

ReadyMade

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

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HOW DID YOU GET THAT F*&%ING AWESOME JOB? JONATHAN ADLER

Revealing how he got into the pottery biz and what it's like to design a life-size house for Barbie.

WRITTEN BY KATHERINE SHARPE PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRYAN MCCAY

Hi, Jonathan Adler. How did you get that f*&%ing awesome job?

By accident. In my early twenties I tried to work in the movie business and I got fired from five jobs in a row for being a terrible employee. I had always wanted to be a potter, so I started working in a communal pottery studio and eventually summoned the nerve to show my stuff to a buyer from Barneys. I never had a plan. I just knew that I was unemployable, and that I had to make the pottery thing work somehow.

What was it that drew you to ceramics?

I'm not a very spiritual person, but when I first tried pottery at summer camp at age 12, I fell madly and deeply and spiritually in love with clay and knew instantly that I was destined to be a potter.

After starting on the creative side, was it hard to learn the rules of business?

When I shipped my first order to Barneys, I didn't know what an invoice was and I charged \$20 for a pot that took me two days to make. I was an idiot. But, after 16 years, I've gradually cracked the code. Business can be very creative, but it's definitely not the same kind of creativity necessary to be a potter.

Do you remember when you first started to notice good design?

I remember being mesmerized by a Brancusi exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art when I was five.

Why is design so important?

Design is communication. The stuff you surround yourself with tells the world who you are and impacts your mood.

What is your typical day like?

Pathetically unstructured and not terribly grown-up. I get to the office around 9:30 and roam around talking to my design team. Then I might duck into the studio and throw a pot or two before lunch with the president of my company. Then, perhaps, a nap and more pots. All of my operatives are smart and very funny and often delightfully inappropriate.



Above: Pillows on display at Adler's showroom in NYC. Opposite: Adler with a collection of recent work.

One of your recent interior design projects was to design a life-size Barbie Dream House in Malibu, to celebrate Barbie's 50th. What was that experience like?

Designing for Barbie was such a treat! The most important thing was that it had to be fun and pink and memorable. Real-life clients can be such a drag—all about storage and practicality—so Barbie was a breath of fresh air. And, luckily, there was no Ken around to rein in the glamour or tone down the pink.

What advice would you give to someone who wanted to make it as a designer and entrepreneur?

Get a job! It's very difficult to make a living as a designer, and I consider myself extremely lucky. So, I'd say just get an entry level job at a creative firm you like, work really hard, and you'll succeed. **RM**

To learn more about Adler, we recommend reading the witty timeline of his career at jonathanadler.com.



 Vitals

OCCUPATION
Potter/Designer

JOB LOCATION
New York, New York

FIRST JOB
Mailroom at a talent agency

BEST JOB
I never had a good job and I don't consider my current gig a job. It's a pleasure.

GREATEST PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE
To remain focused on creativity no matter what kind of business insanity I'm dealing with.

STARTING SALARY
From a whopping 18k when I was 23 to a mere 5k when I was 27.

SITE
jonathanadler.com