

# The wonderful design whimsy of Wonderland

 By Leigh Andrews

2 Apr 2015

Wondering why you haven't heard Wonderland's name at any local award shows (yet)? There's a perfectly good reason...

What do you expect from an agency called Wonderland? Well, to be blunt, it's wonderful. Leaving you with a real sense of wonder and goodness. I know that's vague and fuzzy, so I got Graeme Lipschitz, business development and 'The Mad Hatter of Wonderland' (yes, really), to elaborate.



Some of Wonderland's web work

"We do most of our business for good causes, so our commercial clients get the warm and fuzzies from knowing they do business with guys that are 'doing good' in the world as their prime directive."

As a result they do a lot of pro bono work for NGO- and charity-based clients, and if they had their way that would be the sole thing they do. Fortunately, they have more commercial clients who love working with them to help pay the salaries, and enable them to do the more impactful work for those clients.

So they do good to do well. But not 'just good'. In a recent [interview with Between10and5](#), the duo claim: "We always want our clients to respond with a sense of wonder, so that means good enough isn't good enough anymore. It's a case of taking what's come before and chucking that out for something that is new."

Added to this, they set my word-loving heart ablaze with love when explaining why they chose the name 'Wonderland Collective'.

[On their blog](#), Lipschitz' partner Lexi Fontein (Creative Director AKA Alice in Wonderland, as you'll come to see), explains many people ask why they chose the name "Wonderland Collective," Breaking it down further into "Why Wonderland?" "Why Collective?" "And what does that have to do with making good, quantifiable change in the world?" Fontein says these are all great questions and that the 'wonderland' part comes from the fact that "there's a whole lot of being creative over just coming out with the next website or brand or execution of an idea."



The part I like most, though? The 'Collective' part is based on the belief in Ubuntu, that "together we can be far more powerful than if we stand alone," and they go so far as to illustrate this, with a monthly collective noun illustration that's sold as a limited-edition print and as free calendar desktop wallpaper - it really is striking. [Have a look here](#).

Isn't that refreshing? And that's all it took for me to shrink down and bunny-hop along with Lipschitz on a journey of wonder through the walls of their design maze...

## ***1. Let's go back to basics and what we've already touched on: Where did Wonderland come from?***

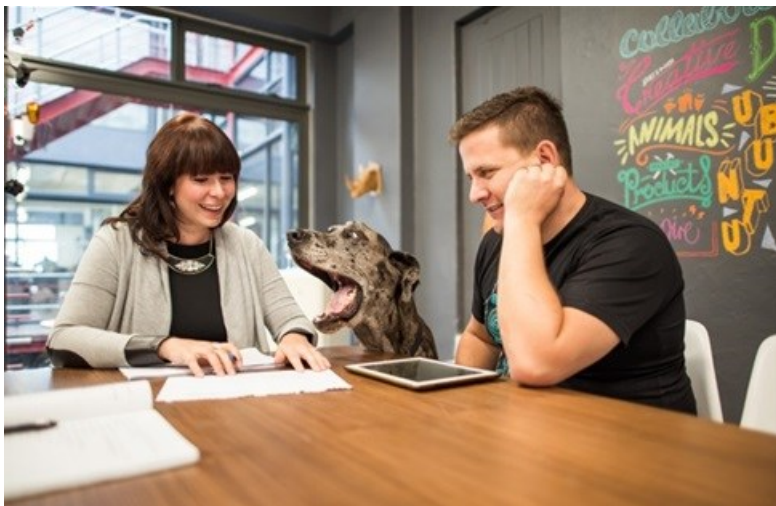
**Lipschitz:** Lexi went freelance in 2010 after working for a variety of agencies both locally and internationally. We decided during our honeymoon in Bali in 2011 that we wanted to combine our talents and work together in our own business. We hired our first designer in 2011 as the freelance work picked up; landed two big retainers at the time and moved into offices in Muizenberg Surfer's Corner in 2012. Then, when the economic decline hit and our two largest clients shut their doors, we moved back home. We built our client base again, this time with five desks, four dogs and one parrot in our master bedroom at home. We grew the studio to the point where we wanted clients to visit us in an office and moved into Woodstock Exchange in January 2013.

