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Disney — Scott Cook, Senior Illustrator & Creative Director

#creativedirection #illustration #disney #design



Welcome Scott Cook!

Today we're thrilled to speak with Scott Cook, a multifaceted creative, senior illustrator and creative director that has worked for Disney for over 12 years!

Scott Cook is from West Los Angeles, entertainment capital of the world, and was the first and only recipient from Disney Publishing to have ever received the Disney Legacy Award, the highest honor a Disney employee can receive for inspiring others to dream create and inspire.

Disney Publishing creates award-winning books and magazines for core Disney franchises, publishes original books from renowned, best-selling authors, and produces premiere lifestyle publications.

One thing that really stood out to me after talking with Scott, is how much creatives need to evolve and grow with the ever changing creative landscape throughout one's career. As technology and aesthetics evolve, so do creative tools and portfolios. For a long and successful creative career (which could be 40 plus years!), one must always be learning and growing.

We can't wait to discuss with Scott everything from illustration to Creative Direction, to his love of asking "What If and Why Not?" storytelling, and making things of value.

Thank you so much Scott for taking the time to answer these questions to help shed light on your creative career path—this is an amazing resource for younger creatives who may be interested in becoming a senior illustrator and creative director in the future!

Part 1: Career Details

Let's start from the beginning, what industry do you work in?

I have worked in animation, gaming, advertising, and publishing. Currently my role has a little something to do with all of these fields.

What is your job title?
Senior Illustrator & Creative Director

What does this career's ladder look like?

There is really no entry level or any specific steps one takes to do what I do. One just needs to be good at what you do, be willing to expand your horizons, and to always be looking for an opportunity to push past the expected into something of unique quality and value to the project. Know your audience, and always do your best. In short, it's a lot of hard work. It's making sure what you bring to the table deserves to be there.

Creative Quest Tip: There are many paths to becoming a Creative Director. You may start your career path as an intern, followed by junior designer, production artist, senior designer, art director then creative director. However you might not be a designer, perhaps you are a copywriter, photographer, illustrator (and more!) but throughout the years you have learned so much about the work flow and process in your field, you may see yourself eventually become a CD and help manage a creative team.

Where should I be looking for job postings for this type of work?

Do your research. Look at the companies that do the type of things you want to make into a career. Look at requirements for and apply to internships. Do volunteer work for non-profits. You never know where those connections might lead while you are helping others out in the process. Always be thinking about and developing your portfolio.

Creative Quest Tip: Thanks to the internet and social media, finding a creative career has never been easier! Try these resources:

1. Keep a list of your favorite companies, and constantly check their career pages in the footer of the website. Jobs will always show up here first, if you're just starting out, reach out to learn more about their internship program.
2. LinkedIn. Companies may post a job to their job board, or in a post. Employees will also share when their companies have open positions. Follow HR and Creative employees who'll actively be looking to fill their creative roles. Make sure you have a LinkedIn page, even if you are just starting out!
3. Instagram. Large entertainment companies like Disney and Dreamworks have their own career instagram pages. They will post in their feed and stories when they are hiring, or offering internships.

What do you look for in a portfolio when you are hiring?

Personally I look for strong foundations and draftsmanship. Presentation and technical skills come in a close second depending on the job. All in all, it's about how well somebody tells me their story.

Creative Quest Tip: Have your creative portfolio ready online. Wix and Squarespace are very easy to use with a monthly fee. Behance is an online portfolio which is free. Art Directors and Creative Directors often search for creative talent on Behance, I suggest having your own website portfolio url AND Behance account for the most impact to stand out.

I have no work experience, what's the best way to get my foot in the door?

Persistence, perseverance, and presence. Sometimes its not about how good you are or your experience, while all those things are important; it's about being in the right place at the right time. Luck is when preparation meets opportunity. Keep your eyes peeled and your skills sharp so when the opportunity presents itself you can make the most of it.

Creative Quest Tip: Get creative! It's okay to show school projects, or personal projects if you've had no work experience. Just ensure something in your portfolio is applicable to the job you are applying for (which should all be listed in the job description). For example, if you want a job illustrating for kids books, mock up and illustrate what an interior book spread would look like. If you want to design books, design a few book covers. Be sure to include that they are personal projects. You want to make it clear to the hiring director that you can do what they are looking for, or at least made an effort. Sometimes they just need to see the potential, even if it's not perfect! Many companies hiring young talent are looking for potential, and will even help you grow.

