DesignWhine

Digital Magazine for UI/UX Professionals

Issue # 02

Natasha Jahchan

Eric Goldberg

Felix Lee

Alex Vvedenskii

Nishant Chauhan

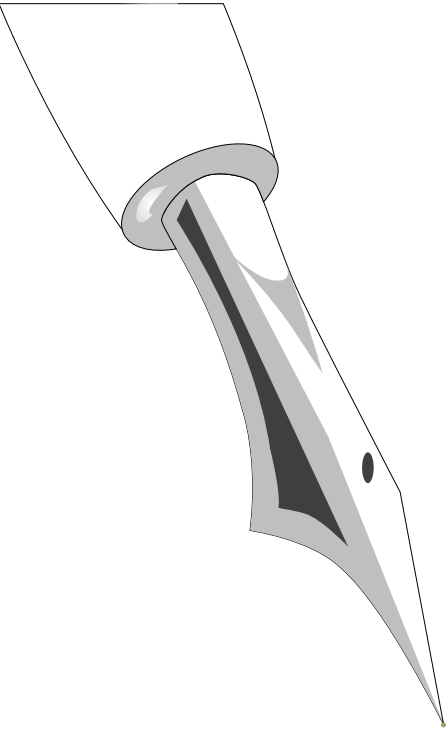Erick Gavin

THE **GIANT** **LEAP**

Six stories of people who wouldn't give up on UX

Empowering the UI/UX fraternity!

DesignWhine's focus since the debut issue has been on bringing the design fraternity together. It talks about individual designers' stories, their inspirations, the tools or desks they've been working on or the struggles they might have faced during the pandemic. DW is not restricted to technical stories or case studies or tips and tricks about UI/UX. It is about the *people* of the industry.

And while we talk about the people who make this industry an amazing space, we cannot help but talk about the people who watch this industry from a distance, are fascinated by it, but have no idea whatsoever on how to enter it.

This issue covers such people's stories. It shares experiences of some of the industry professionals who made it big without having any formal education in design. People who explored various options, experimented with numerous career paths before finding their one true love for UI/UX.

We hope their experiences and stories will encourage and provide strength to the hundreds out there who want to enter the exciting world of experience design 😗

RAJAT AGARWAL
Editor-in-Chief

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Cover concept and design
by Rajat Agarwal

MADE IN JA

How Japan made me a better person and designer. A personal journey through aesthetic growth..

