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# Freelancing for textile designers and working with a design agent

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Degree Programme in Design

Textile design

Thesis

30 November 2022

## Abstract

Author:	Bianca Byggmästar
Title:	Freelancing for textile designers and working with a design agent
Number of Pages:	48 pages + 2 appendices
Date:	30 November 2022
Degree:	Bachelor of Culture and Arts
Degree Programme:	Design
Specialisation option:	Textile Design
Instructor(s):	Tiina Paavilainen, Lecturer Tutti Paju, Senior Lecturer

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This thesis explores ways in which freelance textile designers can obtain work. The ways that are presented are independently and through an agent. The tools presented for marketing independently are a portfolio, an online presence, pitching, participating in competitions, and networking with other professionals. Agents are discussed in detail and are presented as an option for the designers that want to ease their burden of marketing.

The thesis presents three interviews with Finnish freelance designers that work independently and with agents. The discussion follows the work of the designers, their success, and their recommendations to young designers.

An agent is also interviewed, and the discussion focuses on the role of the agent in supporting its designers. Other agents are presented as examples.

The thesis also discusses a textile design case, a project done through the cooperation between a designer and an agent.

Keywords: freelance, textile design, agents

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This thesis has been checked using Turnitin Originality Check service.

## Tiivistelmä

Tekijä:	Bianca Byggmästar
Otsikko:	Freelancing for textile designers and working with a design agent
Sivumäärä:	48 sivua + 2 liitettä
Aika:	30.11.2022
Tutkinto:	Muotoilija AMK
Tutkinto-ohjelma:	Muotoilu
Pääaine:	Tekstiilisuunnittelu
Ohjaajat:	Tiina Paavilainen, Lecturer Tutti Paju, Senior Lecturer

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Tämä lopputyö tutkii tapoja, joilla freelance-tekstiilisuunnittelijat voivat löytää työtä. Lopputyössä esitetyt tavat ovat itsenäinen työn etsiminen ja agentin käyttö. Esitetyt itsenäisen markkinoinnin keinot ovat portfolio, läsnäolo verkossa, pitchaus, osallistuminen kilpailuihin sekä verkostoituminen muiden ammattilaisten kanssa. Agenttien käyttö käsitellään yksityiskohtaisesti ja esitellään vaihtoehtona muotoilijoille, jotka haluavat vähentää markkinointitaakkaansa.

Lopputyössä esitetään kolme haastattelua suomalaisten freelance-muotoilijoiden kanssa, jotka toimivat itsenäisesti ja agenttien kautta. Keskustelu seuraa muotoilijoiden työskentelyä ja menestystä sekä esittää heidän suosituksensa nuorille muotoilijoille.

Työtä varten on myös haastateltu agentti, ja sitä koskeva keskustelu keskittyy agentin rooliin muotoilijan tukemisessa. Muita agentteja esitetään esimerkkeinä.

Lopputyössä käsitellään myös esimerkkinä yksi tekstiilisuunnitteluprojekti, joka tehtiin muotoilijan ja agentin yhteistyönä.

Asiasanat: freelance, tekstiilisuunnittelu, agentit

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Opinnäytetyön alkuperä on tarkastettu Turnitin Originality Check -ohjelmalla.



Figure 1. Annala X YFD Flowers fabric, design Bianca Byggmästar

## Table of contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Background information	6
2.1 Thesis aim and methodology	8
2.2 Thesis framework	9
3. Freelancing for textile designers	10
3.1. Some things to consider when working as a freelancer	11
3.2. Portfolio and online presence	14
3.3. Finding projects and marketing	17
4. Examples of designers	21
4.1 Salla-Maaria Syvänen - freelance textile designer	22
4.2 Eveliina Netti - freelance surface designer and illustrator	24
4.3 Minni Havas - freelance textile designer and illustrator	27
5. Working with agents	30
5.1. What is a design agent	30
5.2. How agents work	31
5.3. Examples of agents	34
6. Design Case - A woven fabric collection with Young Finnish Design for Annala Oy	37
6.1. The collaboration from brief to submission	38
6.2. Collection launch and marketing	44
7. Conclusions	47
References	49
Images	51
Resources	53
Appendices	55
Interviews	55
Suomen Tekstiili ja Muoty Ry, Employer Survey results	64

## 1. Introduction

Some of us design entrepreneurs find it difficult to market ourselves, our know-how, and our work. We have little connections, no experience, and maybe even an international background that leads us to face language and cultural barriers. To many of us, our work is very personal, indeed an extension of our own personality. As a result, we can be over critical and lack a second opinion to boost our self-esteem and know what direction we should follow in developing our work. I have personally encountered many of these challenges while working as a freelancer.

