

designing your **big break**—international style

ENRICH YOUR PERSPECTIVE—AND PORTFOLIO—BY RUNNING AWAY **by KIRK HORSTED**

When preaching the gospel of sabbatical, I've heard people describe them as anything from a six-week maternity leave to 20-minute backyard breathers. Yet a prolonged and faraway holiday more fits my idea of a "Big Break." Few experiences can be so eye-opening, exhilarating, and cathartic. If you think there is more to life than billable hours and branding, read on.

designers need inspiration!

If you toil in the field of design, you know it takes all the time, tools, and talent you can dig up to keep your grounds fruitful. That's good news, though, because you'll use those same resources to scheme your sabbatical. After all, designers have vision, think creatively, and are willing to take risks. And they know how to make things happen on time and on budget. You'll need all that (and more) to circumvent the obstacle course that stands between you and your Big Break.

But face it: You want this respite because you work so hard. And you rightfully fear the dangers of burnout. Imagine how some overseas energy could recharge your batteries. New sights, sounds, and encounters can do wonders for igniting the artistic passion within. Frankly, running away could be the best career move you ever make.

some sabbatical suggestions

So let's just say that your big butt dreams to leap out of your Leap Chair. For now, let's also leapfrog the "big butts" blocking your way; they occupy too much of our consciousness anyhow. Ponder instead these simple suggestions to help you start designing a world-class retreat.

Some sabbatical sights, clockwise > The Leaning Tower is just one of Italy's staggering structures. >> This was the verdant view from our temporary home on Waiheke Island, New Zealand—in December! >>> Gamlestad, which means "Old Town," is on one of Stockholm's 11 interconnected islands. >>>> On St. Thomas, in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the locals celebrate Carnival for many days (and nights).



Go away, far away. Chances are, there's some place on the globe you harbor a strong urge to visit. And for more than one frazzled week. So leave the predictable confines of the USA behind and expand your worldview. You'll never see things the same way again.

Accept your mission. That's the difference between your Big Break and an extended vacation: Mission. There's something you've been longing to do, and this is your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Study Soviet design, learn Spanish, or paint landscapes. Elevate your sabbatical with a quest for something coveted, but neglected.

Stretch it out. Strive for a minimum of three months. Travel is hard work, and it can take weeks to overcome time changes, exhaustion, and confusion. Plus, what you're doing—and what you're seeking—is complex. Give it time. If you rush your extended getaway, it won't feel like one.

Put your job on hold. Oh sure, you could plug in and talk shop all along the way. And if your mission is to test your professional portability—or there is no other way out of town—go for it. Otherwise, know that you'll have a better experience if you focus on the experience. For a change, work will wait.



More inspiring places, clockwise: > The rooftops of Munich glow on a clear summer morning. >> Banana trees have appeal on Rarotonga, Cook Islands, in the South Pacific. >>> A Sunday night market lights up a neighborhood in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. >>>> Kyia samples, and then buys, some zesty red pesto from this merchant in Palermo, Sicily.



Balance structure with spontaneity. Is that not one of life's more cosmic challenges? In this case, it means giving yourself a few months in one special place—but also room to roam. Construct a routine to advance your Mission, but welcome worthy digressions. Set up the stability and comfort you need to relax. Then seek the adventures that you crave.

Travel light. Most of us swear we will, but then schlep an apothecary and spare wardrobe. Fuggedaboutit! Carry your life on your back—literally. Remember: You're leaving behind your burdens, responsibilities, and baggage. (You probably won't miss a thing.)

Record your own history. Although this flies in the face of "travel light," please do cart along your camera, camcorder, iBook, sketchpad, diary, or other recording device of choice. There's no better way to capture precious daily details and—more important—to remember them later.

"it's not a financial decision"

But back to that obstinate obstacle course. Sadly, each one is so tangled and unique that it would be presumptuous to



pontificate on how to break out of yours. Yet we all run into one stumbling block: Money. Powerful stuff, those numbers on paper. That's why we need to fight back with this omnipotent mantra: "It's not a financial decision."

Really now, did you make your biggest life decisions based on some spreadsheet? No. Consider: choosing a college, then a career; getting married, or unmarried; having children; quitting a crappy job; moving. Sure, "costs" received attention. But "values" mattered most. Moreover, regardless of your net worth, you likely already enjoy among the cushiest lifestyles on the planet. How will you spend your lifetime of good fortune?

Also ask yourself: Is not the point of career dedication to earn the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness? Are your discretionary dollars better spent on bigger vehicles, homes, and stuff—or bigger vistas? Would you work three years longer at your career's end to free up three years along the way? Can you create fresh design without refreshing stimuli? On your deathbed, will you reminisce about Target circulars—or skydiving in Australia?

now for some little leaps

If you're still reading without cynicism, you must be ready to take a few little leaps. Like, talk to travelers. Start a journal. Propose it to your spouse. Run it by your employer. Watch for windows (of time and place) and windfalls (of cash). Take a test-run vacation. In time, make a production schedule and budget that accommodates this priority.

As if three months away were not their own reward, expect generous, ongoing dividends. You'll overflow with new ideas from novel places. You'll gain the wisdom of the well-rounded person and employee who knows that balance is essential to both life and design. You'll have initiated a new lifeplan driven by deep convictions, worldly relationships, and priceless independence.

But take your time—because you'll need ample patience and persistence. And be willing to adopt the mantra, "Everything is right on schedule." It can work wonders when you're getting frustrated and losing hope.

After all, believing in sabbaticals is not just about lusting for leisure. It's also about finding faith. So feel free to disregard all these ideas and follow your own bliss. Above all, feel free.

— kirk horsted IS 1/2 OF 2 HEADS COMMUNICATIONS, A TWIN CITIES CREATIVE AGENCY KNOWN FOR ITS COPYWRITING AND IDEAS—AND ITS PECULIAR PRACTICE OF PERIODICALLY CLOSING UP SHOP FOR "BIG BREAKS." SINCE 1990, KIRK HAS TAKEN THREE SABBATICALS, WRITTEN EXTENSIVELY ABOUT THE IDEA, AND OFFERED ADVICE, SPEECHES, AND WORKSHOPS THAT HAVE INSPIRED OTHERS TO CHASE THEIR OWN DREAMS. SEE AND READ MORE ABOUT HIS TRAVELS AT WWW.2HC.COM (CLICK ON THE GLOBE) OR CONTACT HIM AT KIRK@2HC.COM.