

EPISODE 102

DAN GOLDEN JEN HUH



U TURN ME CREATIVITY



Dan Golden 00:03

Creative back and forth like a ping pong like collaboration creative like U ME U kind of playful which is art is really integral to our work.

JenHuh 00:14

Humor is also intimate, right? It makes you laugh, it really creates this interaction that goes on inside of you. I don't feel like technology is our biggest concern when it comes to how we do our creative work.

Paul Fairweather 00:38

Welcome to this week's episode of The Common Creative. My name is Paul Fairweather.

Chris Meredith 00:42

And I'm Chris Meredith,

Paul Fairweather 00:43

and Chris and I are on a journey to lift the veil on creativity in the world of business, and life.

Chris Meredith 00:52

This week's guests are Dan Golden and Jen Huh, their designers. They collaborate on a brand new project called U ME U And we were fascinated to answer them because they seem to make success of things with simplicity with humor and collaboration. And those themes seemed to be so important to us, Paul, what did you learn from our wonderful chat with them?

Paul Fairweather 01:12

So many things. Well, one of the things that caught my eye when we invited them on was something on Dan Golden's website that said that he delivered his project with clarity, humor and I think that's, you know, this, this whole episode was about clarity around the creative process, delivered with humor. So it was great fun, to have some great fun conversation with some fantastic insights about, particularly about collaboration, how to collaborate together in the design and artistic creative process.

Chris Meredith 01:42

Already in this particular episode, I think they've made a really powerful and serious point about the importance of humor and collaboration. So let's get them in.

Paul Fairweather 01:52

Dan and Jen, welcome to The Common Creative podcast.

JenHuh 01:55

Thank you and I am happy to be here.

Dan Golden 01:57

Thank you, guys. Thanks, Chris. Thanks, Paul.

Chris Meredith 01:59



Dan, Jen, can't wait to hear more about your story. Welcome to the common creative.

Paul Fairweather 02:03

Can we just start off, Dan and Jen, just giving us a quick potted history about where it came from, and how you ended up where you are now? Wow. Well,

Dan Golden 02:12

It's true.

JenHuh 02:14

At least he goes first.

Dan Golden 02:17

I will. I've always been interested in art and design, grew up studying painting, moved to New York and got to the design scene, and then started doing rugs and pillows and collections with CB too, Crate and Barrel. And Odegaard, which is a rug company, did my own lines. And then, right when we started my own line of rugs, I met Jen around 2007. Yeah. And we've been together ever since. And then we became both design creative partners and partners. And the other sense as well. Yeah.

Chris Meredith 02:54

You've just launched eight amazing new brands, a collection of throws, if I understand it, right, it's called you me it will tell us a bit about that.

JenHuh 03:02

Yeah, it actually started around the pandemic during 2020. And both Dan and I took a hiatus from making products. And during that time, we became very aware of the sense of wanting comfort and collaborating with other people in the community. And every time we do anything that is an extension of our own creative practice, we think of things as like canvases and pallets as much as we can. So we thought going back to the product, why not just go back to doing throws again, so it is the most simple, easy, accessible way. And our approach with working kind of that concept of U ME U you really blended very well in regards to throw.

Dan Golden 03:52

Yeah, the idea was, its idea of this creative back and forth like a ping pong like, collaboration creative. Like U ME U kind of playful, which is really integral to our work is a sense of humor and play. So it was collaboration is really key. And especially during lockdown, it was like a way for us to start a brand and a collection where we could actually work and communicate with other people, other designers, creatives, artists, that we like and gave us an excuse to kind of not excuse but a positive way to bring all together all the things we're interested in doing, which is art design, and collaboration all into one and with our own unique sense of play and humor.

Paul Fairweather 04:37

So I want to pick up on that plan. humor, just throw. Jen, what's your background? Are you an artist as well or what?