Advice on choosing a business (or industry) where my creative powers are being used for good and not evil?

The question is not about good or evil, the question should be what are you willing to tolerate. There are very few companies out there who don't do objectionable things. The question is are you willing to live with what you know. This doesn't make you a sellout, it makes you a pragmatist. Until you are ready to form your own place of business where you can define the moral compass and what direction to follow, I say make the most of the opportunity.

What skills or programs will I need to know? What hardware or art supplies will I need?

The creative world is changing every day. Try to stay current with the medium you have chosen - be it analog or digital. If you are actively striving to be at the top of your game creatively, the rest can be taught.

What type of work will I be doing in an entry level job or internship?

As a creative director, entry level could be a variety of production jobs or internships. From pre-press, illustration, storyboarding, to motion graphics and animation, a good creative director needs to understand all these things. Ideally they should have some experience in each of them.

What does an average day look like for a professional like yourself now?

The day starts with emails and checking the meeting calendars. At some point there is a lot of licensing reviews, and prototype creation or oversight. Meetings consist of checking in with my team, as well as teams from other partners or divisions. From product creation to product curation, a normal day holds a little bit of everything from start to finish.

Do you work for a company, own your own company, or work as a contract employee or freelancer? Are you repped by an agent?

I do both. I work for a large company, and when I'm not doing that I have a few pet projects to create for and oversee.

What client or company or project are you most proud of and why?

The project I am most proud of has yet to be released by Disney in its entirety, but it has taken over 5 years to bring this far. Who knows what the future will hold for it and for me as its creator.

Where do you work? Do you work in an office, your own studio, can you freelance from anywhere in your line of work?

Currently I work from my home studio due to Covid. However when things were old normal, I was in an office, occasionally traveling to other world locals, teaching and working from there.

Did I miss any common questions that you get from creative kids or students that I didn't address here that I should add?

Don't chase your dream job. Bring your passion to create with you, no matter what it is you are doing. I have seen too many kids get discouraged (myself included) when events or opportunities don't pan out the way we expect or want them to. Don't waste that time or frustration. Wherever you are in your journey, create. Tomorrow will take care of itself.

Part 2: About The Artist

What are your pronouns?

He/Him

What were you like when you were in elementary school?

When I was young, I was a shy creative. Art was more about problem solving, than drawing or painting. It was about exploration, and how that made me feel. I was an ok student, but not very popular. And I got older, art was where I got noticed.

What were you like when you were in high school?

My dad often told me that High school was the last time I would ever be able to try everything with little or no responsibility for making ends meet. With that in mind, I played football, and I was also a cheerleader. I was in student government, and I also was the chief audio visual guy. I acted in school plays as well as taking AP art courses. In all of this exploration, I still didn't know what I wanted to do for a career. I thought about making a difference as a doctor or lawyer, but I didn't seem to fit those career paths based on my interests. I grappled with that for a while. Not having a clear path forward I attended a junior college, and started looking for the next steps.

Is college necessary for this role? Did you go to college?

I went to school for the better part of 12 years. That doesn't mean I needed all of that instruction for this job. I attended the Academy of Art College of Design, and Cal Arts. The Academy was good for foundations studies. At the time I was one of four students who spearheaded their animation program partnering with Disney and acting as their student liaison. While Barbara Bradley, the retired head of the illustration dept. was my mentor, ultimately the Academy wouldn't accept my critical studies units from the JC. So after 4 years of advanced and honor classes, I left without graduating, and got a job at Alpha Graphics where I became Adobe certified. I still wanted to get into animation. At the time, the Cal Arts' character animation program was the best. I was accepted on my second attempt and did an additional 4 years to earn my degree. A degree is typically required for consideration as a creative director. An expensive private college degree however is not. Talent and tenacity coupled with intuitiveness and insight is better than any expensive piece of paper. The extended experience did give me the ability to pivot when things changed direction in the early 2000's when Disney shut down 2D.

How did you land your first job?

After graduation, the industry was in a slump and it was really tough. This is where perseverance and determination came into play. I did an internship, but wasn't hired because after 11 months there was no headcount. I did a short stint with Dreamworks, but for whatever reason I was not called back when my project ended. I was a stay at home dad with few prospects. That was tough to swallow, especially after the student loan debt I just put myself in. Some time passed. I worked hard to be a stay at home dad, grapple with student loan debt and trying to find a job, all while my wife worked her guts out trying to support the family singlehandedly. After some time I registered with an employment agency. The break I got there ended up starting me on the path I'm on today.

