

8 Years Since Shillington: Holly Ovenden, Freelance Book Cover Designer

We last chatted to Shillington London graduate Holly Ovenden back in 2015, a year after she graduated, and had just started her career as a book cover designer. Now, 7 years later and 8 since she graduated, Holly is a freelance book cover designer and has had her work featured in publications and exhibitions around the world and has been celebrated and shortlisted in several industry awards. She's come a long way from managing a medical practice before making a creative career change with Shillington.

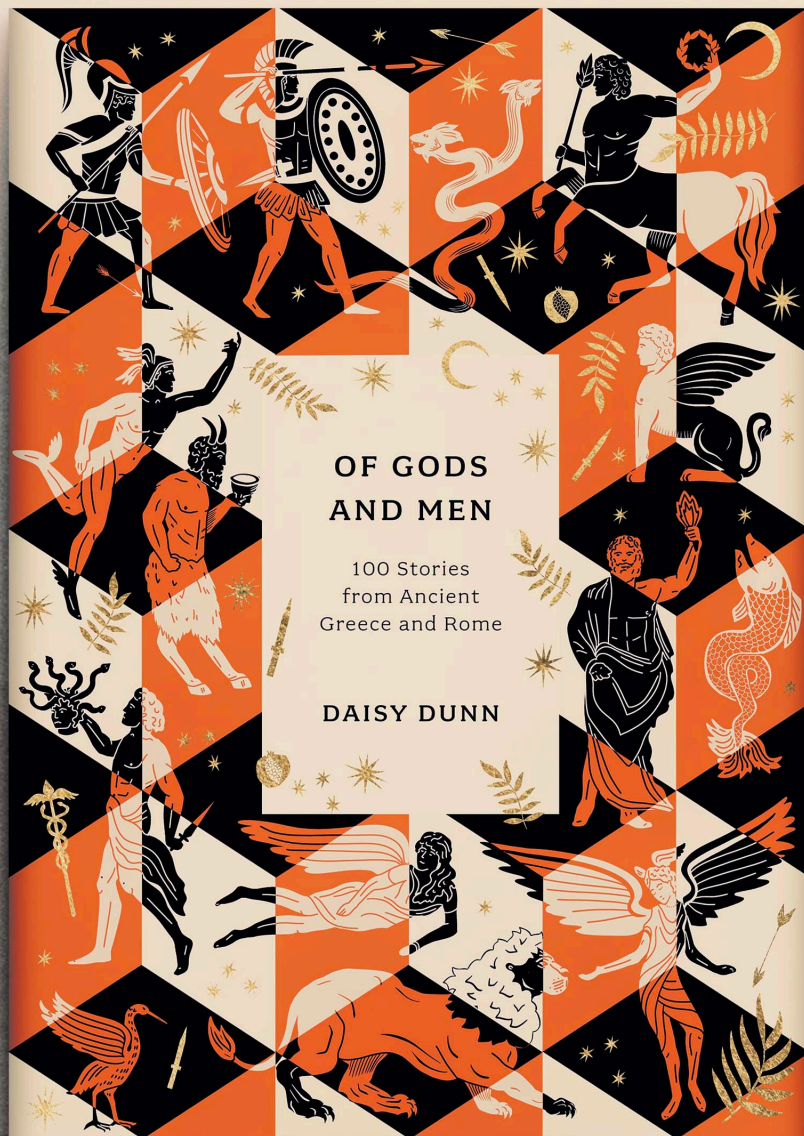


We caught up with Holly to talk about the last 8 years and her amazing design career so far.

When we last chatted 8 years ago, you had just landed your dream job as a Junior Book Cover Designer at Bloomsbury Publishing. Can you catch us up on the last 6 years—how has

Shillington changed your life?

Wow—quite a lot has happened since then! After Shillington, I started as a junior cover designer working in-house at Bloomsbury Publishing where I stayed for 4 years. In late 2018, I came across an opportunity to design at Penguin Random House. After over a year of working at Penguin, I decided to go freelance just before the pandemic hit! Luckily, I have been busy with book cover projects and now work with large and independent publishers in the UK and internationally.



