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20 Questions with Jean Roth

JEAN ROTH
answers questions from **Olivia Neri**

1. What is your Web site?

My design site is <http://www.rotemdesignstudio.com>. I also have two online store sites for t-shirts and apparel: <http://rotemgear.com> and <http://www.badcattagger.com>.

2. How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?

I'd say, at present, professionally, a designer, editor and specialist in creative communications solutions, as well as an intercultural specialist. (I have also managed a public information office, marketed architecture and audio-electronics, run a software office in Tel-Aviv, written speeches for Japanese diplomats, and handled millions of dollars worth of diamonds. Less professionally, I have been a hair model, a dancer (for fun) for many years and am champion of lost and asthmatic cats.)

3. How do you describe yourself on your business cards?

“Rotem Design Studio” – word + images + concept / print + web + editing

4. Why do you think you were chosen to be profiled on DigitalEveLA?

Perhaps my unusual background and how I bring it into my work.

5. What is your educational background?

I have a Masters from UCLA in Japanese Language and Literature (with a lot of Japanese history, anthropology, art, and music thrown in) and a B.A. in Asian Studies. I started off as a Chinese major and veered off toward Japanese instead. I am also fluent in Hebrew, and have studied French and Spanish.

6. What is your current occupation?

Self-employed, designer for web and print, including CD covers, brochures, cards, invitations, etc. Also editing and digital photography for an online media database. A lot of my work has had an international or intercultural focus, particularly Asian and Middle Eastern.

7. How long have you been working in your current field?

Twenty years in Marketing/ public information and media, and 8 years in professional design

8. What is your biggest achievement?

As an inherently unathletic person I'd have to say surviving a snowstorm during an ill-advised climb up Mt. Fuji, and getting a brown belt in Aikido. In terms of career there are so many — creating a public information infrastructure for the department I worked for at UCLA, and perhaps also teaching Japanese language and culture in Israel — sometimes in Hebrew!

9. What do you hope to achieve in the near future?

A rewarding and creative career.

10. What do you hope to achieve in your lifetime?

A rewarding and creative career, and peace of mind.

11. How did you hear about DigitalEveLA?

I think through another site but I don't remember.

12. Why did you join DigitalEveLA?

It looked like a wonderful resource for informative articles, brass-tacks advice and networking.

13. What has been the most beneficial part of this organization?

Networking, resources, and meeting great people who help each other. I hope I've been able to contribute back in some way too.

14. How would you describe your involvement with DigitalEveLA?

A member.

15. What is the best advice that you ever received about your career path?

Strangely, at the moment I can only remember not-so-good advice -- in particular, stuff about having "something to fall back on," which to me has a different emotional and psychological emphasis than, say, being practical, creative and keeping ones options open. There's an inherent problem in doing ones best work while playing it safe -- it's sort of like being excellent at mediocrity, when in reality, we excel at work we love. We do what we must in life, but when we don't believe we should be reaching for our dreams, we lock ourselves into a philosophy of lack and of fear.

16. What would you recommend to newcomers?

Take advantage of the networking events! They are fruitful, fun, and affordable.

17. What is an interesting fact about you?

I spent part of my college in Japan, and worked and lived in Israel for 8 years, so I have an oddly cross-cultural view of the world that helps me when working with, or reaching out to, diverse audiences.

As far back as I can remember I've been fascinated by how words and images convey meanings or evoke responses. To me, a word should be

an image and visa versa. This is the nexus of everything I've studied and worked in.

18. How did your background prepare you for your career?

People often ask me how I got from being a specialist in Japanese language and culture to a designer and editor. The "linear" answer is that my Japanese skills landed me my first marketing job years ago in a Japanese audio-electronics firm and later a 4-year stint in the Public Information and Cultural Affairs section of the Japanese Consulate General in L.A.

I started exploring computer graphics while working at a software company in Tel-Aviv. But it was when I returned to the U.S. and starting working at a couple of local architecture and design firms that I really started learning lay-out, graphics, and paying attention to the principles of design.

But the more "holistic" answer is that, to me, the distance between marketing and communicating through design and my earlier career path is not that great. The Chinese characters used in both Chinese and Japanese-stylized pictographs called "kanji" in Japanese — are the Ultimate Typography. Each character holds dynamic kernels of its own meaning in its strokes, all within a tiny square field.

Even as a young child I was so intrigued by the characters that I once peeled apart the leg of a Japanese doll when I saw that underneath it was composed of rolled up, kanji-rich newspaper!

To me, characters dance, flow, sprout and shine. This is what design and communications should produce — words that evoke images, and images that convey ideas and emotions. So back when I started to seriously pursue graphics it was as if a light bulb went on in my head. All of it — the media, the marketing, the intercultural experience — has come full circle for me and makes its own special sense.

19. If you could drop everything and take a 6-month sabbatical, what would you do?

A couple of trips I've been putting off for years, but mostly study digital video and editing, photography, and really add to my graphics and web "arsenal" with more advanced application and concepts. Animal-related volunteer work.

20. How can people contact you for more information?

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[Olivia Neri](#) is a freelance copywriter who focuses on helping small businesses use the Internet to increase sales.

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