JenHuh 04:45

Yes, yes. So I totally forgot to even address that. So yes, I come from a poetry and creative and photography background. So when Dan and I met Um, we met in New York and how I approach working with Dan and how we work together is basically we have a strong sense of play humor, and a quirkiness. When it comes to our approach to fine arts, especially when in New York, it's so serious temporary art. So we always want to kind of do it in a subversive way. So this is our way when it comes to design and when it comes to arts to do that, so I'll when we come together, we just always kind of communicate and collaborate together. And I don't know we always end up kind of like, we don't end up with each other in real life. But when it comes to work, we can communicate visually, really clearly and articulately, to each other's approach. And where we ended off with that idea, and where he finalizes in the execution. And then I bounce back

Paul Fairweather 05:58

over so many things that we could unpack there. And, and just some of the things that you said, Chris, and I, I know we could speak all day with you. Chris is a photographer. I'm an artist, by book by book working Tyler's called bold, brave, a little bit quirky. So we love that you've worked so hard. And I, I do really want to come back and unpack this. Think about what you said about how you work together? Because I think, you know, Chris and I are on a mission to unpack creativity in the workplace. And all the discussion about creativity is a veil, and I think that you know, you have some insights here about your collaboration that, you know, will be very useful to our listeners. But I didn't want to just ask you that one question again, you, Jen sort of alluded to it. But Dan, what caught my attention. When we first started chatting was your website. And on your website, you had this statement that you delivered your projects with clarity and humor. And I gotta say that I love that so much I stall on it. But can you just tell us about that, you know, that sort of clarity around that statement?

Dan Golden 06:57

sorry, so our dog died, named after Donald Judd . Of course, she wants to get in on the whole show. So if you see Jen sort of like, distracting her, it's because she's complaining that we're on a podcast we'll easily do.

JenHuh 07:10

Now he wants to be like social media stars. So

Chris Meredith 07:15

I'd like to this day still Dan and Jen, this is actually a threesome, we're talking about? Is this the dog part of the team? Yeah, that's good. Sounds like a good thing.

Dan Golden 07:23

Going way back, the idea of finding clarity and simplicity has always been super important to my work, it's just my way of understanding the world. I just find the world to be somewhat confusing in general. So if I can find ways to simplify it and clarify it for myself, I think that's a benefit. And for me, Humor has always been the way that I've just navigated through the world, whether it's through the pain, you know, like, I think that's just the truth. Like, where does humor come from? I think it comes from, I mean,

what's the whole comedy is like pain or time or something like that, there's some line about it. So that's like the truth of my, my history. And so those are two things of like, mentally processing the world, making it clear, and finding humor in it. And those are also ways that I've connected with people because I find that like, the clearer you are, the more you can connect with people in a message. And another way of connecting with people is humor. It's like one of the purest ways of reaching other people. And it's always been a great tool that I've found to be able to express myself. I mean, I can't dance. Jen can attest to that. But I can come up with something fun

Paul Fairweather 08:31

Is he funny Jen, I want to know.

JenHuh 08:34

Well, yeah. But I often say like my whole thing when fighting, I mean, as a collaborator, but also as a life partner. It's like, the most important thing is that we have to have fun and it has to be funny. And what I think of Dan's humor, and his approach to design, it seems so simple, but it's not. I think it's really complex and psychological and it slices through so clearly that it really clearly resonates with people. So even these, Dan does these one cell kind of animation type things and you know, shitty

Dan Golden 09:21

cartoon character name shitty, who he's kind of like my inner dark side, like the worst version of me to survive

JenHuh 09:29

all of us. That's all there was. And so even then we have a little tagline. It's a little shitty and all of us like we're all and it's true. It's talking, it's speaking to who we are and not ignoring the words. The best. It's, it's just making it's truly just human and immediate and palatable, and you could just, like, chew on it so easily.

Chris Meredith 09:58

And you honestly do it. He's always treat something like so I mean, that kind of literally is at USA, it's something very important, very serious that it's very humor gets people together. And what was in my mind as well is that it's an antidote to the kind of the technology that's kind of surrounding us and arguably polluting us too much. So I've got a whole bunch of questions, I guess one of them is how do people incorporate more humor in their lives? So I think maybe we've all got ourselves too serious and too worried about the future? Maybe humor is a really good answer to that. How do we incorporate more humor in our lives?

Dan Golden 10:36

That's a great question. I think it's so important, I think, well, how do we do it? I mean, I think you have to put like a big notepad putting a card on your wall everywhere and say, like, incorporate more, you have to remind or else

JenHuh 10:53

have an app that tells you every 30 minutes,



Dan Golden 10:57

I think you do, I think you need a very clear sign like you forget, I gotta say, like, Jen, for me, reminds me you need to Jen, you know, cuz she reminds me sometimes, like, I can get really, in my own head, I think we all can and, and then all of a sudden, she'll be in a good mood. And it'll just remind me of like, not to take myself in the world so seriously. And I think I try to do the same thing for her. But I gotta say, she does it more for me. So I appreciate that.

