

How to Get Hired as a Graphic Designer in Australia During the Pandemic

2020 has definitely, as they say, been a year for the history books. The world—and our lives—has been overwhelmed by the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. While we continue to navigate these remarkably tumultuous times, Shillington graduates around the world continue to produce incredible for their portfolios. Many of these students transitioned into online learning with us when “Stay Home” orders were given in our campus countries. On top of this, there is a silver lining—our amazingly talented graduates are still finding jobs in the design industry.

We caught up with three of recent Australian graduates—Ping Ni, Uma Madan and Vivienne Au—about their search for and getting a job in 2020. We asked them the ins and outs of their experiences—how they found their role, what their interviews were liked and some advice for other graduates who are in the position they were in just a few months ago. Read on to find out more.



Our Australian graduates: Uma Madan, Vivienne Au and Ping Ni

The Graduates

Ping Ni was a Product Manager for string instruments at Eastman Music Company before she decided she wanted to mix things up for a career in UX designer. After a disastrous semester of graphic design at college, she enrolled at Shillington Melbourne. It was the perfect stepping stone towards her new career.

Since graduating, she now works as a Designer at Eastman Violins, a department of her previous company, as well as picking up some freelance work with some fellow Shillington graduates on the side.

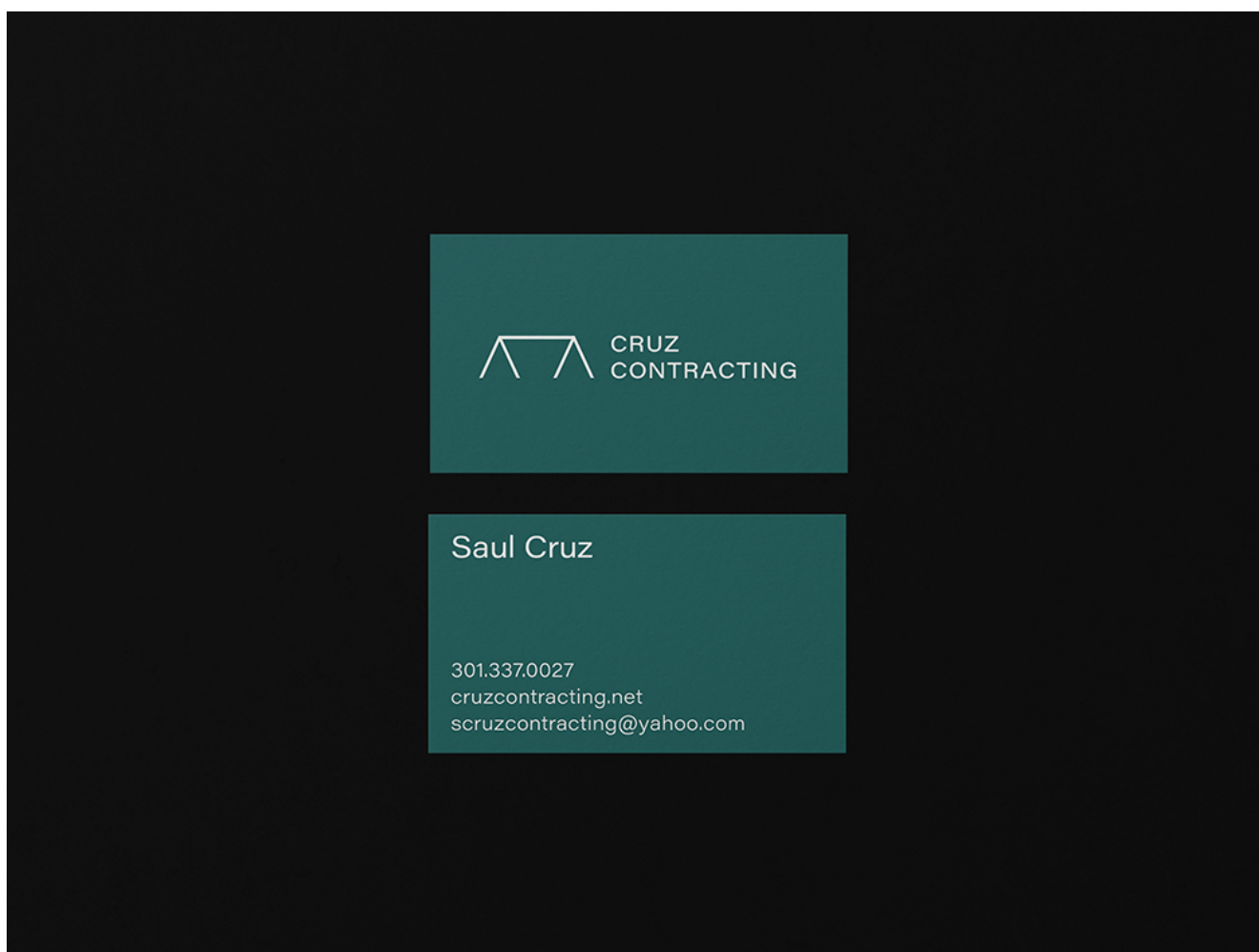
Fellow Shillington Melbourne graduate Vivienne Au was a team leader at a Doubletree by Hilton hotel before embarking on her design adventure. She had dabbled with design a little in the past with skills she learn at school—making a few business cards and advertising materials for her friends.