BY JENNY ELAINE PURCELL

While I was in grad school, I pushed really hard to have an excuse to travel the world and see what was out there that wasn't NY. I especially wanted to experience traveling and living in Japan. It was a country where it was constantly at odds with itself aesthetically, culturally, and artistically. It is simultaneously the most tranquil, simple, and peaceful place to exist, while also being the most chaotic, over stimulating, and manic environments I have been in. It was a dichotomy of attitude and views, past and future, all existing in one frame at a time. After trying for two years I got to go there, I got to teach functional sculpture and study with carpenters in Kyoto. It changed my very being, and set off a relationship with the country for five years.
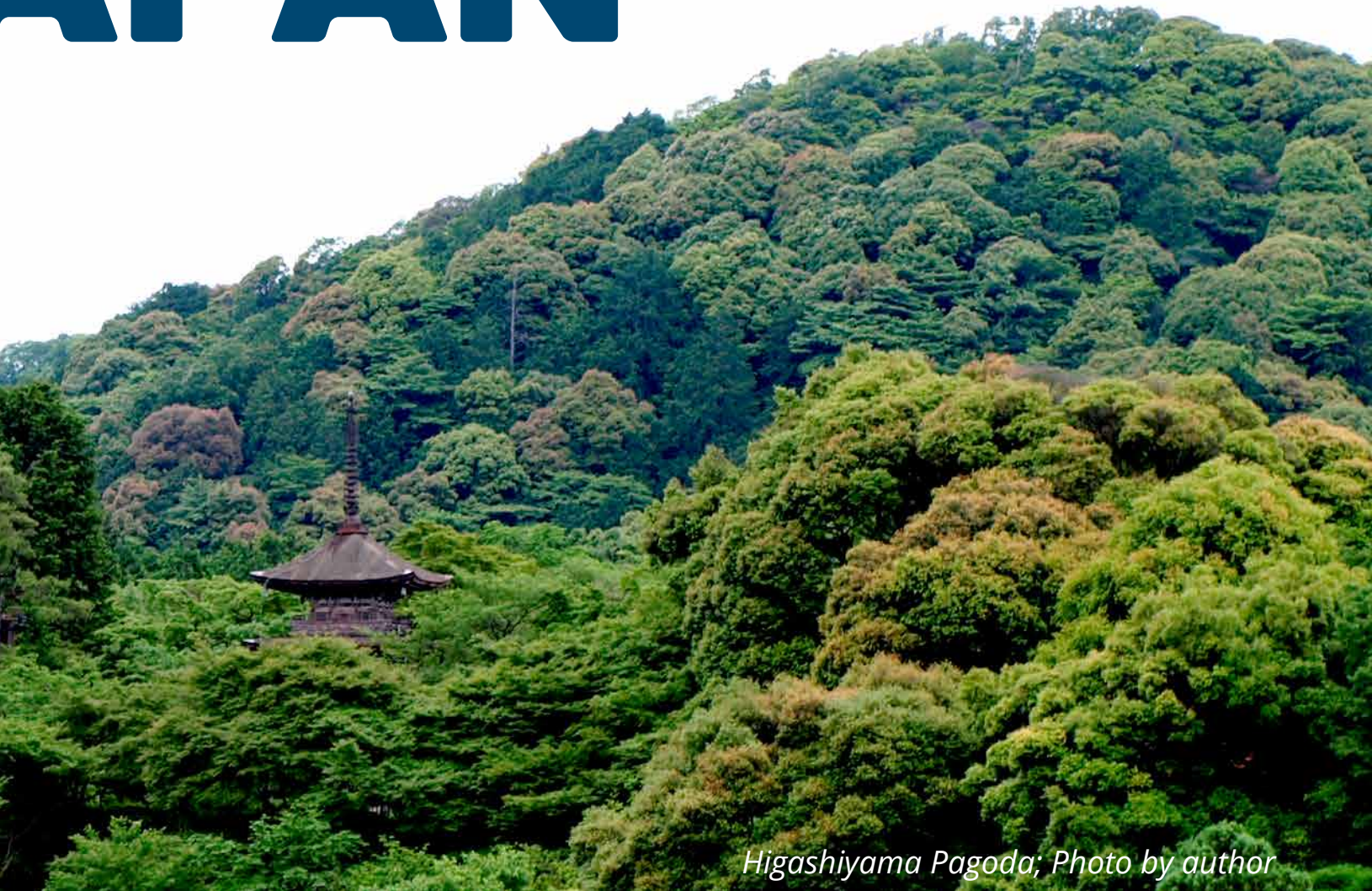
APAN

Higashiyama Pagoda; Photo by author

In 2008 I landed in Osaka, made my way by train to Kyoto, and moved into a traditional Japanese home that hosted artists in residence at the Kyoto Crafts School. I had arrived. It was all that I had imagined, it was both busy and sleepy, I was jet lagged and still

> **Material language is where everything you show and build with, the raw materials, the tools, and the media used, speaks a very deliberate intention to the viewer**

value. It would be a light, a chair, table, vessel, etc.. I was immensely excited to see what my students came up with.

Kyoto Home; Photo by author

I, on the other hand, was needing to wake up super early and study with a group of Japanese carpenters that worked mostly in Higashiyama. Japanese joinery and carpentry is something truly special. They work with no hardware, no fixatives, it is purely the wood connecting to itself in ways that create a locking bond. The joints can be simple or extremely ornate. It is a true art form in and of itself, and I wish I could say I became really good at it, but this western girl only ever became a beginner at it. So I would get up at 4am, take the train and a bus up to the temple complex of Higashiyama, meet my instructors, and then start rough cutting replacement

couldn't get rest because of how stimulating everything was. You are immediately bombarded with media as soon as you land. Ads, videos, signage, etc.. It was all so much, it was almost too much. The covered market in central Kyoto was a bustling empire of ridiculousness and wonderment. I didn't get to have much time to myself, I was almost

immediately introduced to my fellow residents, and we had teaching duties at the school almost as soon as we shook hands and bowed. I had two sections of summer courses to teach, both in something I had been pushing to create in my own work, functional sculpture. Really functional sculpture is just artistic objects that perform some task other than just aesthetic

where, took pictures of everything, I tried to capture this new feeling of existing in parallel worlds only separated by neon and flash. I tried because I wanted to emulate it, I wanted to make others feel this.

