

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Internationally recognized designer Jeff Fisher engineers his business his own way by Marc Acito



A Food Bank for People With AIDS



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Jeff Fisher, fully dressed for his *Just Out* photo shoot



Jeff Fisher works in his underwear. No, he's not a go-go boy, he's an award-winning graphic designer whose internationally acclaimed design studio, Jeff Fisher LogoMotives, is housed on the second floor of his North Portland home. With the majority of his clients communicating with him electronically from out of state, Fisher can roll out of bed and go straight to work in his skivvies.

"I certainly don't plan on using video conferencing anytime soon," he says.

He may have to change his mind, though, given his growing popularity. In the last five years, Fisher's logo designs have garnered more than 235 awards. In addition, examples of his work are represented in more than 40 books and publications on graphic design.

Locally, his roster of queer clients reads like the index of the *Just Out Pocketbook*: Our House of Portland, Cascade Aids Project, Portland Area Business Association, Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, Love Makes a Family, Pride Northwest, Metropolitan Human Rights Center, Rob Buckmaster Fund, Rose City Softball Association...as well as numerous gay-owned businesses, such as Balloons on Broadway and Bridgetown Realty.

A founding member of PABA, Portland's unofficial "gay and lesbian chamber of commerce," the 44-year-old Fisher provides inspiration to anyone who worries you can't be out and successful in business at the same time.

"When I first came out in 1984, I lost a job with an ad agency due to the fact I was gay," he says. "At the time, the owner simply told me he was taking his business in another direction. Later I learned from former co-workers that it made the owner very uncomfortable to have an openly gay person on staff. I vowed that I would

never again allow myself to get into a similar employment situation."

Since then, Fisher has bucked conventional wisdom by focusing almost exclusively on logo design while growing his business with a fearless and tireless knack for unconventional self-promotion.

"If I don't toot my own horn, no one else will," reads one of his relentless press releases, replete with LogoMotives' toot-toot train engine logo.

"My friends call me a 'media whore,'" Fisher says, but his international recognition speaks for itself.

(Those who'd like to learn more about Fisher's innovative approach to marketing should consult *Off the Wall Marketing Ideas* by Nancy Michaels and Debbi J. Karpowicz, which features a section on Fisher.)

Yet, despite all of Fisher's mainstream success, Portland's gay community remains the cornerstone of LogoMotives' business. Nowhere is this more evident than in Fisher's long-standing relationship with Don Horn, founder and artistic director of Triangle Productions.

Since he met Horn at the benefit opening of the gay theater company's first play, Fisher has designed hundreds of pieces for Triangle Productions, including the logos for more than 50 shows. And those projects led Fisher to one of the more gratifying breakthroughs of his career.

"For many years no 'gay-identified' logo project of mine had ever won a design award," he says. "But since 1995 my logo designs for Triangle Productions have won over 60 design awards."

Fisher cites his working relationship with Horn as one of his most special.

"Don always provides me with the scripts of the shows he plans to present for the next sea-

son and allows me to just 'go for it' with the design process," says Fisher. "Not many clients give a designer complete creative freedom."

In 1996, Horn even asked Fisher to co-direct the play *Party*.

"I was turning 40 at the time," recalls Fisher, "and getting to spend every evening with seven nude men for several months was not a bad way to get through my first midlife crisis."

However, according to Fisher, the one element most responsible for the success of his business is his partner, Ed Cunningham. Much in the same way that his business has thrived by breaking the rules, so has his relationship.

"When Ed and I met," Fisher says, "it shattered the potential relationship rules I had set up for myself: No dating guys who were much younger—he was 23 years old and 10 years younger than me. No serious dating of anyone I met in a bar—I don't know where that one came from. No dating of anyone without a *real* job—Ed was still in college and working part-time."

Yet the same evening the two of them met, Fisher turned to a friend and said, "I just met the man I'm going to spend the rest of my life with."

Fisher followed his instincts with the same positive results he's had professionally—last month he and Cunningham celebrated their 10-year anniversary.

Will Rogers once said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

With the courage to lay down his own tracks, Jeff Fisher is driving LogoMotives higher and higher.

■ MARC ACITO is the creator of the comic strip "The Boys Next Door." He wrote this article in Jeff Fisher's underwear.

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