This thesis is a result of my professional struggles as well as successes as a freelancer, and a positive experience in working with a design agent that led to a dream client collaboration. I have been an entrepreneur since 2013, starting out as an interior architect, and a few years ago also working as a textile and product designer. Having worked on my own for many years, I reached a point where I was able to see my strengths and limitations more clearly than when I had started out. I had happy clients and mostly enjoyed my work, but I felt somehow stuck in attracting projects that I was no longer so interested in doing. I knew I needed the courage to believe in myself and in my abilities, and I definitely wanted to grow as a designer. I needed help with marketing my skills and more time to focus on creating, and I lacked validation and support from other professional designers. My first solution was to go back to university and to study textile design, something I had discovered as an interest already during my interior architecture studies, but while studying gave me some of the new skills I had hoped for, it felt like there was more that I personally still needed to be more successful with my business. When we discussed in one of our university courses that designers have the possibility to work with agents, I realised that finding an agent made sense in my case, as I needed help with promoting my work in order to reach the clients I was hoping for.

I started working with my current agent about a year ago and I have had a lot of positive outcomes. Although I have found myself working harder than ever before, I reap the benefits of being part of a team of creatives that speak my design language and inspire me, and I have access to possibilities and clients I would have never been able to approach on my own. Working for my agent is not everything that I do, but it is an important source for projects and opportunities that I can recommend to other designers.

## 2. Background information

Many designers are unprepared to face the business world as freelancers after graduation for different reasons, one of them being that finding enough work to

sustain themselves is difficult. Some blame their universities for not providing them with the tools to find employment, but the truth is that design as a profession is rather demanding. A designer should be skilled in using many software programs and be acquainted with different manufacturing techniques. Moreover, a designer must know how to visually express their ideas and to create safe, functional, and usable objects that are marketable and respond to the trends of the times. The list of skills needed on the market is long, and many of these skills need many years of refinement. Last on the list is usually marketing, simply because it is the least creative of them all. Nevertheless, finding clients and even a job requires good marketing skills and an eye for opportunities, which are very difficult concepts to grasp by many creatives, including myself.

While designers are still employed by many companies, permanent salary work in some fields is rare in Finland, and many recent design graduates must search for their own opportunities and work as freelancers.<sup>1</sup> Granted they are prepared with a good body of work completed during their university studies and have a portfolio, there are many challenges that await young designers when starting out as freelancers. Some of these challenges are that they may have little to no recommendations, they most likely have not sold any work, and they have never put into practice their basic knowledge in marketing their ideas and skills to potential clients. All these things are crucial in order to find client work, so how is this to be done? I am writing this thesis to offer some solutions that work for others and have worked for me.

One of the most important things I have realised as an entrepreneur in the design field, is the need for constant improvement. This is precisely the reason why I decided to go back to university and refine my skills. Finland is very generous in this respect, and higher education is of good quality and free of charge. Although I have been working part time during my studies at Metropolia, I managed to keep up with my studies at a relatively good pace given my previous work experience as an interior architect; I was used to the workload and the stress, and I was already effective at completing assignments and doing creative work. I already knew how to use the Adobe programs and had extensive experience with drawing and painting already from my childhood, having attended an art school since I was 10 years old. My middle school and high school education was in the field of fine arts and design, and my university degrees focused mostly on design - a Bachelor's degree in interior architecture completed in the US, and a Master's degree in sustainable design from Aalto University in Finland. However, although I already had a lot of experience as a designer before starting my studies in textile design at Metropolia, there were things I did not know, which my studies at a technical university completed.

What I personally appreciate at Metropolia is first and foremost the practical approach to studies. The courses are fast paced, which is something that reflects the reality of working as a designer and obliges the students to think fast and

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<sup>1</sup> Ilonen 2021a

develop their creativity. There is a lot of structure to the studies, which can be overwhelming at times, but being able to keep a schedule is necessary when doing client work and one needs to learn how to be effective. These were skills that I already had from my interior architecture studies, which were rather rigid, but I attended a liberal arts university in the US, which meant that I had a lot of theoretical classes at the same time, such as language and literature, philosophy, history, and science. During my textile design studies I appreciated the fact that I could focus solely on design projects, improving my knowledge about materials, and my technical skills. I took every opportunity and new project to create interesting work for my portfolio, something I personally needed to improve.

