Year 3: year in review

Leaving off from last year’s year-in-review, I was preparing for the upcoming Design for America leadership studio at Northwestern University. During the conference last august, we focused on accessibility in urban environments, and we still use some of the frameworks we created in our design studio today.

That fall, I was lucky enough to move to Shanghai, China for a co-op with CBi China Bridge, a design and innovation consultancy. Although I had originally applied to be a design research intern, I was hired on an industrial designer. That co-op taught me a lot about what I’m looking for in my career. I was actually lucky enough to receive multiple co-op offers at the same time, and chose to move to Shanghai. There were quite a few visa complications, however, I finally got it all organized, and was off to start a new adventure in China!

Arriving in China may have been the most overwhelming experiences I had, not knowing anybody in the country before I had started my job. I quickly realized the Mandarin Chinese I had learned previously would not be enough to sustain a life in China, and I hired a private tutor to really work on my language skills.

While the experience of living long-term in Shanghai was very eye-opening, I realized the work was sadly less than I was expecting. I think I’d fit in better at a larger consultancy with a tad more structure to it. I often found it difficult to complete tasks while lacking the resources, infrastructure, and context to get them done. There was a particular moment when I was making a run to buy supplies, and I ended up lost and stranded in a large demolished block where a construction supply warehouse had previously been. That was one of the many wrong turns, lost translations, and confusing experiences I had. Overall, I loved the variety to life it provided for me, but am hesitant to work at a company that lacked the structure I prefer.

Upon returning from Shanghai, I came back to UC to continue my studies in industrial design. I was fortunate enough to land a spot in the coveted Section 001 furniture design studio. Given the nature of it being a collaborative studio, we were all appointed positions. My classmates appointed me lead design researcher, trends analyst, and social media manager. It was definitely humbling to realize how much my classmates respected me for the things I’m best at in design. We also got to visit Herman Miller, Steelcase, and Haworth on a trip to Holland, Michigan. I’ve always loved Herman Miller furniture since I was in a kid, so it was so exciting to see where it was all created. With Section 001, we also got to showcase our furniture in New York City at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, one of the most important furniture events in the world. Being able to showcase my work on this global stage was really an honor.

After my spring at UC, I landed a co-op at LPK, a branding and design consultancy here in downtown Cincinnati. Working as a strategy and trends intern, I was excited for a new work environment that hopefully aligned better with my professional aspirations. Luckily, it turned out to be my favorite co-op yet. I have a much deeper understanding of how research informs design from a trends, strategy, and traditional design research vantage point. Also, I’ve really grown in the types of research methodologies I can use now which is improving my craft.

On the horizon, I’ll be moving to Berlin this fall on exchange at Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft to study industrial design and German. A new language, new country, new culture, and entire new international experience. This will be my 8th apartment, 4th country lived in, and 3rd continent I’ve been to since starting college 3 years ago. As far as goals after that, I’m really hoping to co-op in Europe this spring. Also, I’d really like to potentially try fashion PR next since it’s related, but slightly different from the core work I’ve been doing at my job. Although I love the work I do, I’d like to cast a wide net while I’m still interning places so I can know my exact interests upon graduation. I’m really thrilled with how this year turned out, and can’t wait to see all that my last two years at UC hold!