JenHuh 11:27

Yeah, I mean, that's such a good question. And I kind of want her now to have this question all you periodically throughout the day, cuz like, yeah, we take ours, like, here's the thing, I think we all earnestly want to do great things in our lives, right? We all want to touch people, and have a positive impact. And there are others that are kind of fearful that they're too scared to say the truth, because they don't want to be canceled or called out. There's so many things that are swirling that help that kind of negate our inner self in a bit of a way. So humor really breaks that up. It's like, in a quiet room. It's that loud clap, and it just shakes us up. And I feel like that is something we get to be shaken up every day. Yeah, yeah. Because then we get stuck. And we can't, we really can't figure anything out without humor.

Chris Meredith 12:25

How you could make it could have answered that question. I'm thinking it's an unfair question, because it demands a serious answer. And maybe what you should have just said is, you're kidding, you're kidding, who asked questions.

JenHuh 12:37

You're joking, get me out of here.

Paul Fairweather 12:40

I just wanted to connect that back to that other thing. You're talking about collaboration, Chris and I and some of our previous podcasts, we've had various neuroscientists talk about creativity and wonder the brain is something that they that often comes up is that to be creative, you got to be in a good mood, it's very difficult, you know, to be creative. If you're in a foul mood, you got to have a positive outlook. But I really wanted to come back to the leaking that this thing that you guys enjoy working together. And you have this incredible collaboration, there's not a lot of husband and wives, so can your partner's wife partners that can work together successfully, for an extended period of time, or any period of time. But you know, you do both, I know some with some, some of my friends, because incredible, creative juices in life and in business. But, you know, in my experience is that in collaboration, often it comes out as collaboration, what I call collaboration, which is pretending to be collaboration, but it's really people just trying to clobber you to get their own way. So, what I am interested in, is your personal experience of this collaboration together? And how that might translate, you know, into the workforce, you know, what are the elements of successful creativity? You know, don't say you got to have a life partner because that's going to shrink the pool, dried dramatically. But you know, what, what are their businesses and people in teams might be able to go Yeah, okay, I could do that. Do you know what the essence is? Wow, that's



Dan Golden 14:12

a great question. A couple of things come to mind. building empathy is one thing and trust you know, obviously, like, to that point of feeling like you need to be in a good place mentally to create I couldn't agree more like for me, I had a therapist once who was like, Dan, you're not one of those starving, you know, horrible artists who like creates your best work if you're like starving, or in a bad situation, you need to have like, a roof over your head and like, all the things the trappings like to create, and I was like, You're right, like, I mean, when I was younger, I had this picture of like, you had to be like, you know, Van Gogh or something to be creative, but I'm like, No, I need to feel safe and supported. And all those things like He gets really key. So I think empathy, trust all those things. I mean, no matter how cliché or corny, they may sound, I think they're really the most important thing. Because it really sets the groundwork to be able to do good work even to like exploring ideas. And then the only thing I was going to add to that was, I think supporting just generating ideas is to me, and we talked about this like a good idea. And creative ideas are like, no matter how small a spark of something, we throw ideas back and forth every day at each other. And we figure out what works and we filter through. And this can be applied to a team. It's like a platform where you feel supported. And then being able to kind of be comfortable in yourself to like, generate ideas, and go with the ones that you feel strongly about, or throw them past your team to kind of filter through and get feedback is super key. Because for us, it's like, everything can even start with the simplest sketch on a napkin and the knots even the best, sometimes the best ideas come out of the simplest sketch. And that's a lot of times it really were things that we've done, have come from so it support, safe space to create the work. And then just like, allow yourself to just throw the ideas out there. I feel like that's what we do. We both throw ideas back and forth with each other. And we're honest with each other, but we're also we don't shut each other down. We kind of like it if we don't agree that that's the perfect idea. We help each other shape it. So it's all that and I think that applies to teams.