Since graduating Vivienne has been working in UI design for a digital marketing, where she takes on an impressively diverse

range of projects.

Meanwhile Uma Madan, who graduated from Shillington Brisbane back in May 2020, had recently moved back to her hometown from New York. There, she was working in PR and Marketing and had undertaken a grad cert in UX at UQ. She was also doing some freelance illustration work on top of that too! In these, she had done a little bit of InDesign and Photoshop but that was the limit of her design experience.

Since leaving us at Shillington, Uma has landed herself a job at Peppa Hart, a bespoke creative design agency. They work across branding, digital and product imagery.



Ping's Work

The Job Hunt

Fortunately, as a large majority of job searching is done online these days, the actual process of looking for a job hasn't changed drastically. Don't forget to check out Shillington's Jobs Board for roles across the world. We also have an blog post on the Best Design Jobs Boards if you wanted to look further.

The thing that has changed about the Job Hunt is the amount of jobs out there. We can't say that a global pandemic hasn't had an effect on the amount of jobs out there, but these graduates are proof that there is still jobs for you to apply for. It took Ming around two months to find her job at Eastman:

"After graduating, I wanted to keep the momentum going. I contacted the marketing department at my old company, Eastman, and offered to do design work as an unpaid intern. I was job searching in the meantime, but it was more important for me to keep designing than to get compensated immediately.

After two months, Eastman offered me a position as a junior graphic designer.

I was privileged to have been able to prioritise experience over compensation, and to have a company that I could go to. I'm grateful for that."

It took Vivienne about the same amount of time—she started at her agency two months after finishing at Shillington:

"In July, I was given the opportunity to work with a digital marketing agency. The projects are very diverse, from designing websites for desktop and mobile, to researching colour palette options for a new logo of a medical organisation."

Uma was even quicker! She was working at Peppa Hart within 5 weeks of finishing the course:

“I was fortunate in timing, to be honest. I finished up at Shillington, and after taking a few weeks to decompress and tweak my website a little, I reached out to a friend who connected me to the Peppa Hart agency. Within 5 weeks of graduating I was in the studio.”

All of our graduates' experiences show that it's a great idea to use friends, colleagues and contacts you already have whilst searching for work—you never know what they might lead you to.



Uma's Branding (Student Portfolio)

The Interview

In a time where most offices were shut and people were advised to stay at home, a job interview was always going to look different to normal. Though, like with just about everything else, people found a way to work around this. Like a lot of things this year, Vivienne completed the interview process

without meeting anyone face-to-face:

“The interview process was incredibly laid back, it was a chat via phone and then again to meet the team on zoom.”