## ***2. Sounds like an exciting journey. Explain the agency name and how you reached your creative job titles.***

**Lipschitz:** Well, we came up with the name Wonderland on the way to a Buddhist temple - it stuck because we do many creative things with a view to not only bring the wonder back, but also in creating good, quantifiable change in the world, to make it a wonderland. In keeping with the Wonderland vibe, Lexi is Alice, the CEO and Creative Director; Graeme is the Mad Hatter in charge of Business Development; and the rest of our designers and staff have chosen other characters from the book based on what they like and their own personalities.

## ***3. Let's stick with that theme then - tell us more about your team.***

**Lipschitz:** Well, most of our talented designers are coffee snobs, ranging from Luke "The Graverobber" Wingnean, our digital Jedi who pumps out amazing website designs and illustrations, and a crazy vinyl toy collection for our soon-to-be-launching shop; to Ines "The White Rabbit" Soutschka who designed one of our most beautiful sites yet for Mullineux - launching soon; Frank "The Caterpillar" Conradie, our 3D whizz currently designing our apparel offering and developer of some of the graphic pieces for our new website; Eduan "The March Hare" Naude, our most junior designer; Candice "Queen of Hearts" Laporta, our Studio and Traffic Manager who keeps us on track; and Mark "The Gryphon" Bloomfield, our in-house front-end developer and major skillset win of 2015 as he'll help us produce amazing websites and bigger projects like our augmented reality offering. Find out [more about them here](#).



Some of the key Wonderland Collective team members

## ***4. Sounds like a diversely creative team, What's the basic work flow or creative process in such an agency?***

**Lipschitz:** Well, once we're briefed, our creative director applies her mind to it and briefs in the designer. We've found that when the creative director is briefed in, there's less room for misunderstanding what is required of the work. The work then gets done by the designer under Lexi's direction and is presented to the client. We usually do two to three rounds of reverts

on a project before it is signed off.

## ■ 5. *Good thinking. What's your year been like so far?*

**Lipschitz:** This year things have really kicked off with more international work. We have two new clients - KnowRoaming based in Canada, and Cape London Wines based in the UK. KnowRoaming especially is a massive win for us as they've outsourced a lot of their development and campaign work to us. Locally, we've been doing a lot of work for Sanlam Investments' HR function, where we produced an augmented reality experience to showcase their Employee Value Proposition. We continue to also work with smaller clients where we try and push our design work as much as we can. We also did so many cool things in 2014 that it's hard to pick one highlight. We managed to help a man swim the seven seas for the first time in modern history, sent tractors to the South Pole, launched a Bacon Pop-Up Bar and created an augmented reality project.

## ■ 6. *OK then, what's next for your agency?*

**Lipschitz:** We have a couple of own ventures in production at the moment. We are launching our own product online store in the next couple of weeks. We're designing cool products where we really get to play outside of our client work. Part of the profits of these will go towards making quantifiable change for charities.

We are also launching a trends Lookbook, which will showcase the best of the best in terms of design, both locally and internationally. We want to really push the digital publishing space with our Lookbook and are very excited about this launching!

## ■ 7. *Let's end on the topic of trends: which are the biggest to come this year?*

**Lipschitz:** Content is still king in 2015; except now it's not just great writing but how we can take great content and disseminate it effectively: we did this with the Sanlam Investments augmented reality experience by showcasing custom illustrations, videos and voiceovers, which were really well received.

The CMO is also going to become the CTO and vice versa: being tech-savvy isn't the realm of the CTO anymore, especially as people are sitting up and taking notice of awesome technology-based advertising campaigns. Your CMO is going to have to have a keen knowledge of technology to get ahead.

I agree! That's why I wrote at the start of the year that it's **Time for the company CMO to step into the digital spotlight.**



Wonderland was behind the bacon pop-up bar...

For a more in-depth look at digital trends, the Wonderland team really enjoyed consuming [this trends document](#) courtesy of

Fjord: Accenture Interactive's Design and Innovation Team.

Lastly, if you're wondering why their name hasn't popped up at all the big awards - they haven't entered into any competitions with their work as they've been super busy just actually doing it and are firm believers that "the clients we want to work with see beyond awards and rather see value in our philosophy as a company, our history with previous clients and what we want to achieve in the future."

"We don't pay much attention to this or to our competition - we'd rather just focus on our clients and our own company. With that said, we recently met with an international Loeries judge and he said our work is comparable to any other global design agency - so we'll take that as a feather not only in our cap, but the industry's as a whole. We're also super excited about the general standard of work in Cape Town - there's no shortage of great designers, and we love being a part of that!"

Wonderfully put. For more on Wonderland, visit [their website](#) and follow them [on Twitter](#).

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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