JenHuh 16:37

Yeah, I think trust is the most essential, it's the absolute essential, because I am not as I think, what is what was the term that they use, not collaboration, but collaboration. And I think that like, I think there's two things when I hear that term that let the new unique term collaboration, it's either the person is kind of tyrannical in regards to how they approach and they see it only by one vision. And then it's the team that builds that one vision. And I don't think that's how we can work that way. That's not how we exist. I think that trust is hugely important because I trust Dan, in his ability, and he trusts in my abilities. And we're not here to compete with each other. We have something very unique to offer to each other, and individually and together. And whatever that is, we know that we're always going to be moving towards that. And when we ever have disagreements, because we do have disagreements. That's that, that's true. And sometimes it's really good to work it out. But I don't whenever we do have disagreements, I think it's because we are either not hearing each other. And that's when the collaboration is happening. But that's just temporary, it shouldn't be consistent.

Chris Meredith 18:12

Often what's going through my mind is the idea that actually trust comes from humans or the other way around. Because it's kind of opening up a very vulnerable side of yourself. If you're sharing a joke, you're making fun of something. It's it's it invites all options. One option is to invite being squashed by

and you know, that's not funny, or how dare you say that, whatever it might be. And the other option is to join in the joke. And so it is something that develops trust rather than the other way around. And what I'm thinking through to the workplace is that there's very little humor in the workplace. And lawyers are looking for trust, they're looking for teamwork, looking for collaboration. And maybe he was one of the sort of elixirs that they could use if only they knew how to encourage it, how to get people to relax enough to enjoy themselves. Share a joke.

JenHuh 19:07

I think I totally agree. I think that when it comes to work, I think people express themselves, that they think there's a person's professional self. They separate themselves in some way, but if they just let them be 100% themselves, in their workplace or in how they're approaching in their process, even sharing the process, I kind of feel like everything is so product driven and results, not even sharing the fine nuances. Which nuance is a humor like the ridiculousness of sometimes how they even get to something simple like to get there if it gets spent 30 hours on something that seems it would only take 10 minutes, but the truth is, that's how it is all the time.

Paul Fairweather 19:57

I just wanted to come back to the To the UVU thing, and we'll put links on the on in the show notes. it's because I love your graphic, the simple you use to create a U and M and N A and then A u again, and I, that also resonated with me because I just have a boat, a little timber boat. When I bought it, it was a mother and Sonny salad. It was called you and me. And now it's favorite Japanese restaurant up the coast was cool UMI, U-MI, which I believe is a Japanese dream. So I renamed my boat UMI too. So, which is a very similar thing to U ME U So yeah, so and what are we fighting? So obviously, you already know this. But that logo says so much about your process, you know, not even the process in the throat business about you, you'll be asked back again, but the way you guys work, you know, back and forth. I just think it's in such a fantastic encapsulation of what it is that you do

Chris Meredith 21:12

want to jump into the question about technology? The question is, how do you harness technology? And how do you filter technology because this idea of human connection, simplicity, humor comes across very strongly from you, it's obviously very important to you. And I wonder if that's the kind of antidote to certain craziness of all of our lives, the too much technology, too many new apps and gadgets and solutions to things we didn't know we need solutions to? So, how do you filter technology? How do you explain, for example, Paul mentioned I'm a photographer, I hate studio lights. And the wires you just saw saw me pull the wire out of my own headphone. That's good. So my question is, how do you harness or filter what technology works for you? And how do you know

Dan Golden 22:04

Wow, that's great. I'll jump in for my experience with it as I'm always looking for the most elegant, simple solution from a software perspective. Whether it's what web platform, you know, that we're building a site on, or what software we use. For 3D design, I'm always looking for that. So it's kind of like a curation, filtering of what makes sense. And I used to be really frustrated, because I always felt like I wanted to know everything. And I mean, there's so much cool stuff going on now like 3D design and motion. And I realized, like, I'm kind of accepting that there's only so much that one person can do

and to like, to focus on the things that I like are where my proclivities or my strengths or interests lie. And maybe it's like my strength is putting a pen on a piece of paper, and I can scan it. And I can use Photoshop and Illustrator and a few other things, but I'm not going to not, I don't need to try and compete or know all the software out there. Part of what we do, we have this other website called curator, where we do interviews with artists and designers. And it's another extension of this idea of that U ME U, this kind of community creative collaboration. So I was thinking about it, like, it's a great way for me to reach out to people who know those things that I'm interested in, but I'll never be able to learn it, but are really masters of it. But I can open dialogue with them and understand it through them and pick their brains and maybe get some suggestions on what would be the tools that we might need to use or want to access. But if it comes down to like, it's a curation of all that, you know, it's like all filters because it's so easy to get overwhelmed. So you have to kind of clear it out.