In practice, I studied advanced weaving and knitting, and pattern making to a level that enabled me to create ready products. During our weaving and knitting classes, we travelled to factories and had our fabrics and products woven and knitted on the same machines that produce textiles for the Finnish fashion and lifestyle brands. I was able to establish contacts and later make my own products in one of these factories, which I am selling independently to my clients and at markets. Although these courses were rather short and intense, I had enough time to learn the essentials and to later improve my skills through personal projects.

At Metropolia was also where I learned how to improve my website and my personal image as a designer, and how to present my work in a more successful manner. We had two classes that focused specifically on preparing oneself for the job market, a class in Photography and Portfolio, and a more advanced class, Professional Portfolio. While I personally had a lot of materials ready for my business, I greatly improved my image and managed to attract more clients and projects because of the things I learned in these classes. The teachers taught how to be more successful in making client tailored portfolios, and how to make an interesting CV. I improved my website and my Instagram profile, gathering more interest for my work. It was here that I also learned about agents, and when the opportunity arose, I was able to make a sufficiently good portfolio to secure a place in the Young Finnish Design agency. During my studies, I gained a lot of knowledge about how to work in the textile design field and how I can achieve my goals, which is what I am ultimately presenting in this thesis.

## 2.1 Thesis aim and methodology

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the current nature of freelance work independently and through an agent, as well as strategies for finding clients as a freelance textile designer. The information is presented through the experience of three Finnish freelance textile designers, a discussion about agents in Scandinavia and what they can offer designers, and my own experience in working with an agent. The design case presented in this work serves as an example of a successful collaboration with an agent, a textile design project for Annala Oy - the only Finnish producer of contract upholstery fabrics. Given the fact that I live and

work in Finland, the targeted audience of this thesis is mainly Finnish emerging designers and students of design, however, much of the information in this thesis is relevant to other textile designers and even to designers from other fields that want to work with agents and to freelance.

In this thesis, I use qualitative methods for gathering the information needed for argumentation, such as literature reviews from industry promoters, and interviews with freelance designers and agents. The design industry promoters in Finland use quantitative resources to gather their statistics about the design labour market, and these resources have served as corner stones in guiding the research process. Where relevant information has not been available from Finnish sources, I use international literature.

## 2.2 Thesis framework

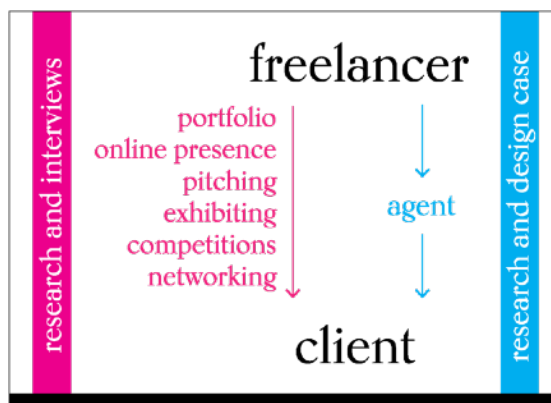


Figure 2. Thesis framework

This thesis presents two ways in which freelancers can obtain client work, which basically build its framework (Figure 2). The first way of obtaining client work is independently, which entails methods for marketing such as building a portfolio and an online presence, as well as pitching, exhibiting, participating in competitions, and networking through professional organisations. The strategy for argumentation used here is through research, or literature reviews, and interviews with designers that freelance. The second way of obtaining client work that is presented is through design agents, that relieve much of the burden of marketing from their designers and provide them with opportunities. The argumentation has been achieved mainly through research, or literature review, and by presenting a design case.

The thesis is divided in two parts: the first part addresses working as a freelance designer independently and with an agent, and the second part presents a textile design case, a project I completed through the Young Finnish Design agency for Annala Oy.

In more detail, in the first part of the thesis, I discuss some things to consider when working as a freelance textile designer, and the marketing work that leads to finding clients. Many designers work with agents to aid them in promoting and selling their work, so agents are discussed in detail. This part of the thesis presents interviews with Finnish freelance textile designers and an agent that share their experience and expertise.

In the second part, I discuss my project for Annala, and my experience in working as a designer with the Young Finnish Design agency. My collection for Annala is presented from brief to submission, as well as from its launch to marketing.

This thesis has been commissioned and supervised by the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland.