When you were just starting out (think first job), how did you handle life and finances?

The first few years after graduation were very hard. I would not have been successful if it weren't through the sacrifices of my wife and family. I was in doubt and depression. I relied on faith many times when I didn't see a way forward. In time, preparation met opportunity. Since then I have tried to make the most of every chance afforded me. Never taking anything for granted. Giving my best to every situation. Sometimes time just needs to have its due.

How has your career evolved from one industry to another?

My career path has always been about storytelling, regardless of the venue or the medium. That is my passion, that is my purpose. If there's a way, I'll tell a story.

Part 3: Musings Of A Creative Superhero

Do you have any shoutouts to special people that helped you land your first gig, or find your creative superpower?

My life has been filled the comings and goings of mentors and motivators from Bill Matthews and Bradley Gross at Disney, to Barbara Bradley at the Academy and Ed Lieu at Montgomery High. The ones who have consistently been by my side looking out for me at every turn have been my wife Ginger, and my family.

Do you have a creative outlet outside of client work?

If you are blessed enough to do what you love, sometimes appropriate work life balance can be tough. Knowing the difference between work and pleasure and giving both their due time, keeps one appropriately hungry for both. Paid work and personal projects are also just as important as rest and time away from it all. Make an effort to see that all get the attention they deserve.

Where would the world be without creative thinkers / creative problem solvers / designers / artists?

The world is full of problems. People are looking for solutions. Creativity is the act of considering a problem and engineering a solution. Why not make them beautiful? #art-is-in-life

You can thank Scott for his story and learn more:

