Study Design Abroad: Henriette van Baren, Amsterdam to Shillington New York

Have you thought of living in a different country while studying design? Henriette van Baren had a unique journey—she majored in both fashion design and law at a university in Amsterdam, but after graduation, she decided to upskill by continuing her studies in design at Shillington New York.

When Henriette returned to Amsterdam after Shillington, she started working at a law firm and took on freelance design projects on the side. Her job combined both law and design—creating infographics for different legal information that would be later used in court. Although she enjoyed working as an attorney, her creativity wasn't being expressed to its fullest potential. Fast forward four years—she decided to solely focus on design—moving back to New York City! Read on to learn about her path to becoming a full-time designer after exploring different career possibilities, advice to students interested in studying abroad, and her experience living and working in New York.

Tell us a bit about your creative journey. When you were studying fashion design and law, did you have the intention of having a career in both of these very different fields?

To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted! I have always had many different interests. As a kid, I made my own jewelry and dreamed of starting my own jewelry brand. I took painting and drawing classes and dreamed of becoming an artist. On the other hand, I am a bit of a study geek and I enjoy breaking my head over complex matters.

After high school and a gap year at the art academy in Florence, I decided to study both law and fashion design and I thought I would figure out what I liked most and drop the other. I did not have the intention to have a career in both fields, I simply didn't know what I wanted and thought I'd keep my options open. But doing both actually worked out quite well for me. I loved the versatility of it, and I ended up with a BA in Design and a Masters degree in Law.

> *My problem in life is that I want to do it all. I often say that if I could, I would spend the rest of my life studying.*

I am always hungry for new knowledge and new skills. Currently on the top of my list—psychology and architecture.

What made you decide to study in New York?

I was instantly impressed by the student work on the website. I had been wanting to go to New York since I was 16, but because I was in both fashion school and law school at the time, I could not leave Amsterdam. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to upgrade my design knowledge, and Shillington New York was an easy choice.

Any recommendations for students hoping to study abroad?

Jump in and go for it. I believe anyone will benefit from studying abroad. It is a great experience to step out of your comfort zone and be surrounded by new people and new adventures. You will learn so much about yourself and it is a real opportunity to rethink your priorities and where you want to go in life!

Since you already had previous experience in the arts and studying design, how did the Shillington course further build your skillset?

After I completed fashion school, I worked as a stylist for a little while but I soon discovered that the fashion world was

not for me. I realized that the thing I had loved the most in fashion school was the graphic design part of it—branding and designing trend books. I had taught myself the basics of InDesign and Photoshop in fashion school, but I did not feel confident enough about my skills to apply for graphic design jobs. Right around that time I stumbled across Shillington, and from that point, I was adamant on going.

> *At Shillington, I gained a deeper understanding of design principles and upgraded my skills in every way possible.*

What motivated you to leave your job as an attorney after 4 years to focus solely on graphic design?

I actually liked my job as an attorney a lot, but my time for passion projects and freelance design jobs were limited. It came to a point where I realized I was neglecting a big part of myself. I hadn't painted in years and I could only take on small freelance jobs. I was struggling with the thought of leaving for some time when my boyfriend and I got the opportunity to move to New York. Looking back, it was the best decision of my life.

What were you up to after graduating from Shillington?

In the time between deciding to go to New York and studying at Shillington, I fell in love with graphic design and enjoyed every minute of the program. When I got back to Amsterdam, I started working at a law firm and decided to work on freelance projects every minute I had left. I also found a way to incorporate my love for design into my job as an attorney. I was using my design skills to create visuals for legal structures and complex issues to make them understandable for clients. I discovered that in the corporate and legal world, visuals are a powerful tool to get a message across clearly and convincingly, whether you're summarizing complicated information or trying to decipher its essence. We would use the visuals I created as an aid in and outside the courtroom.

I very much enjoyed the process of digging into legal matters and translating them into visuals—I got to combine the best of both worlds.