I wasn't alone in Japan for long. In my second section of teaching, I met Kiyomi. She was a student in my course, though older than myself, and we immediately hit it off. She was extra special as a person, she felt everything intimately, and she had a wonderful eye for form and simplicity in her work. We would talk for hours about punk, queerness, games, art, and NY. She attended Parsons and was only in Japan for the summer, and I was completely lost in her. More than any of this, she understood what I was amazed by, and we explored this idea as much as we could. This eventually led me to visit her and her family in Funabashi, and finally get to see Tokyo.

Tokyo is a madhouse.

Kiyomi at Temple Door; Photo by author

parts for a 13th century pagoda. Like holy shit what?!? The guys that let me shadow and apprentice were so friendly and open to me joining them, it became almost my only social group outside of my own teaching, but essentially they were all family men and aside from the few trips to the izakaya I met them at, they weren't super available. So I walked. I walked every-

Rainy Day at Tokyo Tow

Example of Author's Sculpture; Photo by author

Everything Kyoto was for me, was multiplied in Tokyo for ridiculousness. It just never stopped, it went on forever. Walking at night was like walking in mid-afternoon, it was so bright in the busy areas of Akihabara and Shibuya. Color existed everywhere in every shade possible. It was the most modern city I had ever experienced. I took pictures of simple things like capsule stores, and sleepy streets, shrines and festivals. I was in a place that I felt so

happy and excited over. It was what NY was for me as a kid, but so much better. My artwork began to change a lot during that time, simply because of Tokyo. We would travel back to Funabashi once a year for the next five years of my relationship with Kiyomi. Each time we would stay for a month or more. My work is very simple, very mournful. It emulated these quiet spaces I had found in Japan. I mainly used natural materials, unfinished and raw surfaces. It was

built to contrast the light I used in the pieces. Japan taught me something very important, material language.

Material language is where everything you show and build with, the raw materials, the tools, and the media used, speaks a very deliberate intention to the viewer. Raw and unfinished wood for me was nature, it was imperfect in its perfection, and tactile in its quietness. I used it extensively to calm the viewer and express a

sense of peacefulness and tranquility. The hemp cord became

delicate. I used a lot of glass and light to try and communicate this to the

busy temple market. It was everything I explored and felt with

Looks like one of us is lost out there alone, and I have a feeling it's me....

