

ADVERTISING STAR



Bart Cleveland: Creative Director and Partner at McKee Wallwork Cleveland

[By Heather Jung]

Bart Cleveland has been a passionate member of the advertising community for more than 20 years, after taking a design course during college that involved creating advertisements. He said that his teacher, a creative director, told him that he was a natural ad maker, and he has been hooked ever since.

"I just couldn't get enough of it in school," Cleveland said. "Every ad I did made me want to do a better one. Who wouldn't want a career that makes them feel that way every day?"

Cleveland began his undergraduate academic career at Paris Junior College in Paris, Texas, where he was a fine arts major.

After graduating from PJC, he continued his studies at East Texas State University (now Texas A&M University-Commerce) and graduated with his B.A. in Advertising Art.

Cleveland is now a partner and creative director at the Albuquerque-based agency McKee Wallwork Cleveland, which has

amassed an impressive client list that includes both national accounts and "blue-chip regional ones" such as Heritage Hotels, Mr. Rooter Plumbers, New Mexico Department of Health Tobacco Use Prevention and Control, Presbyterian Health Services, and Blake's Lotaburger.

Previously, Cleveland worked at agencies such as Fahlgren and Saatchi & Saatchi. In 1993, he opened his own agency, Cleveland Clark, in Atlanta. The agency was quickly recognized by members of the advertising circuit for its creative work, and it went on to win national and international awards despite its small size. In 1998, Cleveland became senior vice president and executive creative director at Sawyer Riley Compton. During his illustrious career, he has worked on a number of national campaigns, including those of Coca-Cola, CNN, Cartoon Network, and UPS. He has also done work for luxury hotel chain The Ritz-Carlton.

"I worked on The Ritz-Carlton from 1998 to 2005 helping them continue to expand their brand presence in more diverse resort and hotel offerings. We reintroduced The Ritz-Carlton to NYC in 2001 as well as helped them with their new residences in areas like Aspen and Orlando," Cleveland said.

According to Cleveland, the ads he has been most proud of are the ones "that were successful for my client while being deemed by my peers as among the best."

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I play golf because, as a self-loathing ad maker, I like to see myself humiliated in some way other than having to make a logo bigger on an ad when it's perfectly legible. I also love to spend time with my wife. I've been married to her since college, and she is still just a cute coed to me. She could care less about what I do at work, so she's a great way to escape on the bad days.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. That's a dangerous question to ask me. It depends on what minute of the day it is. I've got very eclectic tastes in music. My iTunes is permanently on shuffle. That way, Lou Rhodes is singing "Beloved One" one minute, then Zoar is doing "Clouds Without Water" the next. After that, Vivaldi, Johnny Cash, The Decemberists, Tricky, and Charlie Parker. But at heart I'm a rocker. I love Cake for their lyrics, Tool for their riffs, and Apocalypta because who would have thought a chamber orchestra could be a rock band? I also adore Alanis Morissette, The Cranberries, Sarah McLachlan, and Morcheeba because I love the female voice as a musical instrument. I guess my all-time favorite band is Pink Floyd. I've got almost everything from 1968 to today. But I don't even listen to them without interrupting them with a little Patsy Cline.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. Not counting the Captain America comic book I just finished? I read *Spirit Magazine* on a Southwest Airlines flight to Miami. There was a great article about Big Fat Brain, an interactive ad agency.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Seinfeld*, to the great annoyance of my wife. I can't have a conversation with my youngest son without using dialogue from various episodes—not that there's anything wrong with that.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Stan Lee. I love his energy and passion. Lee pulls for the underdog and is the anti-hero. To have my work peak in popularity late in my career like Lee's has would be awesome.



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Besides the Ritz-Carlton campaign, recent favorites include his work for Taos Ski Valley and TUPAC (Tobacco Use Prevention and Control). The goal of the Taos campaign was to “establish a voice for their passion for ‘pure skiing,’” since the resort is one of very few that does not allow snowboarding. In order to convey this idea, Cleveland and his team wanted to give Taos and its “loyalists” their own symbol and story, so they created “The Purification.” TUPAC is a local group that has allowed the agency to handle multiple noteworthy campaigns, such as its current one, “Thank you for not sucking,” whose goal is to deter ninth graders from taking up smoking.

“This campaign has been a huge hit among the target,” said Cleveland. “They are adopting it for themselves as their own way of taking a stand against smoking while remaining ‘cool’ in the process.”

In addition to his agency work, Cleveland has taught and tutored students for the past 20 years. He has been a guest instructor at schools such as the Ringling School of Art and Design and Miami Ad School. Over a 10-year period, he also taught at the Atlanta-based Portfolio Center and Creative Circus.

“Teaching others teaches oneself,” he said. “I consider teaching a part of my own education.”

Cleveland advised future advertisers to “go to a good school.” He also said that students should do their research in order to figure out which schools best suit them before dropping \$40,000 on a school that may not be the best fit. In addition to choosing a good school, he said that advertisers should read books and magazines pertaining to their field in order to stay up to date.

“During school, network like crazy,” Cleveland said. “The schools can help you with that, but it’s up to you to get to know who’s who in the business. Take rejection and being ignored well. Don’t think too much of yourself or advertising. Approach your work as if it’s saving a life; sometimes it does.”

ON THE NET

McKee Wallwork Cleveland
www.mckeewallworkcleveland.com

The Ritz-Carlton
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Default.htm

Miami Ad School
www.miamiadschool.com