Uma’s interview process also went off without a hitch:

“Sophie Bell, the owner of Peppa Hart, is an angel and from the first email, to the confirmation of the contract, it was a dream process.

It wasn’t a hard-and-fast structured progression, like it might be were I interviewing with a large agency. Peppa Hart is a small studio, and so it was very conversational. Sophie had already checked out my work (my website, Instagram and I had sent my portfolio, as well as my resume), so during the interview we just discussed my previous experience and what I felt I could bring to the role.

I think the size of the studio was also a huge contributor to how quick the process was. We had chatted via email, organised an interview, met over Zoom, negotiated pay and confirmed the contract all within 4 days.”

Having work for Eastman before, Ping’s experience was a little different:

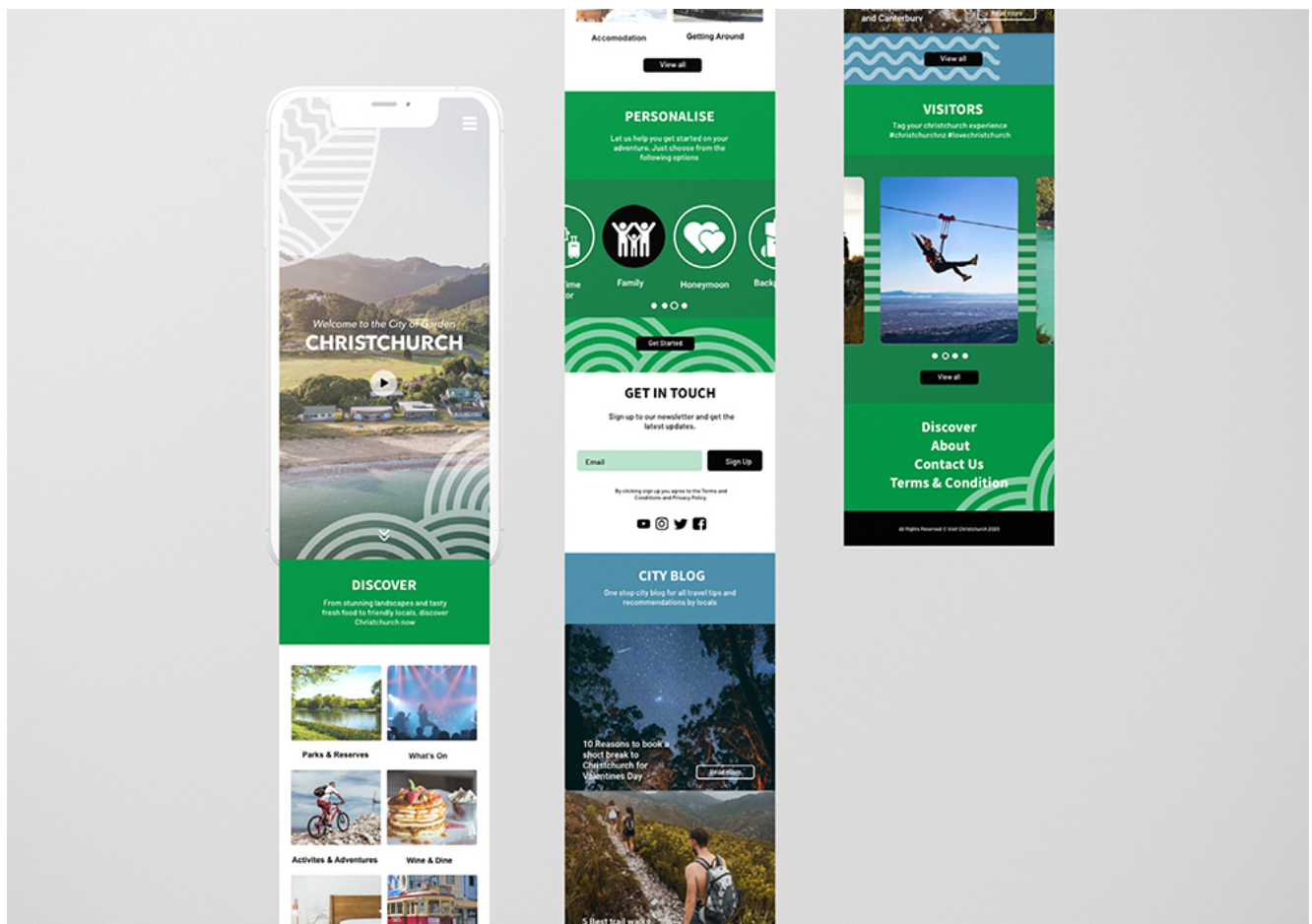
“Since I had worked for Eastman before, there was no formal interview process other than presenting my portfolio to the marketing director to show him my experience and capabilities.