GO BACK TO HOME?
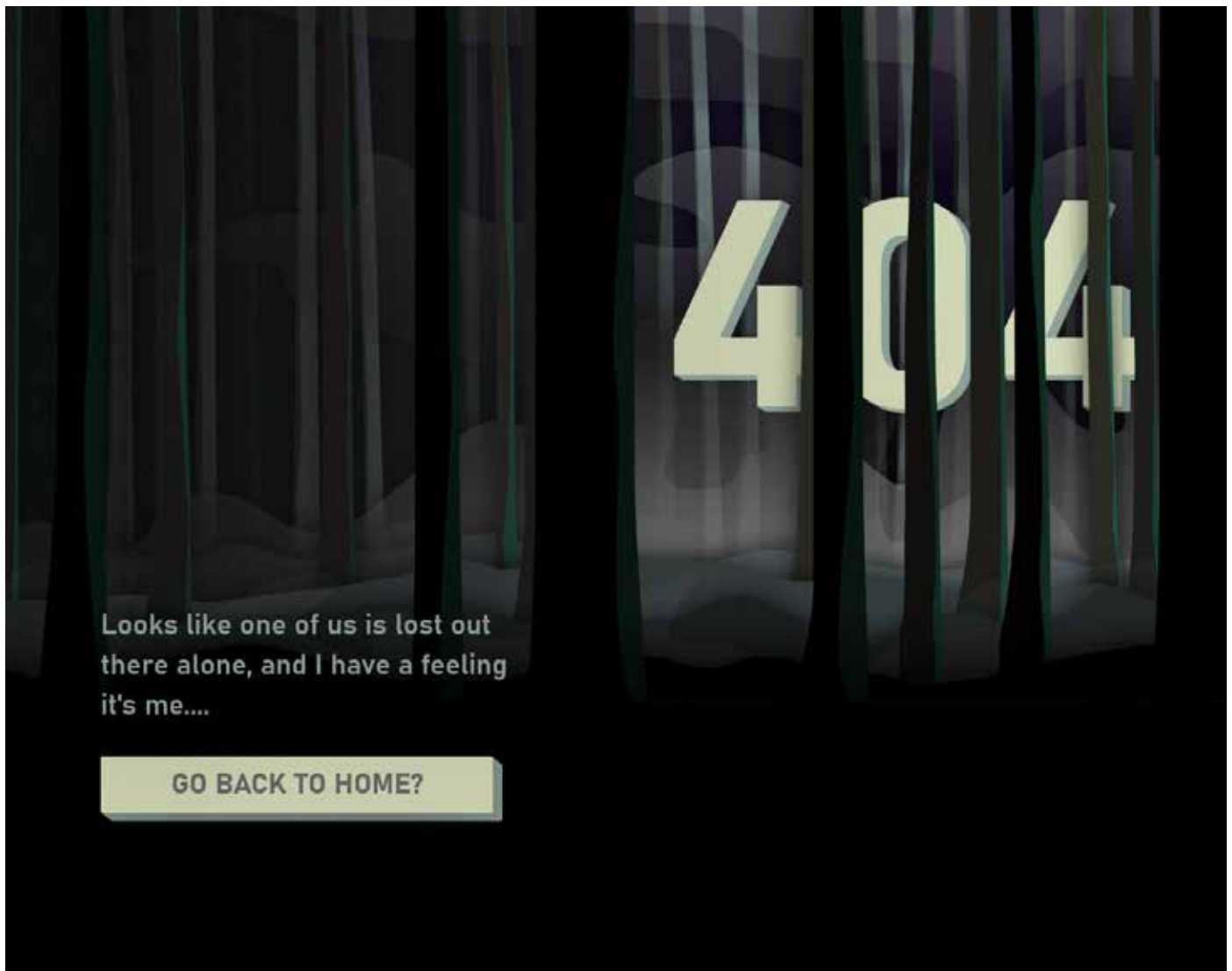
Example of Author's Designs; Photo by author

binding and imprisonment. It was tied in ways expressing being weighed down and in servitude. My other most used material language was fragility and light. Our senses of self can be immensely fragile, and those lights within ourselves, so very

viewers. When you add in my usage of flora, you get a message of mournful peace. My sculpture was the quiet space of the Tokyo shrines, nestled into the mega city around it. It was the wall of hopeful fortunes tied to the bush at the end of the

Kiyomi in Japan.

Kiyomi graduated in 2012, I was rudderless for a long time, but one thing that had changed almost completely inside me was from her. My design sensibility and artistic tendencies were completely tied

into those five years with her, and with Japan. In much the way I described in my physical work. My designs have been shaped the same. I put a lot of focus on texture and feeling in my designs. Like is this app doing the task it needs to efficiently? Yes, awesome, but what does it communicate and make you feel. Do you feel demure or bored, or are you lit up from it, feeling fun and playfulness in an experience that you otherwise wouldn't. The great thing about UI and prod-

uct design, is that you can take the most mundane experience and turn it into something so much more. Why wouldn't you want to smile while using a banking app, or feel rested after a simple and efficient experience purchasing metro tickets. Why are we stuck in this mentality that our digital experiences need to feel the same as they did in the physical world? Why are we so stuck on tradition and fidelity to what is essentially anxiety and unhappiness? Use that bright

colour, that pastel palette, that gamelike flow. Make a 404 page that truly makes you feel lost and alone. Pair the ADD mania that is in our media consumption with the tired and simple. We don't know something is dark without the light, we don't know when something is bright without its shadows, and we don't know how to feel about something until a designer tells us. I just want to make it better, we deserve better. ☺

JENNY PURCELL

*A Product Designer, Artist, and Musician, with a history in Fine Arts and Sculpture, **Jenny Purcell** dreams of making a difference. Believing that Design, Art, and Expression make the world a better place, and allow the world's worth of personalities to shine through*

are you a designer with a story?

we're interested in getting you heard.

write@designwhine.com

Oh, Sweet, Muscular

Jesus!