Chris Meredith 23:55

What you're saying is basically get other people to advise you on the stuff that's elegant, and is going to work for you to avoid that trap of just pursuing the latest, the newest, the shiniest bit of technology and the ones who spend our lives doing the tech and not doing the work. So yeah, that's

Dan Golden 24:12

it. Yeah. I just wanted to jump in back to what Paul was saying about the U ME U thing, because I want to mention something, you know, to the logo that was designed by spin studio that actually designed one of the the throws for U ME U. And it's also an example of like, serendipity and the whole idea of like the way that we work with the collaboration. They had designed this throw, they had a pattern they created or a shape, they called symmetric, which is like this u shape. And it actually worked out perfectly as a shape that could build the logo. And in the conversation with spin studio. I just kind of mentioned it to Tony Brook who's the founder director, one of the founders of spin, and he was like oh Oh, let me mark it up for you as your logo. And what they do all day long is create the world's best logo marks. I mean, they're like one of the best agencies and creative agencies in the world. And he was just like, here you go, you can use this. And he's like, It's yours now. I'm like, wow. And it was like finding people that were our tribe, in a sense and wanting to collaborate with us. And, you know, it wasn't about the money. And it wasn't about, you know, ego, and it was just like, here you go, this works for what you're doing, we have the same spirit of creativity and collaboration. And so that if that was sort of exactly it.

JenHuh 25:41

Yeah, I mean, to build upon what Dan was saying. And also I think joining Hall and pressing your questions is that, Dan, what you were saying about technology, and how you approach, I always have to run behind Dan, to go back to the pen. Can you go back to your hand, because everything we do is intimate. Its humor is also intimate, right? It's, it makes you laugh, it really creates this difference, it's this interaction that goes on inside of you that you have no excuse, and then you all suddenly accidentally laugh and make yourself look ridiculous. And, and you're exposed, and then it makes other people laugh. It's contagious, right in that way. So for him, I know that sometimes, like Rula, we do a lot of graphic work. And it's really simple and refined. But his hand and how he draws is, to me, the best communication of how we're articulating our ideas. And whether that's from doodle to like 3d prototyping, it always stems from the hand. So even when it comes to our branding ideas, even though

it's an idea concept, we put pen to paper and make it into reality. And then the only way we can make it even feel even more real is connecting with people so that other people know. So then all of a sudden by knowledge, it has this existence. So that's how we approach our collaboration. And also these ideas and technology I don't feel like technology is our biggest concern. When it comes to how we do our creative work. I think it enters into the concern of how it's being marketed and how it's being approached in that way, but then it's really not our concern, because then we can always work with partners.

Paul Fairweather 27:35

I see. That's a fantastic thought. And thank you for sharing that. Because one of the things that Chris and I both do, we get people drawing in the masterclasses, we run for all various reasons. And doodling, you know, guy asked me cool if the crowd ever knows who draws now, who doodle say I do? Well, hello. But the third thing I wanted to, I just wanted to make another observation, you're talking about that you and that mod in Australian Indigenous art is that that is a motive that is often used. And it's like, as far as I understand, I might have this wrong, is basically an aerial view of a person. So when there's a gathering, there's a series of these, you look at the motors, it's a series of these us, you know, placed into the circle, and it's basically almost like an aerial view of people sitting with their legs crossed, you know, and sort of opening. So it's really quite, you know, quite fascinating. I just wanted to ask a question. And it relates a little bit to the simplicity thing, but also everything that you do. I know, I have probably more of a challenge than Chris. But Chris also has a bit of a challenge around this. We're both body potentialed. We like shiny new things. You know, I'm an artist, right? Steger and Van goes on, I was an architect, I'm a caring architect, I find it very hard to focus. You have a lot of interests or things that you do, but I sense that they're more layered or something that they're more, you know, there's like not something totally different. They're all sort of overlapping, or it's a big Venn diagram. Am I correct in that? And how do you do that? Like, how do you say, Well, I can't do that if I didn't do this. Keep that sort of continuity or connection with the things that you do? Well,

