BY BRYN MOOTH

SIDELINES

INK ON PAPER

When your 9-to-5 design job keeps your work in the digital realm, sometimes it takes a sideline gig to scratch the ink-on-paper itch.

Chicago designers Mig Reyes and Kyle Stewart spend their days working on web-based projects for Threadless and for the digital agency Digitas, respectively. Reyes earns his paycheck, as he puts it, by "making magic for the web for the most killer tee company ever." That would be Threadless, an open-source community/e-commerce hybrid where folks can submit their T-shirt designs to be voted upon by the masses; top vote-getters are printed in limited editions and offered for sale. Stewart's role as an art director for Digitas keeps him hard at work on web projects for clients like General Motors and Goodwrench.

Since the guys are both fairly recent college grads and they live in the same building (Reyes has the apartment directly above Stewart's), it was natural that they connected and started talking about design. That conversation led to some initial joint projects, mostly fliers for small dance shows in Chicago. They dubbed their poster-design collaborative straightSilly, and in summer 2009 (after Stewart was laid off by a previous employer), they began pouring more effort into this sideline gig.

Their initial client base—clubs, DJs and music festivals in Chicago—has branched out beyond the city, growing by word of mouth among DJs and promoters. Reyes says the duo has complete creative freedom in these projects; clients see their posters online and trust them to impose their style. Reyes and Stewart do their screen printing at Chicago's Screwball Press and offer their posters for sale online and at the gigs their broadsides promote.

For Reyes, straightSilly offers a chance to explore new design techniques and concepts that he can then bring back to projects at Threadless. For Stewart, it's a complete antidote to his day job, where online projects are reined in by the clients' branding guidelines.

Reyes says the two groove on the up-til-all-hours nature of their poster work: "We like to think of ourselves as night and weekend warriors." HOW

Bryn Mooth is HOW's editor. HOWdesign.com

MIG REYES CHICAGO www.migreyes.com
KYLE STEWART CHICAGO www.therealkylestewart.com
STRAIGHTSILLY CHICAGO www.straightsilly.com



PRINT 'EM UP
"We print most of the posters ourselves," Reyes says. "We screen print at a Chicago facility called Screwball Press, and for smaller shows we create a limited run of archival prints. Sometimes the venue will take care of mass-printing for quick and easy hanging around the city."

UN-MARKETING
"For the past year, work has been coming to us by recommendation from each DJ and venue we work with," Mig Reyes says. "People Tweet about our work, and we get noticed through word of mouth. With our steady growth and requests for work, we're looking to pursue bigger music talent names to work with."





ADVICE
Reyes says: "Do it because you're passionate about it, not because you're looking to make money from it. It's not about having time for your sideline gig, it's about making time."

BACK IN SCHOOL
"Not much has changed since we graduated from college just two short years ago," Reyes says. "We're still staying up until the wee hours of the morning cranking on design projects. Sometimes it feels like finals all over again—and don't we all miss that."