*An experience designer at **Google**, Charu Choudha loves to sip tea, read books, and draw. You can find her active on Twitter, Instagram, and Linkedin.*

Charu's desk is a pretty simple and cozy space at home, where she works as well as relaxes and reads a book!

"

I love to collect stationaries which is rare, especially I love gathering various types of sticky notes, the ones I am using right now is the Batman and Superwoman pack which makes me feel like one when I write my todo's in the morning on them...

*Want your design desk featured in the next issue? Submit your desk pictures at - **desk@designwhine.com***

Alex Vvedenskii

Eric Goldberg

Erick Gavin

Nishant Chauhan

Felix Lee

Natasha Jahchan

UX

LOST AND

political science

mech

civil engineering

law

accounts

The bad thing about limiting beliefs that we hold is that they're so deep rooted, they prevent us from chasing our dreams.

The good thing, probably the only, about limiting beliefs is that they're all false and can be fought.

At DW, we get a ton of questions from people who are fascinated by UI/UX but don't have a formal degree in it, are in a totally unrelated field and are lost at how to get their foot in the door.

Digging deep we found asked industry professionals who had similar limiting beliefs about getting into UI/UX until their big leap.

BY TEAM DW

FOUND...

anical engineering

Six industry professionals share their experiences on how they found their way to UI/UX with zero design background...

Having learned from my previous rejections, I made a slideshow showing the parallels between my civil engineering degree and UX..

Two and a half years ago, Lebanese-American UX designer **Natasha Jahchan** strayed from the predictable world of civil engineering to her life-long passion for architecture; the intricate creation of digital experiences.

When did the idea of a career transition to UX come up?

Civil engineering was not my first choice in terms of career. Until I switched to UX, I was pretty conservative in terms of risk-taking. I went to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute so that I could do both architecture and competitive basketball, which was a hard combination to find. So I went into college pretty optimistic. I was already at a highly-regarded polytechnic school, and the closest thing to architecture was civil engineering. I

was sure at the time that it wasn't my passion, but in my mind I was just buying time until I found something else. It was something I was naturally good at, and I knew I could apply an engineering degree to a lot of different careers. My younger sister Chantal is a graphic designer and I looked to her for a lot of advice. I remember telling her when she was 17 or 18 that she shouldn't study art in college because she wouldn't find a job. I'm so glad she didn't listen to me! About two years ago, she had just graduated college and suddenly was getting paid to do what she loved. That's when I was like, 'oh, it is possible after all.'

What were some of the struggles that you faced?

The entire process of

changing careers, for anyone, is always going to be a challenge. But if you make yourself solid – you read as much as you can, you practice your skills, you build your portfolio, you polish your resumé – it just comes down to believing your own story so that you can tell it to others convincingly.

Message to UI/UX aspirants with no degree

If you are interested in becoming a designer, the first thing you will learn is not colors and typefaces. It's the process – where to start, what to ask. The decisions we make as designers are a result of that process. So if you're interested in UX, focus on learning how to think like a designer first, and let the rest follow.

Natasha Jahchan - Finding a common thread b/w civil engineering & UI/UX

People didn't take me seriously as a designer since I had a degree in law. How could a lawyer be creative and aesthetically inclined, they'd ask..

A UX designer and researcher who uses design principles to make engaging experiences, **Erick Gavin** was in the middle of a law school when the designer bug bit him.

When did the idea of a career transition to UX come up?

After a lot of conversations with mentors at the time as well as internships and shadowing that left me very un-inspired I started looking outward to new fields that might draw my interest and to my past to remember what excited me about previous career decisions. My search kept leading me back to technology so I reached out to an alumni who had a foot in the tech community and asked to intern with her. After talking to some practitioners about a scholarship for a bootcamp I went for it and landed it to subsides my transition. I then gave myself one year, six months after I graduated, to find a job in tech or go into law until I find a company to pick me up. With luck and perseverance I got my first job as a product designer two months after my bootcamp ended. The things that allowed me to be a better designer after being in law were being detail oriented, effective communication, and a comfort with reading and taking in a lot of information.

