

LAB



Live. Learn. Repeat as necessary.

LAB 0.5 is

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Fact:

At least 58% of magazine readers skip introductions. Read the following and find out why.*

What the heck is LAB? It's a space for learning; a space for experimentation. All kinds of things come out of actual labs— some good, some not so good. Frankenstein's monster, penicillin. Pepto Bismol, photocopiers. Microchips, synthetic fat that makes you poop your pants. Solar panels, Pop Rocks. You get the idea. It's a mixed bag. But LAB isn't so much about technology, in the way of beakers and flasks and poofs of smoke and mad scientists with crazy big hair— it's more about the spirit of creative experimentation (crazy big hair optional). Which brings us to this issue's focus:

Freelance artists. Craftsters. Photographers. Bloggers. DIY startups. Creative entrepreneurs. Media makers.

Just a few of the terms tossed around to describe a new breed who are actively creating what they want to see in the media and in the market, not content to sit still and passively consume the same old slop. If metaphors are your thing, you could call it the The Long Tail that's wagging the dog. By any name, these are people who are passionate about what they do, whether or not it pays the bills, whether or not it wins a Nobel Peace Prize. Some are just folks who have some spare genius to burn on weekends; others would maybe like to quit the Day Job and do the voodoo they do best, whether that voodoo is videoblogging, cross-stitching, or orchestrating improv flash mobs. Or maybe it's a dream of opening up a bookstore or gallery or biodiesel-fueled taco truck / mobile info-shop / wireless hot spot that donates half of its profits to the local library (tell us if you find one of these!). Or it could be a ten-year itch to put out a magazine. *ahem*

For this first issue, we've picked the brains of photographers, illustrators, writers, printers, bookbinders, and makers of all kinds of media, asking nosy questions like: where'd you get the startup funds? what resources did you use? what are the best & worst parts of being your own boss? Along the way, we discuss: DIY ethics, participatory publishing, user-generated content, authentic media, idiot bosses, nightmare clients, the *Puppies, Sunsets, and Rainbows Syndrome*, and what jazzes the funk out of funky jazzy stuff. We learned new things. And this was good. Because LAB is an experiment, a science project undertaken by Joseph Robertson (& Co) of Portland, OR. This October, Joseph quit his day job to spend more time learning about design & photography. He doesn't normally speak of himself in the third-person, so you'll find a self-interview in the back of this issue (pg 121) that will answer all those burning questions that you've got.

We've still got a lot to learn. Buckminster Fuller said it best:

You can never learn less. You can only learn more.

/Joseph Robertson

* Okay, so we made that little factoid up. But it rings with a certain truthiness, doesn't it?

© 2006 LAB & contributors | Not to be confused with LAB magazine from the UK (labmagazine.co.uk) which does not appear to have published any issues since 2003, or Cal Lab Magazine, a journal of metrology (the science of measurement) published in Vancouver, WA, or LAB (Laboratory Accreditation Bureau), which provides accreditation to laboratories across North America (based in Fort Wayne, IN), or LAB.com, a website that provides resources and info on software testing and laboratory equipment (and, by all appearances, is an online Potemkin village or sponsored directory), or Adobe Labs, a site where you'll find Adobe's latest beta software. One might start to get the idea that LAB is a popular name for things, and although we don't regret choosing it, we did run into some difficulty finding a domain name, with all permutations of LAB being taken, right down to L-A-B.com. Although we briefly considered L—A—B.com, we finally chose LAB-zine.com (note the dash), which is certainly preferable to our secondary choice, all-the-best-domain-names-have-been-squatted-so-we-give-up-already.com. All copyrights will continue to be held by those who originally held them, namely, those who originally wrote the words, drew the illustrations, took the photos, utilized the clip-art in clever ways, stitched the patterns, set the type, inked the rollers on the press, sewed the signatures, bound the books, wrote the code, posted the entry, or generally took the time to create something interesting, instead of sitting around complaining that Originality is dead. Any photos that were taken by Joseph Robertson (p49, 50, 75-77, as well as the photo on the back cover), are licensed under a Creative Commons license (specifically, the Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License), which means the photos can be used for any non-commercial purposes as long as credit is given (for more info on Creative Commons, visit creativecommons.org). Speaking of the photo on the back cover: it is a riff off of Laura Kicey's photo on the front cover; intended to be more of a design convergence than a weak imitative rip-off, although, in truth, we fear it has potential to be perceived as the latter. In general, most of the design in this issue was inspired by the folks who generously agreed to share their time in the form of interviews (and, in some cases, articles). No contributors were paid, as LAB's budget is fairly—how do you say—nonexistent? No: minimal. In a comic strip, LAB would be portrayed as wearing a barrel in place of clothing. Of course, barrels can mean many things, and it would not be unreasonable to compare LAB to, say, a barrel of fun, or, perhaps, a barrel of monkeys. LAB being what it is, a vagabond of a start-up publication about freelance artists, DIY entrepreneurs, independent business, progressive cultural entrepreneurs, and media makers of all stripes (and checked patterns), and dedicated to showcasing said folks, we were frankly quite surprised and even perplexed when so many talented people agreed to our random, bordering-on-unreasonable requests for interviews and/or contributions. We can only hope it was our roguish charm, raw genius, unfettered courage, and entrepreneurial savoir-faire. More likely it was something more closely related to Charity, or its ragamuffin cousin, Pity. LAB was originally intended to be a 30-page zine. It very quickly metastasized to a 130+ page project, partially because we got far more response to our requests for participation than we initially anticipated, and then we got too excited to separate the material into 2 or 3 issues, which might have been a smart thing to do, in retrospect, because now the printing costs have grown in direct proportion to page count (which is why 0.5 is being primarily released as a PDF). And when it comes to editing or cutting, we tend to leave things a bit on the long and shaggy side (as you may have noted); you would not want us as your hair stylist, believe you me—you'd come in with a huge head of crazy hair, we'd snip off a few stray hairs sticking out at odd angles, and then send you on your way. Of course you would not be happy; in fact, you would probably be highly vexed, and demand your money back. You would say: what, you want that I should look like an angora rabbit? [ed: for reference clarification, see narbc.org] We can only hope that putting out a (magazine is not like giving a haircut; we'd prefer to think (or at least we tell ourselves this to feel better) that You, The Reader, want something a little more big, bushy, and natural-looking. And in that way, the vast majority (versus the infinitesimal minority) of these interviews have not been edited or otherwise pruned, besides maybe snipping off an odd preposition or double space here and there. Most were performed via several rounds of email, except Ze Frank's interview, which was done via Skype, so any discrepancy we blame on the growing pains of VOIP technology. But the next issue will definitely be simpler, shorter, more concise, more focused. Less semi-colons and ellipses and dashes—more periods. And colons! Because: we will edit it with laser-like focus. Interview questions will not exceed their respective answers in length. More questions will be multiple choice, to be filled in with a No 2 pencil, and scanned in the cafeteria. In fact, each interview will be edited down to one crisp pull-quote, which will be set in 144-pt type across the spread. No more of this rambling 4-pt fine print. In fact, you'll be able to read the whole thing on your iPod while you're waiting for the next train. But for now, this is the best we can offer. File under: Material To Read While You're Waiting in the Dentist's Office, Desperately Trying to Distract Yourself. By the way, this beta issue can be acquired in digital format as a PDF at lab-zine.com, for no cost, and with the wasting of neither ink nor trees (made with recycled 1s and 0s, actually). For those who prefer reading as a more physical act—the smell of ink, the holding of the spine, the licking of the finger, the turning of the page, the placing of napkins as bookmarks—we plan on making this issue available via print-on-demand at Lulu.com. It's probably not necessary to get into which format is better, but we will briefly mention a few of the advantages of the hardcopy issue: 1) it's easier to read, 2) it's nice to be able to flip open to a page, and read at random, and 3) it's fun to mark up spelling errors with a big fat red marker, and scribble comments in the margins. Speaking of hard copy, snail mail should be sent to the following address: LAB 5035 NE 25th Ave Portland OR 97211. Vintage postcards (penned by imaginary characters) are more than welcome. Grammar mistakes, breaches of etiquette, inconsistencies in style, design crimes, incorrect attributions, improper use of em dashes—if you notice any of these, please send an electronic message to: feedback@lab-zine.com Design notes: all body text set in Myriad. And this note is best viewed at 300%. Also, we apologize for the excessive use of the plural. It's rather addictive. Kind of like having a chorus behind you, or a line of back-up singers in snappy matching outfits. I highly recommend trying it; it works wonders for self-confidence. —JR

freelance artists
photography
illustration
self-portrait



indie biz
DIY craft
startup
cultural entrepreneurs



web content
authentic media
media makers
writing



proportional length of articles, in pages

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