### 3. Freelancing for textile designers

This thesis defines “freelancer” as a self-employed individual working on a contract or project basis. Thus, a freelancer is an entrepreneur, generally not the employee of another person or entity, and is not subject to the supervision and direction of an employer. It is possible, however, to work as a freelancer also on short term employment contracts. Freelance work typically means having several shorter contracts or commissions during a year, sometimes simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> Most designers that work as freelancers in Finland are sole traders, but it is possible to work as a freelancer without a business identity number (*y-tunnus* in Finnish) or trade name (*toiminimi* in Finnish) or to use one of several different company formats, such as a limited liability company (*osakeyhtiö* in Finnish).<sup>3</sup> A common practice of freelancing without a trade name is using third party companies for invoicing purposes (*kevytyrittäjyys* in Finnish). There are tens of such service providers available in Finland alone (e.g., Eazy Work, Laskuttamo, Ukko) offering their invoicing services for fees ranging from 2 to 7 percent or at fixed rates, most with insurance packages included.<sup>4</sup> Other ways of working as a freelancer in Finland are through using a freelance tax card, which can be obtained from the tax authorities, or through a collective. The most advantageous way of working freelance is something that must be investigated in every case. Depending on the format chosen and the volume of sales, there are legal requirements for business registration, accounting, tax and pension insurance, which should be checked with the appropriate authorities.

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<sup>2</sup> Määttä & Hakkarainen 2022

<sup>3</sup> Toivio 2021

<sup>4</sup> Kevytyrittäjäksi.com 2022

### 3.1. Some things to consider when working as a freelancer

The trend of working with freelance designers rather than employees started in Finland already in the 90's, when many companies moved their production overseas, or closed their factories altogether and started buying services from abroad for their textile production.<sup>5</sup> The trend has continued over the years,<sup>6</sup> and the effects on the job market are evident from a recent employer survey<sup>7</sup> run by the Finnish Textile and Fashion Organisation, Suomen Tekstiili ja Muoti Ry,<sup>8</sup> that has gathered information about the skills member companies need of their employees. If the year 2020 saw 15 percent of member companies expressing a need to invest in hiring designers over the coming five-year period, this number had already decreased to 4 percent in 2022. Even the need for hiring textile material specialists over the coming five-year period had decreased from 30 percent in 2020, to 20 percent in 2022. What has grown, however, is the need for know-how in product development, sewing, and sales. While many designers choose to work with sales, and some even with sewing, it is promising to see that skills in product development are needed, so for those that seek full time employment or even for freelance designers that have these skills, this information can serve as a lead.

Although in certain fields, such as interior architecture and service design, there are job opportunities advertised during the calendar year, in many design fields, publicly announced openings are almost non-existent.<sup>9</sup> This is certainly the case with textile design, where even creative director roles are given to freelancers and are sometimes filled only for the duration of the design and the release of one collection.<sup>10</sup>

Textile design is a relatively versatile field of design, that could potentially offer a diverse range of possibilities for employment, but job opportunities are not necessarily advertised or easy to find. For example, textile designers can work with woven, knitted, or printed textiles, fashion and interiors, or can otherwise create surface patterns and illustrations for a variety of objects and even building murals. The recent developments in yarn production and textile materials in Finland (see Figure 3), driven by the EU Commission's vision for a circular economy,<sup>11</sup> have also created new possibilities for employment, with the promise

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<sup>5</sup> Tanninen 2014, 24

<sup>6</sup> Hoisko 2020, 2

<sup>7</sup> Survey result in resources on page xx

<sup>8</sup> Suomen Tekstiili ja Muoti Ry website: <https://www.stjm.fi>

<sup>9</sup> Ilonen 2021

<sup>10</sup> Syvänen, interview 07.10.2022

<sup>11</sup> The EU Commission

of further growth and more openings in the near future.<sup>12</sup> Many textile designers also teach or work with art, while others work with sales. However, at least in Finland, the reality is that textile designers compete with fashion, industrial, interior and graphic designers, as well as visual artists and amateurs that all pitch their designs to the same companies. So, while work with a more technical or commercial aspect might be more readily available, particularly design roles are reserved for freelancers and entrepreneurs that have the know-how in marketing their services to companies, or otherwise work with agents that do the marketing for them.