What were some of the struggles that you faced?

Each time in interviews I had to put forward why I would opt to take less money and such a large risk, but over time it became easier to explain. They heard the passion in my voice and since day one I always asked myself why I chose design and the way that I designed, making it easier to express my appreciation for my new field. Second, I faced what most new designers faced, imposter syndrome. It was endless until it hit me six months in that we are designers as soon as we chose to fully embrace this career path. Designers aren't determined through projects. Designers are those professionals who fully embrace the designer's journey.

Message to UI/UX aspirants with no degree

Don't do it because someone told you it's a good switch, ask a designer what their day looks like and then decide if it's the right-path for you.

Erick Gavin - Lawyer turned UI/UX designer

The Army taught me a lot about love and loss — it bettered me as a person which became the fundamental of me becoming a design leader..

Well known in the industry as a design leader and evangelist, **Felix Lee** has worn many hats. Co-founder of ADPList and a design lead at Gotrade (YC S19), he has an engineering degree and has had a brief stint in the army as well.

When Packdat, a company he had co-founded while still pursuing his engineering, was eventually acquired by Passpod Indonesia in 2018, it was decided that he would lead the design team at Passpod and that's where it all began.

What were some of the struggles that you faced during or after your transition to UX?

I started from an engineering school so you could say that I was pretty deep in the ends of electrical/mechanical engineering. When I

transited into design, there were huge differences in the way of thinking. Personally, I struggled more with finding friends who were interested in design since I was in an engineering school. I think one of the best ways to learn and grow is to surround yourself who wants to do just that. As for me, I saw LinkedIn as a way to reach out to design professionals to learn what the real world and industry looks like.

Did your stint in the military service help you gain skills needed for UX?

The Army taught me a lot about love and loss — it bettered me as a person which became the fundamental of me becoming a design leader at Gotrade (YC S19) and ADPList.

In the army, we're surrounded by fellow soldiers from diverse backgrounds and the one thing I've learned is that, if we want to lead people from everywhere — we have to do so with empathy, humility and gratitude. Design skills in many cases can be taught & trained for - these qualities however are much harder to develop and I'm thankful I have this experience in Singapore.

What would be your message to people looking to transition to UX with zero design background?

Learn and share - we all learn faster by sharing our knowledge. Lastly, don't judge yourself too early, have the patience to follow through things. Have faith in what you do and love what you do — be radically honest with yourself yet kind.

Felix Lee - An engineer, an entrepreneur, a soldier turned design leader

Fresh out of university, I was unemployed and without any formal UX education so getting the first role was the hardest thing..

Born in Moscow, Russia, **Alex Vvedenskii** moved to the UK to study and completed GCSEs and A-Levels at a boarding school. He did well at school and went on to study Management at the London School of Economics. He loves to play video games, having led an eSports team at the London School of Economics for Dota 2, winning numerous UK university tournaments.

When did the idea of transitioning your career to UX come up?

When I was in my second year of university, I noticed that I was not as interested as my peers in pursuing a career in banking or management consulting. Knowing that I had a passion for technology and games, I wanted to choose a career that has a high job satisfaction score which also leveraged my analytical skills from my degree in Management. That's how I came across UX design. I began learning about it online and attended meetups. UX to me is ultimately about improving users' experience with digital products. As a user, I felt that there was a strong growing need for this in the market.

What were some of the struggles you faced in the transition?

Getting my first role was the hardest thing. Fresh out of university, I was unemployed and without any formal UX education. So, I joined an online Bootcamp in UX design. Communicating with the mentors that I found in that Bootcamp helped me so much in overcoming my difficulties in starting out. The reason for choosing that Bootcamp was that I was able to create a working portfolio that is currently featured on my website *www.alexvvedenskii.com*. This really helped me land my first job at a design agency in Manchester. But it was not easy to find my first role. There were very few junior roles advertised, and those that were advertised often required years of experience. Networking on LinkedIn and joining design Slack groups was what ultimately resulted in me getting my first role.

Message to UI/UX aspirants with no degree

Learn more about UX using online resources and attend meetups. If you are still interested, I highly recommend attending UX Design Bootcamps to find that first role as a designer.