What advice can you offer to someone who wants to transition careers?

Listen to your gut. If switching careers has been on your mind, there is a good reason for it and you shouldn’t ignore it!

What do you love about being a designer?

Being a designer allows me to be me. Art and design are integral threads throughout so much of my life. I no longer feel like I am neglecting the things I am most passionate

about.

How was your experience moving back to New York from Amsterdam?

Amazing! I love Amsterdam so much, but the energy in New York is truly unmatched. The city is full of possibilities and adventures. That being said, New York is also a very big city and when I first moved back and was looking to find a job, I often felt very overwhelmed. I didn’t know anyone in the design community and I felt that it was hard to get my foot in the door. But I just kept trying and after weeks of no one getting back to me, I suddenly got multiple job offers. So don’t give up!

What are your favourite things about living in New York?

The creative community in New York is huge. There is so much to see in New York and you can get inspiration everywhere. I have met such amazing people and I am so grateful to be able to live here!

Tell us about your design role at ABC Carpet & Home—what does your typical day look like and the types of projects you've worked on.

My job at ABC allows me to work on a range of projects! The store has undergone major renovations in the past months, and the redesigned first floor has opened just a few weeks ago. That has opened up a lot of interesting design opportunities such as rethinking in-store signage and wayfinding. Recently, I have designed the gift guide for the holiday season, and we are currently in the process of rolling out the rest of the holiday campaign. Also, I get to do a lot of illustrations and I am working on the re-design for the ABC Kitchen restaurant menus, which I am super excited about!

Could you tell us about your freelance projects?

So far, my freelance work has been varied. I have designed logos and websites, worked on medical research book design, did various branding projects and created invites and an illustrated mural for New York Fashion Week. Currently, I am working on a branding project for a mezcal company and UI design for a public restroom app.

My favorite branding project from last year was for DRUYF, an Amsterdam based start-up that offers month to month wine subscriptions delivered to your doorstep. All wines are exclusive, organic and hand-picked by a team of experts. DRUYF aims to educate their customers on developing a palette for wine in a fun and playful way.

Your drawings and portrait paintings are beautiful! What inspires your art?

Thank you! Since I was a kid, I have been painting people and portraits. I am intrigued by body language and facial expressions. This year, I have painted a series of portraits of freckled people. I became fascinated with the way freckles create mystery on a face.

My line drawings are more abstract and I often do them with my eyes closed. One of my paintings was part of the Red Dot Award Show at the Art Students League of New York last Spring. I have no other shows planned, but I am always open to new opportunities.

Where do you find your inspiration?

I pull inspiration from so many places, rather inconsistently! At the start of a new project, I try to stay away from the computer.

> *I go look at art, spend an afternoon in a bookstore or walk around the city and take in all there is to see.*

I sketch and write down initial thoughts and then open up my computer. I use Pinterest, Behance, Dribbble, and Instagram mostly. I follow a lot of designers and agencies, but also artists. I like being able to see all of their work in one place.

I also attend various design talks and fun creative gatherings to get inspired. Some of my favorites in New York are Design Matters, Type Thursday, Ladies Wine Design, and Sip ’n Sketch!

Describe yourself and your creative style.

My design and art are characterized by sophisticated simplicity, thoughtful details, and a feminine touch.

What projects would you like to be working on in the next few months?

I would like to be doing more digital illustration, restaurant branding, and book design. Putting it out there in the universe!

Huge thanks to Henriette for sharing her story! Be sure to check out her website and follow her on Instagram.

Have you read any of our other study abroad series? We’ve spoken with Robyn Hunt who moved from Capetown to Sydney, Camila Rogelis who traded Bogotá for London, and Mia Dellore who left Slovenia for Manchester.

Want to study graphic design abroad? Study at Shillington in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane –> shillingtoneducation.com

The post Study Design Abroad: Henriette van Baren, Amsterdam to Shillington New York appeared first on Shillington Design Blog.

https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/henriette-van-baren/