Figure 3. The Marimekko X Spinnova collection 2022

Working as a freelancer is a must for many, and a personal choice for others, but while there are many benefits, there are also challenges to working independently. Some designers appreciate the freedom of managing their own business and fulfilling tasks that are otherwise not part of the responsibilities of an employee, and some even earn more as freelancers.<sup>13</sup> However, many suffer from isolation and yearn for the support of peers, which is evident from the most recent survey of the working life in Finland for designers,<sup>14</sup> published by Ornamo, The Finnish Designer's Organisation. The respondents included designers from different fields and made a broad analysis of the situation of freelancers and entrepreneurs in Finland. According to the survey, there are also other matters for concern, such as low income and a lack of projects for many designers; 24 percent of designers had a turnover of less than 15 000 euro, while 36 percent had a turnover between

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<sup>12</sup> Ruokamo 2022

<sup>13</sup> Netti, interview 13.10.2022

<sup>14</sup> Lith 2022, 36-43

15 000- and 49 999-euro, 50 000 euro being considered the required level for providing a sufficient living for one person. Out of the respondents, 41 percent had less than 10 projects annually, and 37 percent had between 10 and 29 projects per year. This information gives a realistic view of the working conditions and the financial struggles that many design freelancers encounter, but it should not serve as discouragement for those that are motivated and ready to work hard for their success, because help is available, and many manage despite the bumps along the road.

It is important to understand that to work as a freelancer means in essence to run a business, with all that it entails. Many designers are “excellent at doing creative work, but they lack business skills,”<sup>15</sup> so it is worth exploring the resources available through Ornamo and other organisations that support designers in Finland. To give an example of help that is available, in response to the challenges design businesses face in Finland because of the recent pandemic, Ornamo<sup>16</sup> has participated in the organisation of a program called the Eevi-program,<sup>17</sup> that educates entrepreneurs from the creative fields on strategies to run their businesses more effectively. Other key participants in the development of the program are The Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and Raitala Music Oy. The Eevi-program aims to prepare creatives to deal with the different challenges associated with activities in the creative business world, and to become financially independent. Participation is free of charge and available to interested creatives from the Uusimaa region. The program offers mentoring sessions, as well as group meetings where the participants can give feedback to each other on their plans for growth and development. This is just an example of a program that is specifically geared at helping creatives, although not limited to design, but there are other specific resources that Ornamo can help designers with. These include legal advice, intellectual property rights and contracts, as well as portfolio and marketing advice. Given the statistically difficult situation many creative entrepreneurs find themselves in, such services are much needed to keep the know-how alive and flourishing.

Some resources for freelancers are given in the following sections of this work, where I discuss a few ways of attracting clients, I interview three incredible young designers that are managing well their creative businesses, and I discuss agents and the support they can offer. Interestingly, all the designers interviewed for this thesis are very well educated in the field and have at least two well-defined specialisations that support them in finding projects. Additionally, they all work with agents to assist them with contracts and to market their work. The information that I provide in these sections has run through the lenses of my understanding and experience working as a freelancer, much of which has been confirmed through the discussions I have had with the interviewees. The

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<sup>15</sup> Arbel & Aroian 2020

<sup>16</sup> Ilonen 2021b

<sup>17</sup> Eevi website: <https://www.luovatverkostot.fi>

following sections, however, do not address all the necessary aspects of running a freelance business, such as the legal and financial requirements, because I lack the expertise and I am myself a receiver of support in this respect. As a result, the focus is on the visual side of design work, which is the driving force of a creative enterprise.

For those interested in a more descriptive approach about the personal qualities needed on the job market when working as a freelancer, during my research I found the work of Heli Hoisko,<sup>18</sup> freelance fashion designer, that I can recommend. Heli wrote her thesis about working as a freelancer in the textile and fashion industry in Finland. She wrote from her own perspective as a former employee of 24 years with a Finnish fashion brand that moved its operations overseas. Heli made some very good points in her work about the practical efforts that go into preparing oneself for the challenges of a freelance career and about adapting one's skills to today's working environment.

### 3.2. Portfolio and online presence

*Think of yourself as the curator of your own digital gallery. You are the creative mind after all, with an eye for design and all things beautiful. Show it!*<sup>19</sup>  
- The Central Illustration Agency

One thing that is evident when observing successful designers, is that they are very good at what they do, and that they communicate their skills in a professional way. Most are active on Instagram and on other social platforms, they have very well-designed websites and a LinkedIn profile to show the extent of their network, and they visually know how to display their skills. Also working in their favour is often a long list of clients and amazing product photography of completed projects and collaborations that date years back. But however good it all looks now, they all started simple, most likely with school projects, and gradually polished their image over the years.