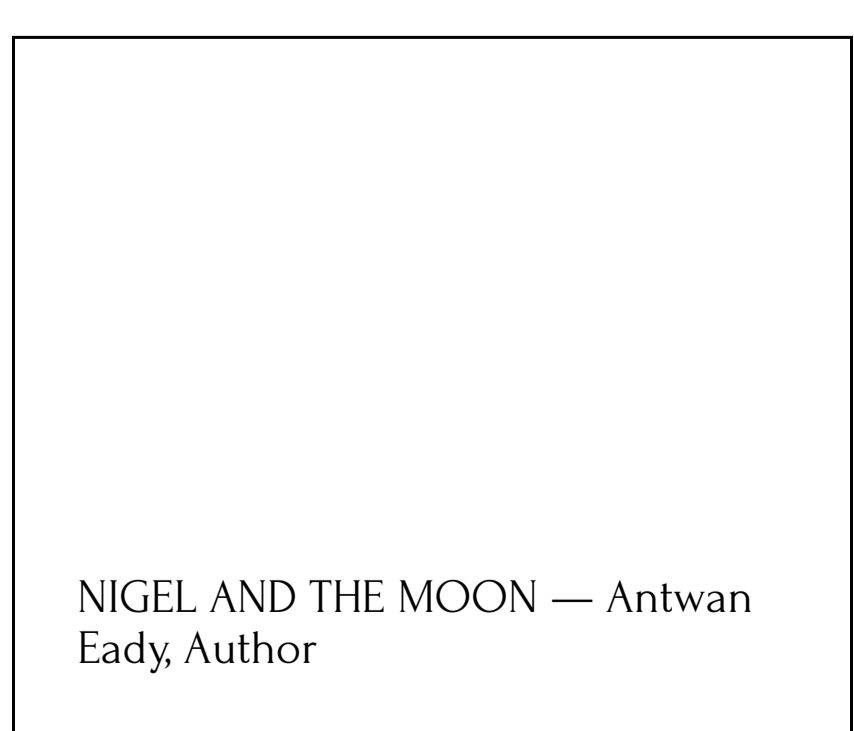
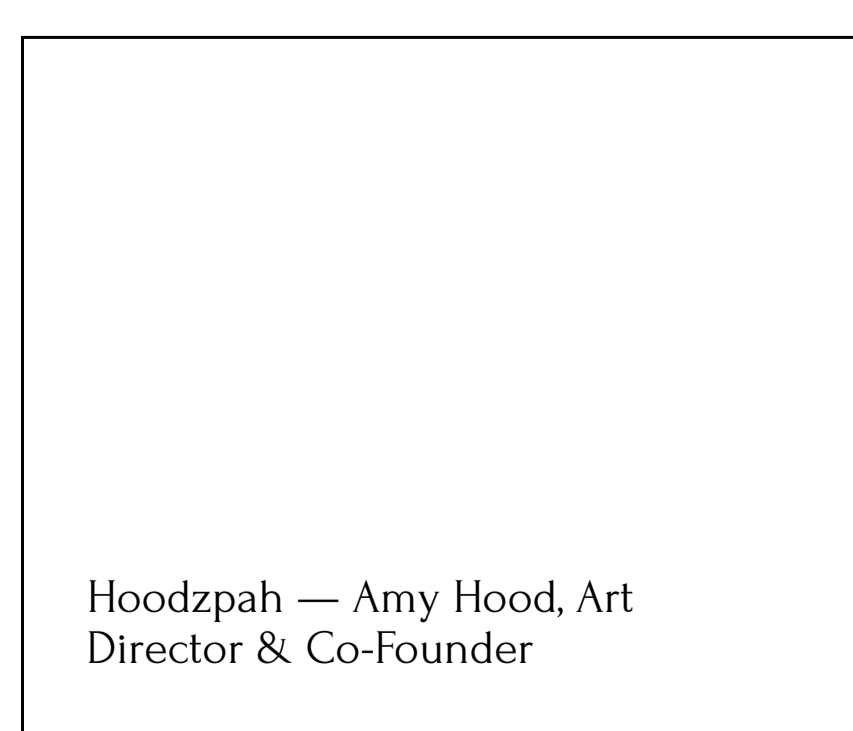
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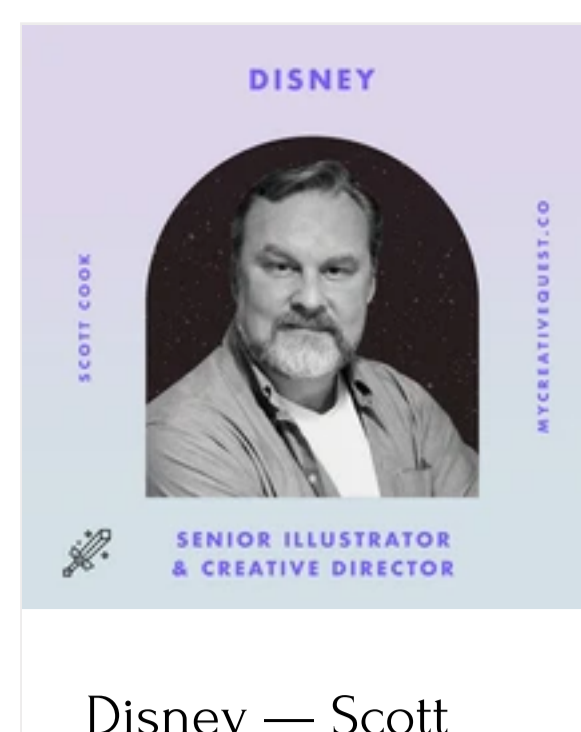


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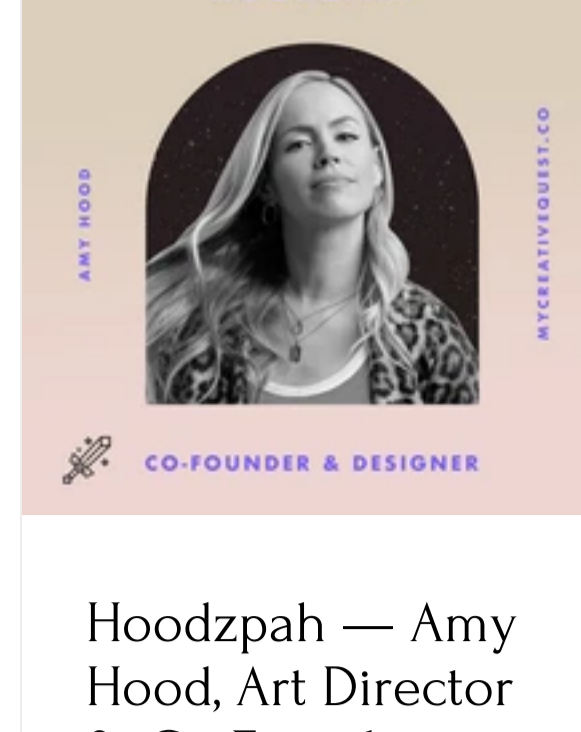
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