

**NONNATIVE CREATIVE INTERVIEW****JAN VRANOVSKÝ****(video transcript)****JAN**

The city is just important. To a large degree, we judge the society based on the public space we see. We would come to a city in a different country, and we don't even speak to the people, but we just like, look at what the city looks like, and that's kind of what we use to make a judgement about how the country is.

I'm an architect, graphic designer, and also a photographer...lately. My background is graphic design, really. That's where it all started. Graphic design was kind of my obsession since I was a child. Maybe like since 6 or 7 years old.

I was doing graphic design for money since I was almost 12. At 18 I started to do freelancing next to a school. But then, when I had to choose a university and my course, I was feeling that to study graphic design after so many years doing graphic design is a little bit, um...boring, to be honest.

I felt like it's in a way a little bit limiting because I was interested in design in general, of course. I was also interested in the city. Architecture itself, not that much at that time, to be completely honest. Like, buildings themselves, I didn't really know what to think about it. But I just thought that choosing architecture as my profession is something that allows me to do whatever I want within the field of design.

So, essentially, as an architect, you can be a graphic designer. I mean, you can design logos, and it still sounds good. But as a graphic designer, it's very difficult to tell your clients, "I can also design your house," right? I basically chose a profession that would not limit me in what I can do.

But actually, I didn't get accepted to university. They refused me, and I had to choose a different course for the first year. I chose Japanese studies.

**ALISHA**

What prompted that decision? Of all the other things that you could have chosen, why was it Japanese?

**JAN**

Well, uh, yeah, that's a good question. Well, I was already kind of interested in Japan. I went to Japan once completely on my own when I was 18 years old, just like 2 days after my 18th birthday for one month. And it was kind of a life-changing experience for me.

I didn't know that much about the culture before, but it just completely gets me. I mean, I've been to other countries. I used to live in the United States for 2 or 3 years. So it's not the first time I traveled. But aside from design and graphic design, Japan was kind of my second hobby at the time. So, it came out as a natural choice.

I learned a little bit of Japanese, and then I just left and went to architecture. I finished my undergrad in Czech Republic, and after that I applied to several universities outside of Czech Republic. So one of the schools I applied for was Tokyo University in Japan. And I was lucky enough to get accepted and to even get a full scholarship. So, there was no going back. And that was four years ago.

So, finally I came to Japan, I finished my studies here, and even though I originally didn't really plan to stay in Japan afterwards, just things happened the way that I stayed and started working here as an architect.

#### **ALISHA**

How did that translate into actually working in an architect's office in Japan? Do you feel like it prepared you for that? Or was there something

#### **JAN**

No.

#### **ALISHA**

No, okay.

#### **JAN**

No, it did not. But I think that this is a well-known fact everywhere; that the schools do not prepare you for the practical reality of how architecture is being done.

I generally feel that schools in Japan are more technical. There is not so much of emphasis on design in general. You can kind of see that in the presentations of the students. It doesn't look too good, but at the same time, they're very good at just doing research and having results.

To answer your question, no. It totally did not prepare me, but at the same time, I don't even think it's supposed to prepare you for that. I think it's supposed to give you some kind of a basic way or kind of like a grid of thinking. Or a way how you approach problems and how you think about them. And I think it's much more general. It's more like making creates you.

**ALISHA**

What was the experience of being a non-Japanese person working in a Japanese architect's office?

**JAN**

So working in a Japanese office was kind of a shocking experience. Partially, I'm sure it's because of the language. Basically, I still had to use English, so there was definitely some kind of...I would say like, a distance, or a sense of isolation, perhaps.

But I think that culture of working in Japan is very specific. And very difficult to...I would say...accept. And I felt there's not enough communication. Just constantly, I felt. And that wasn't really because of Japanese. But I feel that the art of conversation – and using the discussion as a tool to bring or to come up with solutions that neither of the people who is in the discussion could come up with by themselves but really to use it as a tool to come up with something totally new...I didn't see that.

When I kind of forced this on my colleagues and kind of forced them to do this kind of discussion, they seemed to be quite fine with that, but kind of surprised. But they also were concerned about the fact that we were wasting time. And they actually directly told me that we might have, you know, wasted too much time by that, but it was very interesting.

