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## From Ugly to Design: Draplin Design Co. Rocks Vermont

May 15, 2012 · by [Liz\\_Millikin](#) · in [COMMUNITY](#)

More than a great designer, [Aaron Draplin](#) is a character. He is also a friend of the studio, and last week at the [Signal Kitchen](#), Draplin had a room full of designers and creatives laughing and cheering along for an hour. That's no easy feat.

Originally from Michigan, he is the design mind behind [Draplin Design Co.](#) in Portland, OR. You might know him as the craftsman behind Field Notes, the graphics he's made for Burton Snowboards, or simply by his crisp, vintage-inspired style.

On growing up and finding his way to a successful career, Draplin readily admitted, "It was ugly." He lived out of his van for years so that he and his buddies could spend their time snowboarding instead of paying rent. He also worked summers as a dishwasher in Alaska, screen-printing T-shirts after hours, to make enough money to buy a computer. It was ugly, but he did it. Why?

Because growing up in a "shitty-ass town" (his words), he was told that he'd grow up to hate his job and have a shitty little life. But he didn't believe it, and he worked like hell to buck the trend and make meaningful design happen.

Here's some advice from Aaron Draplin that aligns with our own philosophy on how to go from ugly to loving it—and stay there:

Say yes a little bit more than no.

Stop saying no because the job's too small or too big or doesn't quite pay enough.

If it's fun, if it's a challenge, if you believe in the client, then say yes and do it. The little stuff is the fun stuff —the stuff that sticks with you.

Do good work for good people. Your work—be it design or creative or accounting—directly affects other people's ability to work and earn a living.

Take your job seriously and do everything you can to work for good people who you want to work with.

Draplin is rough-talking, trucker-hat-wearing proof that following your passion is the way out of the rat race and into a work-life balance you love. Even if there will be some ugly patches along the way.

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