doing it.

Longevity is very important when it comes to getting good at design: The longer we stay in this business, the more likely it is that we'll have the chance to get good at it.

For many designers, a major key to staying in this profession lies in finding activities that not only keep things fun, but also help expand skills and knowledge.

Creative projects done on our own time—and according to our own goals and rules (without clients, deadlines or budgets, in other words)—can go a long way in keeping things enjoyable and ensuring that our creative skills stay fresh and up-to-date.

If you're like most designers, then one of the main reasons you got into this business in the first place is that you like making art. It's very likely you grew up drawing, painting, taking pictures, shooting videos, playing with clay, making collages and/or doodling. Right? And it's our background in these areas that actually establishes a large part of the foundation that drives our creative thinking as we produce layouts, logos, illustrations, graphics and Web pages as professionals. So, why stop creating art for fun now that we are grown ups? Don't we risk losing our artistic drive and our creative savvy if we limit our artistic output to commercial purposes?

(Over)

Project ideas and notes:

What kinds of creative projects would *you* like to do during your free time? There are several ways to choose. You could pick activities simply because they sound fun. There's nothing wrong with that. Or, you could come up with projects that would deepen your skills in areas that you wish to pursue for either personal or professional reasons—illustration, photography or video, for instance. You could also select personal creative projects based on the kinds of art you would like to use to fill spaces on the walls of your living room, office or cubicle. It's up to you!

How about doing personal creative projects that involve non-digital tools? Just for the sake of variety, if nothing else (after all, pretty much everything we do while on the job involves working with computers). Besides, most digital tools are designed to mimic hands-on media like paints and pencils—so why not handle the real thing for a change?

Also, just to be clear, it's okay(!) to **not** do creative projects—or any other kind of self-motivated project for that matter—on your own time. Find a balance. Sometimes we just need to take a break from everything when we're not working. Other times, a hands-on creative project is just what's needed to give ourselves a fun means of experiencing art in a way that does not involve work-related pressures and expectations.

Consider using media that you don't normally use on the job when doing creative projects on your own. Make a 3D sculpture or some kind of shrine out of junk, for example, if you normally work in the two-dimensional realm of Web or print media. Dealing with media that is outside our norm acts as a kind of "artistic cross training" that helps develop our creative muscles in ways that feel fresh and invigorating. Pretty much any effort we put in creating works of art and expression—regardless of the specific media being used—sharpens our creative thinking and our ability to resourcefully solve problems (and therefore also stands a very good chance of having a positive effect on our work as professional designers).

How about doing some extra-curricular projects with a friend or a group of friends? What about an art party or an art date? These might sound like corny ideas, but you'd be surprised how much fun two or more creative people can have when paper mache, clay, finger paints and/or a box of crayons are involved.

Consider keeping things like a digital camera, a sketchpad and maybe a good book with you at all times (which may mean carrying a small shoulder bag for those of us who don't normally carry purses or wear backpacks). Once you get the hang of keeping these things around and using them—which really isn't all that hard to do—you will likely find yourself boredom-proof and always able to fill downtime with some kind of enjoyable activity that is creatively and/or intellectually beneficial.

Project ideas and notes: