



Creative Insight

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FALL OUT OF LOVE WITH YOUR STUDIO?

Following a recent rebrand and change of focus for her design business, Laura Jane Boast discusses how she lost and then re-discovered the connection with her own studio

By **Emma Tucker** 31/08/2021



As for many, lockdown was a difficult time for Laura Jane Boast, designer and founder of Conscious Made – previously known as LJB Studio. After spending years developing her own business, and tweaking how she presented it to prospective clients, quarantine hit and Boast found herself with plenty of time to rethink things.

“When lockdown happened, I almost felt like I was left with a person and version of myself I didn’t really recognise,” she says. “It was really difficult to comprehend that. I felt like I’d almost failed. I’d been having this success, the work was working for me, yet I still didn’t feel that sense of connection with the brand.”



Design Giving was launched by Laura Jane Boast in 2018, and explores the links between design and sustainability

Boast had always had a focus on design's relationship with sustainability, studying it for her masters, and taking a first job with a company in Wales that emphasised its ethical values. After five years there, she relocated to Manchester and set up LJB Studio. In the early days, says Boast, she worked with brands that “weren't necessarily the perfect match” – which is probably familiar to anyone that's just started a studio or gone freelance.

“I felt like I couldn't turn work down if it wasn't necessarily fitting my values,” she tells CR. “I was almost like I was grateful for the work people were giving me, and choosing to work with me because of my experience. I definitely didn't have the confidence at the beginning to say, ‘this is what I want to do, and I don't want to do anything else’”

Boast always knew she wanted to introduce more of a sustainable slant to her design studio, but says the “trigger point” really came in 2018. She'd set up a magazine, entitled Design Giving, which started out as Kickstarter-funded passion project, but landed her an invite to a panel session in London to discuss purpose-led branding. “For me, that event was a standout moment, because it gave me the vision in black and white,” she remembers.

“I could see the difference between what I'd created with Design Giving, which had such a strong purpose, a real name, and a real meaning that connected with people with shared values. I could see the contrast of what Design Giving had and what my studio was failing to give, so it was at that point in January 2019 when I knew I needed to change the name.



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Branding for Conscious Made, which replaces the former LJB Studio

“It was such a slow process, really underpinning what it was about me and my process and how I could sell myself in a way that wasn’t so tied to a specific core service in design,” she continues. “It almost made me feel a sense of failure, because in some sense I had a brand which was succeeding in that it had a real purpose, but then I failed to have that with the studio, which was my day-in-day-out job. It left me feeling really disorientated, and with that element of not knowing where I wanted to take the studio. I didn’t have the answers back then.”

Feeling lost, Boast says she went through a quick brand audit of LJB Studio in 2019, reshooting photography and repositioning her services – but found there was still a “missing piece”. She describes the process of rethinking her own studio as a solitary one, explaining that she felt almost embarrassed discussing it with anyone else. And once lockdown arrived, her lack of connection with it became even more apparent.

Like many people, Boast found that work dried up during quarantine, giving her a rare chance to stop and think. Although before she says she’d lived and breathed design, lockdown meant she had two months without any kind of creative feeling whatsoever, or the chance to go out and meet with other people. She describes it as a moment of realisation that she needed to give herself a little bit more self care and address her mental and physical wellbeing, as well as dealing with her worries around her business.



Poster designed by Conscious Made

Ultimately, Boast decided to focus on her original interest in design's relationship with sustainability and wellbeing, and rename her studio as Conscious Made – which now “provides immersive design and brand consultancy services with health and wellness at its core”. She says she pushes this idea of wellbeing to the front in projects, exploring elements such as biophilic design and natural materials, and making sustainable choices a priority.

This is very much driven by her own experience of the pandemic as well. “I think it takes an event, or something, and when you're feeling really low that's the trigger point or turning point at which you've got to make a change,” she says. “But I was distracted by work, and always in work and busy. I overlooked the importance of my own wellbeing, which is why the underpinning of Conscious Made is around being more conscious of your thoughts, your feelings and your experiences and tapping into that every single day.

“That is the most important thing for me, and I really want to help other people. Over the years, I've already done that within my work, but now it's trying to package it in a way that's putting that to the forefront above anything else.”



Calendar designed by Conscious Made for With Print

Boast's feelings of confusion and lack of connection are likely familiar to others who may also be some way into their careers and wondering if what they're doing is still the right fit. She says it's a difficult mental space to be in, and after sharing her own struggles on Twitter, received plenty of messages from people feeling the same way – reminding her that while it seems like a lonely experience, there's likely plenty of others going through something similar.

“I try and see it not necessarily as a failure in a bad sense,” she explains. “I listen to a podcast called How To Fail, and it's really transformed the way I think about failure and how to fail better. It's about using what you perceive as a failure and turning it into a positive ... you hear other people, that you idolise, saying that they've failed. And you think, 'oh, they can't possibly have failed at something, they've had an amazing career'.

“It's trying to utilise [your feelings of failure], accepting them, owning them, and saying that's part of your identity, your journey, and what makes you you.”



Conscious Made branding

Boast's advice for anyone else feeling lost or uncertain about the business they've set up, is to question how their brand makes them feel, how they want it to make them feel, and how they can make that happen. She uses these three questions with her own clients now, and says embracing feeling vulnerable can help guide people in the direction they actually want to go in. And the answers don't necessarily mean a total change of direction.

"I think that's one of the biggest challenges – to really actually recognise it for yourself, and then figure out what is the thing that's the problem," she tells CR. "It might be, for some people, that they have the same feelings of a lack of belonging or lack of connection with their brand, but they might not necessarily have to change the name of the studio. It might just be a small strategy change or overall vision for the brand, or change of direction. For me it feels very much like a personal transformation as much as a studio brand transformation.

"I've got a more simple process, a more straightforward USP, and I think I've always tried to fit with other people in terms of what I offer in services – this has made me feel like I don't need to do that anymore," she continues. "It's a relief of pressure, feeling that I don't have to please people as much, and try to be anything and everything for everybody. That's the biggest shift of the mindset – I no longer feel like I need to fit into another box, actually I can fit into my own circle."

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