, Bond and Socio. These were all amazing places to work—the people were brilliant and the different styles of work allowed me to think more deeply about the type of design I wanted to do.

I then spent a couple of years working at Made Thought, where I met some amazing people and had the chance to work on some brilliant projects. It was after Made Thought that I joined the team at Porto Rocha. At the time it was a smaller studio of 5 people including the founders, Leo and Felipe. Fast forward two years, we are now 20 strong and growing! It's been an amazing couple of years and I feel very grateful to be learning under such talented founders and alongside an incredible group of designers, project managers and strategists.

You're now Design Lead at Porto Rocha—what does your day-to-day look like?

I am based in London, with the majority of the studio situated in New York. As such, I spend the first half of my day focused more on designing, with the second half spent catching up with the team, collaborating on projects, and meeting with clients.

Have you got a personal favourite project you've worked on over the years?

I loved working with Imprimerie Du Marais whilst at Made Thought, on a series that was exhibited at the Made Thought Store back in 2019. Each print was a graphic interpretation of the circle motif in a celebration of the summer solstice. The series moved from dark to light, making use of different printing and finishing techniques to celebrate Imprimerie Du Marais's impeccable craftsmanship.

I have loved every project I have worked on at Porto Rocha. A recent favourite would be the work that we did for Nabr, an initiative founded by world-renowned architect Bjarke Ingels that is looking to transform the US housing market. We worked

with their team to craft an identity that speaks to the geometric, modular nature of the architectural style, as well as the relationship between the physical and the digital, a crucial tension that fuels the innovation of their product. We're really happy with how it turned out and have been excited to see the first of their buildings launch in San José.

Are you a fan of working on personal projects alongside professional work? If you are, what kind of things do you enjoy working on?

For a while I loved working on personal projects alongside my professional work. I spent a lot of my spare time designing posters and typefaces, and exploring new techniques. It's a

great way to learn new skills and arrive at new and unexpected solutions. Often these results would in turn help to inform client work. While these projects are fun, they can also be very time-consuming!

Since joining Porto Rocha, I have made a concerted effort to continue developing my practice, but in ways that are more targeted to studio work. I have been reading about how to be a better leader within the team and learning specific skills to improve my design work within the studio.

What would be your number one piece of advice for someone who has just graduated from Shillington?

It would be the same advice that I was given by the creative

director at the first studio I worked for after graduating—don't rest on your laurels. If there is somewhere you want to be, keep working and applying yourself until you are there.

Design is a work in progress, so you can always be thinking about how you can learn and improve.

Huge thanks to Joseph for sharing his design story with us! Make sure to check more of his work on his website and follow him on Instagram.

Want to follow in Joseph's footsteps? Learn more about Shillington's 3 month full-time and 9 month part-time courses Online or on campus in New York, London, Sydney or Melbourne.

<https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/4-years-since-shillington-london-joseph-lebus-design-lead-porto-rocha/>