Dan Golden 29:20

I'll just say that I struggle a lot with this over the last year because I mean, my whole entire design experience or creative words like exactly one and do a million different things, and could see a million different avenues to go in and then not getting every for me getting where I want to get in any of them. Maybe I will get a little somewhere. And I just realized, like, Oh, I was thinking this over the last year. I was like, I've got five projects I want to work on. And then as I kind of went through them I realized well one of them was U ME U Another one was a curator that there was some children's book now there was like wanting to go back and do some art painting. I want to do this one thing. And I just realized, Okay, I can't do them all, I've got to focus and just pick two. So I can only handle so much, I just know how much I can handle on my plate. So I kind of really whittled down into those terms. And that doesn't mean that those other things can't get woven in. But it's also just in terms of like, what can I do now and thinking of life is like this marathon, I just did my first marathon last year. So I've learned a lot from this idea of like, Thank you, very slow, but I made it, I survived and was still here. But the point being is that like, I'd now instead of looking at this thing of like, I'm not gonna be a rockstar, I'm not gonna be in past rock star age, I'm gonna, hopefully live till 90 or above, I'll have the time to do all these things. I don't have to like, try and fit them all in. So two things, one, I do, it's not possible to do a million different things at once you do. For me, I have to make a selection to get ahead. And then I can weave in the

other things. But then I do think all of them do relate or have stemmed from certain areas like values about creativity, collaboration, art and design. So they do stem off of a center core. So I wouldn't say, I don't know, if we do them more successfully or differently. You stack them up differently than anyone else does. But they all do align, I think for us.

JenHuh 31:22

Yeah, I think it's really difficult in regards to how you kind of silence yourself a little bit of silence or dampening all the things because it can be really distracting. And that's inclusive of, I think, technology and being able to see what everyone's doing and what's available and all your own goals and hopes and dreams or inclinations or ideas. Like, I think that is why collaboration working with Dan is so helpful for me because it lets it's not even a silo but it's just why it's the space so I can really, truly focus. And when we can have a direction we'll work together even in the collaboration, it's, you just want to be 100% there with the person that you're there with. And with the person that you're thinking of, which is whoever is being designed for or with whom you want to narrow that down and not narrow down the ideas, but narrow down that experience, so that you have full intention and full meaning when you're working. And, to me, the end result for me is I hope that I'm 100% satisfied by it. And it inspires and sparks the next so I could be 100% there for that

Paul Fairweather 32:45

That is a most amazing statement to unfortunately call this to an end because we run out of time, that full intention and full focus. I just think it sums it up beautifully. Thank you so much for sharing your clarity into design and art and business with humor. Nothing new. It has really been

Chris Meredith 33:09

I've enjoyed it. And I've enjoyed reading the two more. I think you're onto something really big. I think it's the antidote to birth being surrounded by too much stuff too much technology and torture craziness. I've really enjoyed it. Thank you.

Dan Golden 33:24

We appreciate it. Well, we'll share some things with you just between now and later. Some images that you probably haven't seen that I think might be interesting. Have a sense of that play. And thank you for reminding me of that because of the humor because I think sometimes I forget about how important that is. I'm trying to be cool all the time

Paul Fairweather 33:47

too cool for funny

Dan Golden 33:50

Thank you

JenHuh 33:51

Thank you Well,

Paul Fairweather 33:56



Chris, again, when great energy you look great,

Chris Meredith 33:59

and what the learnings they've helped me get some real clarity apologies about all the things that get in the way of us and the seriousness we approach things with and the technology we surround ourselves with him I think simplicity clarity, honor what, what wonderful themes to live by to grow by and to kind of share stuff.

Paul Fairweather 34:21

And reminded by that quote, was too important to be taken too seriously and quite short. Who said that? So anyway, listen, if you've enjoyed this episode, please leave us a rating, hopefully five and some review. And please most of all, share with your friends if you've enjoyed it, because that helps us it helps other listeners and then helps our guests please share

Chris Meredith 34:45

please share it out. Join us for next week's episode of The Common Creative. Thanks for listening.

Paul Fairweather 34:49

Bye for now.



**Dan Golden
Jen Huh
(Special Guest)**



Paul Fairweather - Co-host



Chris Meredith - Co-host



Two Common Creatives