In the beginning when I was just freelancing, I treated that time with the same amount of respect for deadlines and commitment to my work as if it were a paid position. I’d like to think that mindset was a factor in Eastman offering me a job later on.”

All of our graduates’ interview experiences, which all took place during a pandemic, show that a job interview is still nothing to be afraid of: even it is over the phone, over Zoom

or anything else, no one is trying to catch you out. Interviews being on Zoom or another platform can also work in your favour—if you're able to do a good job on there, they know you'll be ready to work remotely.

Want to know what to expect in a graphic design interview? Check out our article on the kind of questions you can expect to be asked and the best ways to answer them.



Vivienne's Branding (Student Portfolio)

The Studio

With many people working from home, design studios are looking like very different places in 2020. In fact, some studios have made the decision to scrap a physical studio all together. Though, many still keep their traditional office space. For instance, Ping has been 100% remote since she started her job. She explained to us:

"I regularly Zoom and screen share with my marketing director and we text constantly. I'll send him screenshots of my work, and he'll immediately reply with comments. Aside from missing being around other sentient beings, it's been great."

Vivienne is the same and has been working from home:

"I am working remotely. My work schedule is flexible, I start around 10am and finish around 6pm. Sometimes I'm working on 3 different projects at the same time. The projects could span days or weeks."

She's learnt some important lessons from having to work on her own timings, though:

"The most important thing I've come to learn is managing my time better so that I am able to meet the different deadlines."

At Peppa Hart Studio, Uma has been mixing things up and working both remotely and in the studio:

"I work 3 days from the Peppa Hart Studio, and 2 days from home. When working remote, we use Slack. We each have our own projects, so it's quite easy to take those days away and work on our own. It's a regular day—we log on by 9, log off by 5, and just communicate when we need to.

When we come back together, there's a lot of chatter, and the days are filled with high energy collaboration."



Ping's Violin Labels (Eastman)

The Work

One of our favourite things is seeing the designs our graduates work on once they leave us and start their careers—and not even a pandemic could change that. Ping has told about some of the work she has been creating since she started designing at Eastman:

“One of the first projects I did for Eastman was redesigning violin labels. It’s a tiny strip of paper glued inside the instrument identifying the maker, model, and age. I’m in love with print design, and it was a fun challenge trying to fit so much information on a 30x70mm strip.”

On top of her work with Eastman, she has also undertaken some freelance work in collaboration with some fellow Shillington

graduates under the name Dim Sum Studio. This began simply as an outline for the two of them to keep designing in what they thought would be an uneasy job market. We asked Ping to tell us a bit about how it started and what they've been working on:

"We've been pleasantly surprised at how many people could use design work just within our network. A few projects came from friends and family, and a few came from serendipitous conversations with strangers."

"We're currently working on an identity for a coffee roaster in Cairo and a microgreens grower in Michigan. As recent graduates, the imposter syndrome can be intense, but our Shillington teachers Kim and Annette have been amazing mentors. They've helped lend a critical eye when we're stuck, and we're beyond grateful for them."

Ping has also been taking on some other freelance projects:

"One of my freelance projects has been creating an identity for a local building contractor. Contractors have a reputation for being untrustworthy and cutting corners, so we wanted something that felt honest and sturdy. The abstract sawhorse mark references stability, but it can also be seen as a roof since my client literally puts a roof over your head."

