Interview with Dan Pilgrim, Founder and Designer at Saul Studio

From his first day of a graphic and communication design degree, Dan Pilgrim knew that one day he wanted to start his own design studio. Fast forward a few years, in comes Dan’s partner Joey Barritt, and the pair founded Saul Studio. Saul Studio is a graphic design practice based in Leeds specialising in typographic design, but also working in visual identity, publication, website, exhibition and other design material. Dan recently zoomed into our Shillington London and

Manchester students to talk through some of Saul Studio’s branding projects, the design scene in Leeds and more.

We caught up with Dan after his lecture to talk about his design journey from uni to studio, Saul Studio’s process and loads more. Happy reading!

Can you tell us about your design journey so far? How did you get to where you are today?

I have always had a passion for graphic design and typography. As a child I remember collecting signatures from family and friends and enjoying/analysing the handwriting of relatives. I studied art and graphic design at school and college but it wasn’t until university that I really had an opportunity to put my passion into practice.

How did you and Joey (Barritt, Dan's partner) get to founding Saul Studio? What made you want to start your own studio?

I had in my head from day one at university that I wanted to work for myself, particularly run a design studio of my own. Therefore, I took part in an additional business and enterprise course at university that helped me to set up the business. There are advantages (and disadvantages) for working for yourself but for me I always felt the positives outweighed the negatives.

It wasn't until two years after university that I met Joey whose work I was aware of in Leeds—we were both doing the same thing in the same city and had the same ambitions, so instead of competing with one another it just made sense to work

together (two heads are better than one as they say!).

In short, what do Saul Studio do?

We create beautiful, meaningful design for our clients. And if the client is passionate, then so are we.

In your lecture, you touched on some amazing restaurant branding projects—could you tell about one (or both) of these? How did you get to the eventual outcomes?

Both piña and SARTO are research-driven visual identities—with piña, a Mexican bar and taqueria, we had to become experts in Mexico, tequila and mezcal, and with SARTO absorb ourselves in Italian food and culture.

As I touched upon in the lecture, the typography, colour and material used for both projects is built out of the subject matter in which they derive from, influencing everything from the interior design to the menus and signage.

This might be a tricky question, but do you have a favourite project that you and Joey have worked on?

I really enjoyed piña as Joe the owner is really passionate about Mexican culture and we learnt so much about the cuisine and culture of Mexico from that project. It’s a project we keep coming back to, and still enjoy working on three years later, especially as there was so much source material to work from as well (for example, Joe’s photos from his trip to

Mexico).

You also spoke about your book Coffee Shop North and the new Coffee Shop Series that has been born out of it. Can you tell us about this?

Coffee Shop: North was an idea I had after leaving university, in short, a publication that showcases and documents the independent coffee scene in the north of England. I used Kickstarter to fund the project and pitched the idea to a photographer (Justin Slee), and thankfully both the Kickstarter was successful and Justin was happy to be a part of the project. Coffee Shop Series reboots that idea into a series of books with each focussing on a different city. The first, Vol 01: Leeds is available now. Vol 02: Manchester is

coming soon.

In your opinion, what are the joys of self-initiated passion projects? Do you find they help your other design work?

> *Self-initiated projects give you the opportunity to practice for real-life scenarios, for example, I give myself a deadline and try to stick to it.*

And when the studio work is mundane or dry, it gives you an opportunity to work on something that is creative.

Where do you go to look for inspiration? Or is there anything you do to get inspired?

I am inspired by every day things, sometimes subconsciously. I might see a typeface that I like on a billboard, or titles in a film. I do look at other’s work on Instagram, etc. but I mostly take an individual approach to work. Galleries and art are always a source of inspiration for me, as well as trips to new places.

If we have any graduates looking to start their own studio, is there any advice you can share?

If you want to do it, do it. It’s not for everyone but start now if so. Look at any business/enterprise modules or courses that might help you. Find work experience/an internship too. Ask questions!

And continuing on from that, what’s your number one piece of advice for a fresh graduate trying to find their feet in the industry?

> *Work hard, make it count. It’s a tough industry, especially right now, but if you persevere and put your heart into it you will get to where you want to be.*

Some or most of your projects during education will be the first things a potential employer might see as part of your portfolio so it’s important that you’re happy with it. Take breaks as well, find things that inspire you!

Finally, give us five words that describe you and your creative style.

Contemporary, minimalist, functional, expressive, individual.

Anything else you would like to add?

I’m grateful for where I am right now, and all the people who helped me to get here, so thank you.

Big thanks to Dan for joining our London students for an amazing guest lecture, and for talking to us afterwards. Make sure to follow Saul Studio on Instagram and check out their website to keep an eye on any new projects.

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and advertising agencies at Shillington. Check out more interviews from guest lecturers.

https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/saul-studio-interview/