We just read your amazing interview with AIGA—Shillington was

a big risk, you quit your job and sold your car to study design full-time. Why did you decide to take that leap with Shillington? What made our design course stand out from the rest?

Thank you! Yes, I was in quite a predicament in my previous career, as I needed a way of retraining without having to spend 3 years completing a design degree. Shillington was the perfect opportunity for me, 3 months of intensive learning that equips you with the skills needed for a design career. I really loved the live briefs—coming up with solutions in a matter of days, quick thinking and giving students room to experiment and make mistakes.

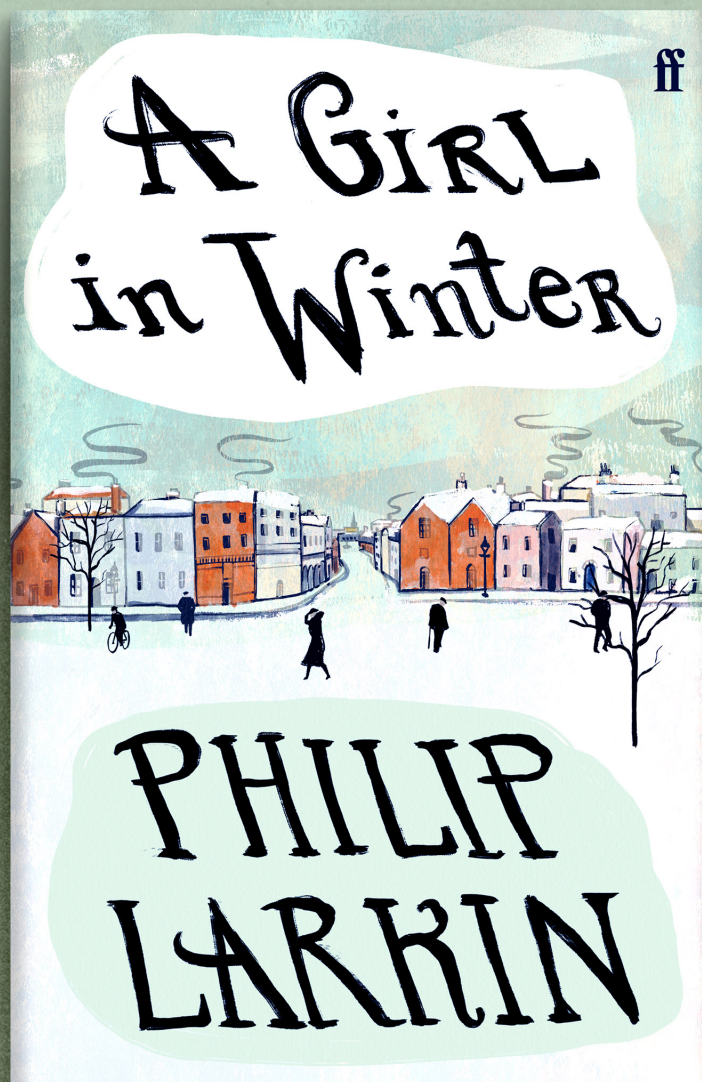
I took these newfound tools into the real world when I finished the course and they have given me a great foundation to build on ever since.



You're now working as a freelance book cover designer (having gone solo in 2020), can you tell us more about that and how that happened?

I wanted a little more flexibility in my in-house role at Penguin, being able to work from home and to help my partner set up his own business. After much consideration, I decided to leave Penguin Random House to go freelance. Looking back,

it was quite a big risk, but has turned out to be a great decision. I now manage my own projects, work with new publishers, art directors and authors on a huge variety of book covers ranging from literary fiction, cookbooks, series designs, classic reissues and children's books.



What does a typical day-in-the-life look like for you?

I guess what drew me to becoming a book cover designer is that no two days are the same! My days are spent starting new briefs, reading manuscripts, sketching out ideas. Others are receiving feedback from art directors, making amendments,

laying out a full cover and sending it off to print! Design for publishing is a great niche to be in as you get a lot of creative freedom to explore and to give a book its own identity.



Can you share details about any exciting projects? What's the most exciting opportunity you've had since striking out on your own?

