

Design Diaries

Design Diaries, Chapter 1: Sunny Side Up

By Judy Bell



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***design:retail presents “Design Diaries: Confessions from Quarantine,” a new series featuring uplifting personal stories from our industry friends. Here’s what it’s like to be in retail design, creating and working from home during the COVID-19 crisis. Chapter 1 is brought to you by Judy Bell, chief energetic officer, Energetic Retail.**

I am usually an “over-medium” in my egg-style preference, but lately in this new #StayHomeMN environment, I decided to ramp up my inspiration and go full swing into SUNNY SIDE UP.

Stephen Colbert, when interviewed on AC 360 last August, talked about how important it is for him to be grateful for *all* of the things that come his way in life. “...and that involves acknowledging and ultimately being grateful for the things that I wish didn’t happen, because they gave me a gift.”

Sometimes you have to look for those gifts, and sometimes they fall right into your lap. For years, I held a fantasy about pausing for a month of solitude. I read May Sarton’s “Journal of A Solitude,” Doris Grumbach’s “Fifty Days of Solitude,” and Dale Salwak’s “The Wonders of Solitude,” and in my usual fashion, sticky-noted the pages in anticipation of my own journey someday. I never did find the time for my “Walden” until now—plop! Here it is. I’ve been isolating myself for several weeks in my Minneapolis apartment, playing it safe. The first few days my anxiety level went up when I wasn’t able to visit Rustica, my local coffee shop for a *café au lait* and one of the best chocolate chip cookies on the earth. Every week day at 2:30 p.m., I’d settle in with my *WSJ* and *The New Yorker* and whatever project I was working on, while savoring the charming, coffee-scented, cozy café. I had gotten to know the baristas and the engaging staffers at the counter, a few of whom even musically sang out my name when my order was ready—“Judeeeeeeee!” a real upgrade from the other guests. But alas, Rustica was closed.

I knew I had to tone down my anxiety, which was based on fear of contracting the virus, fear of the changing economy, new fears emerging every day. I knew that fear can affect your immune system, brain, circulation and digestion, etc., the whole works! I decided to embrace the mounting unknowns in the world with a sunny-side-up attitude, and shift my fear into clear, focused thinking. Using a facts-first approach, the fantasy of solitude I had held close for so long gave way to creative thinking: How could I find a unique way to approach each day? As Doris Grumbach revealed, “Order, *sequence*, is a secret of being alone.”

Now, on weekdays the minute I get out of bed, I tune into a new online yoga class direct from my gym. Then I settle into my office routine, which begins with a Zoom meeting more frequently every day. I must confess, I wear a business jacket on the top and casual yoga pants on the bottom for the early meetings. Don’t tell. Anyone remember mullet haircuts? “Business in the front, party in the back?” You get the picture.

For work breaks, I practice Einstein’s method of sharpening his brain’s creative knack with a few rounds on his violin. I discovered this in “Einstein’s Violin” by Joseph Eger, who is “Among the most widely traveled and venerated classical conductors of his generation.” I have a violin, cello, drum and a piano right outside my office to add a little “jam” into my days.

In place of my 2:30 p.m. Rustica ritual, I walk around one of the three neighboring lakes, often with my friend Lila, who I met at Target more than 25 years ago. We walk, the mandatory 6 ft. apart, and brainstorm and laugh. I always return to my home office refreshed and inspired. I’ve walked more than 60 miles in the past few weeks and I’m feeling more fit than ever. My immune system is smiling. And somewhere, May Sarton is smiling too, knowing that I have taken her words to heart: “Help us to be ever faithful gardeners of the spirit, who know that without darkness nothing comes to birth, and without light nothing flowers.”