**ALISHA**

Was your interest in taking photos of buildings in Japan – was that something that only emerged, you think, because of that conflict? Or was it just something that you enjoyed doing from the beginning?

**JAN**

I wouldn't say it emerged from a conflict. I actually started to be interested in photography already while studying. Well then again, there was also a lot of conflict there, so maybe it has something to with conflict.

It was, to some degree, an escape. Just really, a way to spend time. To do something else for a little while, which I think is really important. So, a hobby, essentially. For me, I was actually never really so interested in photography before. I didn't do photography in Czech Republic.

It's a really kind of interesting and very overwhelming feeling when you come to a city or a country that you really don't know. And you know, you come here and the next day, school starts. And basically I could just be somewhere in between my home and the school, but it feels so strange to

be inside of a city that you don't just know, you know? That you don't know how the streets look, and how the places look.

I think that for me, it was just in the beginning really important to know where I am. It's really that simple. And the photography wasn't important. I was just walking around, and I wanted to see where I am. But of course, because I was alone here, I wanted to share with my family and friends, so I took photos of what I see, and I was uploading it to Tumblr or Instagram or wherever. Just to share with them. And I never really intended to make a series or to become a photographer. That was absolutely not my plan. I was so busy with school and architecture.

But yeah, strangely enough, like, very very soon, like after just a few months, there were magazines and people who want to do interviews with me and it was completely shocking to me. I didn't expect that. But after some time, it became a thing, and I found my own topics.

It was very interesting, because these topics, at some point, merged with my research topic in the university. My master's thesis was actually very much influenced with my photos and what I discovered as a photographer.

Actually, I got to a point where I have architectural shooting commissions and I actually really do photography officially. I bought a better camera. So it basically became like a third job, or third topic.

#### **ALISHA**

Right. It's interesting to hear how all of these sort of kind of related or connected disciplines have – there's sort of something to feed off of from each discipline.

#### **JAN**

Absolutely.

#### **ALISHA**

But I think that that's visible in what you do.

#### **JAN**

No, it's exactly like that. It's exactly as you're saying. And I think that's basically the biggest advantage of doing several things. It creates kind of like a feedback loop between these two or three fields, essentially, of design. And photography is more of an exploration, essentially, for me. It's really – It became a huge source of inspiration for both architectural design and graphic design.

Precision, in a way, is very important, so you need to train yourself to be able to be very precise and exact, at some point. But at the same time, this precision kills the creativity. And you do need the creativity, because if you don't have that, you can't do anything different, and you do want to do something different. So, you need to find some well that you can use to dig something to make your things different.

In the end, even just going abroad, and just the fact that you are working abroad as a creative has a similar reason and root to it. Because you want to find a new source of inspiration, really. It's that simple.

Recently, just one month ago, I started working in a new company which is just completely like newly established. Not just an architecture design office, but also branding and design office in general. We are basically building it, almost from scratch, I would say. And for me, that's very interesting, because it's kind of an opportunity to try to really put all these assets of design that I do together. So, to really connect architecture, graphic design, branding, and perhaps even photography. And turn it into a business model.

In the end, it kind of all clicked together, you know? Even though that wasn't planned from the beginning, but in the end, I'm an architect in Japan.

#### **ALISHA**

Thank you very much again to Jan for joining us on this episode of Nonnative Creative. If you are interested in his work, want to see some photos, want to see all of the interesting things he's done, please make sure to check out his Tumblr, his Instagram, his Behance, I think, profile as well.

#### **JAN**

Oh yeah.

#### **ALISHA**

There's all kinds of interesting things to take a look at there. So definitely have a look at his work, and thanks very much for watching this episode.

#### **JAN**

Life drags you in certain directions, whether you want it to or not, when you are in your home country, you didn't decide to be born there. You didn't decide to speak that language. You didn't decide about anything. You didn't decide where you want to live, exactly. It's just kind of given.



But when you break this and go abroad, suddenly it's...yeah, it's something extra, it's something that you choose by yourself. It gives you like, this opportunity to really rethink everything.

Which I think is pretty exciting.