Since going freelance I have designed and illustrated a series of six Puffin Classics including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Peter Pan* and I also recently had the opportunity

to create a book bag design for The Women's Prize for Fiction. Last year, I completed my largest and most exciting project to date! I was commissioned by HarperCollins USA to redesign and illustrate a series of fourteen (!) Agatha Christie 'Miss Marple' classic murder mysteries. It was a career highlight! All the books have been printed now and each design features a toxic plant, a clue from the book and Miss Marple's hidden silhouette.



What inspires your design work? We'd love to hear about any particular experiences or influences on your practice?

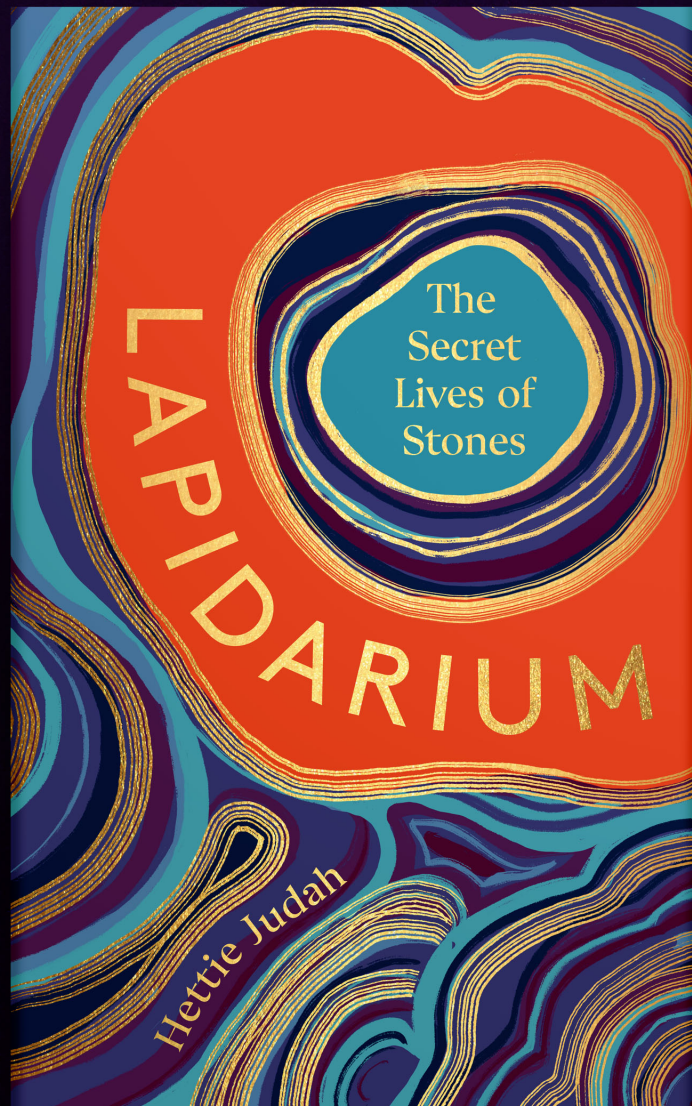
I guess I have always been inspired by nature, sounds very cliché, but whether it's unusual shapes, patterns, colour palettes or textures, I always find it weaves its way into my designs.



What does the future hold for you! Where do you see yourself in 12 months?

I am really enjoying working as a freelance book cover designer! I would like to branch out into other areas of design and have just recently been commissioned to illustrate a collection of clutch bags for a French fashion brand Olympia

Le Tan.



What was the most surprising thing about the course?

I didn't really think it would be possible to learn and absorb so much in 3 months!



What would you say to someone who is skeptical about the Shillington course?

I think looking back, it was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I was at a crossroads; in a job I disliked and didn't really have any other routes to make a change.

Shillington gave me the tools, knowledge and confidence to start a career in design.

Huge thanks to Holly for sharing her story and ideas with us.

Check out her website and follow her on Instagram to see more of her work.

Want to make your own creative career change? You never know where design might take you. Learn more about Shillington's innovative graphic design course or come and meet us at an Info Session.

<https://blog.shillingtoneducation.com/holly-ovenden-interview/>