Uma isn't able to share any of the projects she's working on at Peppa Hart yet, but she did tell us:

"The clients at Peppa Hart are all so exciting and the work is diverse. Since I've been here, I've worked on a range of things—90% design, 10% other; it's never boring."

Meanwhile, Vivienne has been working on some exciting projects in her freelance role (though, she's not able to share any images yet!). She told us what she's been up to:

"I researched and designed pages of the new website across

desktop and mobile for Kennedy which is a luxury watch brand in Australia. It was fun working with existing brand guidelines and yet still creating something new.”



Uma's Packaging (Student Portfolio)

The Course

Nothing makes everyone at Shillington happier than seeing our graduates head off into the design world and forge their own careers. We make sure they leave with all the skills, technical know-how and confidence to be able to do this. And, all of our graduates agree with this. Ping was particularly impressed by the briefs that are delivered to students during the course:

“The practical software skills I gained at Shillington are invaluable, but the 35 client briefs we completed during the course are what really prepared me for the real world.

Working on realistic briefs with tight deadlines taught me more than a traditional classroom setting ever could. Instead of learning theory and never applying it, we designed every day and learned theory along the way.

Shillington taught me that design is a solvable problem, not a sacred art that only enlightened individuals are privy to.”

Uma definitely agrees with her:

“The most valuable skill was learning the creative process. It consistently guides me through my client work, and it really helps having learnt ways to push through the mental blocks every creative gets.”

This was backed up by Vivienne too:

“Without the Shillington course I would not have had the skills to succeed in my current role. The short deadlines with each brief and the ideation skills I learnt in the course prepared me for real life.”



Vivienne's Packaging (Student Portfolio)

Their Advice

Finally, we asked each of our graduates to share their number one piece of advice for anyone who is starting their design journey with Shillington. Ping told us:

“Take advantage of the books. The internet is full of noise; books are a quiet respite containing a wealth of inspiration.”

Uma added some firm advice:

“Be all in. Before you even start, get on Pinterest, download the Behance/Dribbble apps on your phone, search for design you're interested on Instagram and browse. Constantly browse. For three months, stop browsing anything else and just look at design you love. Save it, ask yourself why you like it. Maybe replicate it—it's great practice.”

“When you start, get to know your peers. Talk and ask questions, relax, share both your great ideas and your terrible ideas, make fun of yourself and boost others up. And listen to everything your teachers say! They know what they’re doing.”

Just be all in.”

Finally, Vivienne shared:

“You get out of the course what you put in so knuckle down and learn as much as you can because I promise you, the course goes by so quickly but everything you will learn is pure gold!”

Big congratulations on their new roles to all our graduates, Ping, Uma and Vivienne, and big thanks to them for sharing their stories and advice with us.

Ping, Uma and Vivienne are just three of our Australian graduates who have landed a job during the pandemic. We’d also like to say a big congratulations to:

- Tarek Elkaffas and Zeldene Peat, both from Shillington Melbourne, who have been freelancing as Dim Sum Studio alongside Ping.
- Lara Neck, Shillington Brisbane graduate, who is working as a Graphic Designer alongside Uma at Peppa Hart.
- Shillington Melbourne graduate Holland McKoy who has been working remotely with Think Graphics from her home in South Carolina.
- David McDermott, Shillington Sydney graduate, who is employed full-time at Canva in Sydney.
- Shillington Brisbane graduate Sophie Bo Schmidt who is working as a freelance designer and a Senior UX Consultant.

We wanted to write this article to show that, despite the

turbulent period the world is currently facing, there are jobs out there and Shillington graduates are getting hired! We hope this article shows you that there is hope.

Good luck in your job search! For more help, check out the Resources on our blog, there's loads of amazing career tips and treats on there. And, don't forget, we have an incredible Career Guide exclusive to Shillington graduates on The Guide.

Artwork by #ShilloLON Teacher Jack Trotman.

<https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/get-hired-pandemic-au/>