Alex Vvedenskii - A management graduate turned UX designer

When I first started, my main struggle was the imposter syndrome. I don't think I will ever get over it but it's also kind of part of being in UX.

Born and raised in Woodstock, **Eric Goldberg** is a tech geek and, for better or worse, a political junkie and quite heartbroken with the recent passing of Alex Trabek. A political science major, he made his transition to UI/UX quite naturally as research was an essential part of political science as well.

When did the idea of a career transition to UX come up?

Political Science involved looking at every side of an issue, the data involved, the demographics you are trying to reach. On the account management side, I worked for a small agency that acts as a middle agent for producing concerts focused mainly on the college market. In that field, you are dealing with relationships, understanding the client's needs from separate angles, focusing on the minor details, and finding creative solutions to complex problems, mostly having to do with your clients' unrealistic expectations. So being a tech geek, having a curious, researched focus mindset, the hardest decision was not whether I would be able to do it, but taking the risk of leaving a career that I was comfortable in. It was scary going into a field where I would be starting from the bottom again.

What were some of the struggles that you faced?

When I first started my main struggle, which I share with even the most senior UX Designers, is the imposter syndrome. I don't think I will ever get over it, but it's also kind of part of being a UX Designer. It's all about having that growth mindset, never feeling you know everything, and that you are never done learning and bettering yourself. In my immersive program for UI/UX, many of my classmates were extraordinarily talented individuals that I wrongly saw myself competing against in the back of my mind. That thought quickly changed. They were my team and cheerleaders.

What is the one thing that you miss about your previous career field?

One of the things I loved was the relationships I formed, whether with a talent agent or a student interested in the music agency. It felt good helping people, and I can't wait to get to a point in my UX career where I can help mentor someone again.

Eric Goldberg- A UX designer with a major in political science

As I cleared my last exams for Chartered Accountancy, I started to visualise how my life was going to be and didn't really like what I saw..

A digital product designer at Razorpay & physical product designer at *Fleck.co.in* a lifestyle brand he has co-founded, **Nishant Chauhan** enjoys travelling & gets a rush out of the most calming activity, Calligraphy. When not doing any of the above, he is found talking about or making coffee.

When did the idea of a career transition to UX come up?

It started some time before I cleared my last CA exams, I started to visualise how my life was going to be. I didn't like what I was seeing and I started exploring what else was out there. I thought of myself as someone with an analytical bend of mind & I initially evaluated things in a similar domain, like becoming an analyst. A friend introduced me to a bunch of young entrepreneurs who presented an opportunity to explore design with their startup and that's how things kicked off. While my education didn't help me in the core skills part of may job as a designer, the label itself did bring a certain amount of weight to my words.

What were some of the struggles that you faced during or after your transition to UX?

Personally, by switching to UX overnight I had disrupted the lives of people close to me. This created an internal pressure of 'doing something' to live up to their expectations. Getting rid of that emotional debt was something that took me some time. Professionally, the struggle to convince people to trust me with the experience of their product instead of the finance has been too real at times. I have found myself in the position where instead of telling why a design decision makes sense I am explaining why they should listed to an outsider on this.

What would be your message to people looking to transition to UX with zero design background?

I have found design to be a very open space, where people focus on your positives over your shortcomings. Try to understand what value you bring to the table and focus on how you can communicate that to others. While most organisations are looking for generalists, you can only make a mark if your portfolio reflects where you excel.

Nishant Chauhan - From Chartered Accountant to UX Designer

GRANNY'S REMOTE

79 year old Ms. Anderson lives by herself in Phoenix, Arizona where temperatures regularly exceed 100-degree mark.

She has a poor vision and hates her aircon's remote. She doesn't understand half the buttons and what the different modes - Auto, Cool, Dry, Fan, Heat - do.

All she'd like to do is use the on/off buttons, put it on auto, set ideal temperature and speed and be done with it.

Can you redesign Ms. Anderson's aircon remote to suit her needs?

"I thought the whole point was NOT making me think!"

We need your ❤️

DesignWhine was born and continues to grow in moonlight.

Its a small independent venture run by a handful of team members after office hours. A lot of hardwork and resources go into it's production but we do it for the love of the UI/UX community.

If you enjoyed reading this issue, we'd request you to please share it with your professional network on LinkedIn to support us.

in Share on LinkedIn