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Getting carded

The quest for my 2" x 3.5" self was fraught with style decisions

By LOUISA McCORMACK
Special to The Globe and Mail
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Despite not having a steady job or my own incorporated company, it became clear to me that I needed a business card.

I required one for networking purposes, for those moments when encounters struck me as professionally fruitful. I wanted to represent myself as a going concern with polish and reliability. It was about maximizing the official aspects of my home office and making myself look enterprising.

Plus, I needed a card to slip cute guys my number in an offhand, efficient manner that's a hell of a lot sexier than fishing fretfully for a ballpoint and writing on a damp bar napkin.

In my quest for the perfect one, I realized how "calling card" got to be such a resounding metaphor. The path from my hopes to your wallet was fraught with style decisions, budgetary considerations and envy of other cards I'd spied, the ones that make standard letterpress look hopelessly plain-Jane.

Like the luxurious velvety sage and fuchsia cards of landmark Toronto restaurant Susur, for instance. Owner Susur Lee's wife, fashion designer Brenda Bent, was the creative mind behind them. "I was reminded of those forties children's books with the fuzzy hearts and dogs," she says.

And then there are the layered cards of artist and designer Penny Dimos, who prints hers on translucent vellum and then applies patterns of clear, sticky-sided vinyl overtop, to "play with proportions of matte and gloss."

Obviously I'm not the only one who fretted over the details.

"It was two months of neurotic madness," fashion-marketing expert Christine Faulhaber says of designing her first card upon setting up shop on her own. "It's the paper version of you. Why wouldn't I agonize over paper stock and the right shade of grey?" She's happy to have ended up with something "sophisticated but not stuck-up."

"It's a huge issue," she emphasizes. "It's not just, 'Hey, slap it on.' "

Ben Garfinkel, owner of Vancouver marketing firm Industrial Brand Creative, chose to make his company's card really personal; it features a strikingly goofy photo of himself that he felt compelled to use. "Wacky isn't a problem for us, but this card also demonstrates what we're capable of pulling off technically," he says.

Clearly, there are a multitude of trends I could have indulged in as I determined my 2" x 3.5" self: rounded corners, credit-card plastic, acetate, lamination, perforations, folds, cropping, jumbo and tiny sizes, metallic and fluorescent ink, a slogan on the back and, if I really wanted to spring for it, the lenticular winking-Jesus effect.

So I enlisted Jason Halter, formerly of Bruce Mau Design, now owner of multidisciplinary design studio Wonder Inc., to guide me on my quest. He's the kind of maverick who morphs two fonts together to create a signature hybrid.

"You don't want to be uber contemporary," Halter said. "Let's do something that

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"Don't put writer/broadcaster/actor, or everyone will think I'm a waitress," I warned. "I better be nothing."

As we perused fonts together and I pointed out that one was "too manly" and another that made me feel "like I had a big bum," Halter complimented me on my acumen. He quizzed me casually on my nature -- it was very therapeutic -- and then asked to be left alone to his own devices.

A few days later, I had several prototypes to pick from. Although tempted, I nixed my name in outsized typewriter-style letters that hinted all too accurately at my affectations and unfortunate lack of bashfulness.

I settled on minimalism for once in my chatty life. I've ended up going "urban nomad," as Halter puts it, a little jet setter number with Toronto marked on a perky globe graphic, hinting at continental dreams come true. I know it's going to drum me up some business. I just hope the fellas like it.

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