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<sup>18</sup> Hoisko 2020

<sup>19</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022a

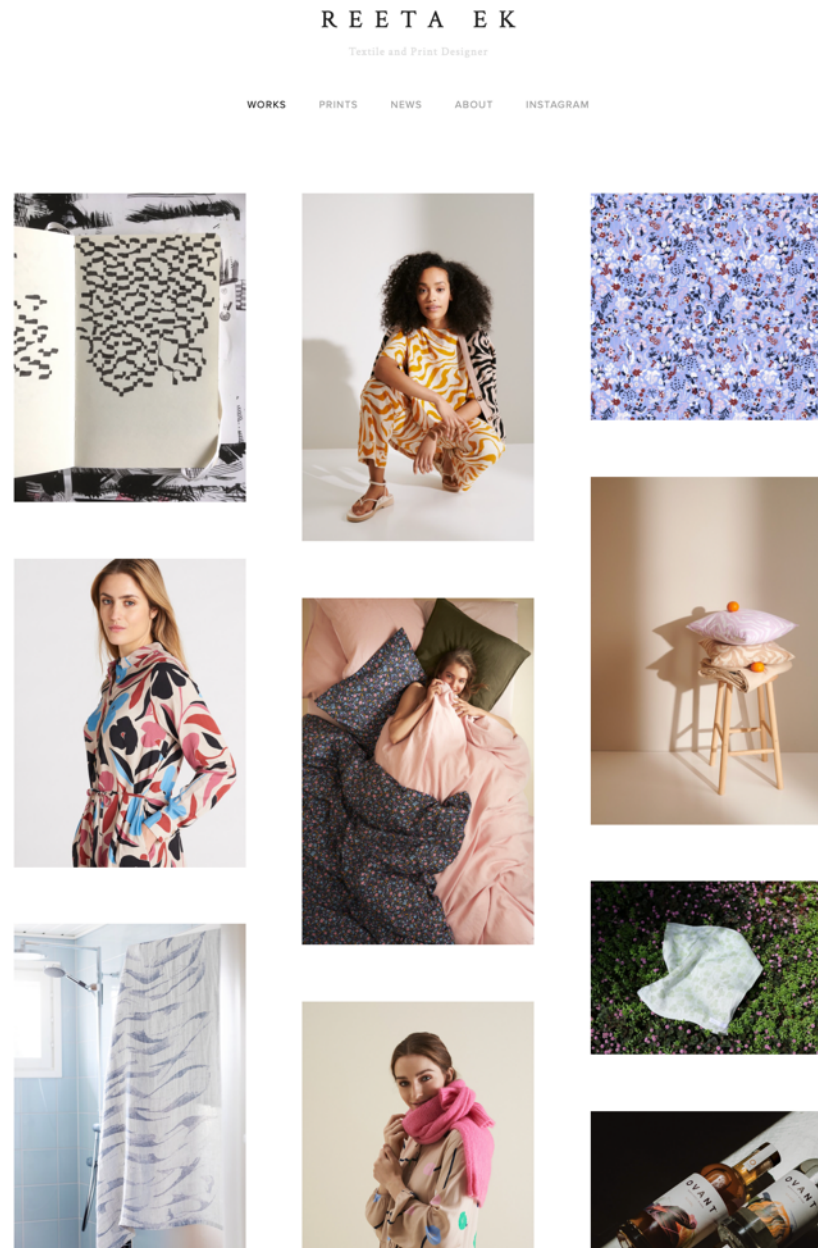


Figure 4. The website layout of Finnish pattern designer Reeta Ek

Some of the first things that most designers will do to build their public image are a logo and a website or online portfolio to showcase their work. A website is someone's personal corner of the internet, a page that can be customised, and that reflects the personality and the level of professionalism of its owner. Visually, a website should be designed in a way that attracts interest and encourages its visitors to explore the content and to return (see an example in Figure 4). The same is true for online portfolios, although platforms have restrictions for how work can be presented. A good basis for building a beautiful personal website or an online portfolio can start from one's own experience with the internet. "It is said that it takes only 1/10th of a second for us to form a first impression about a person. Websites are no different. Online, it takes around 50 milliseconds for

visitors to form an opinion about your website that determines whether they'll stay or leave."<sup>20</sup> How we personally interact with websites can be a good start for designing our own. A question to ask ourselves when building an online presence is how we want to be seen when professionals look us up.<sup>21</sup>

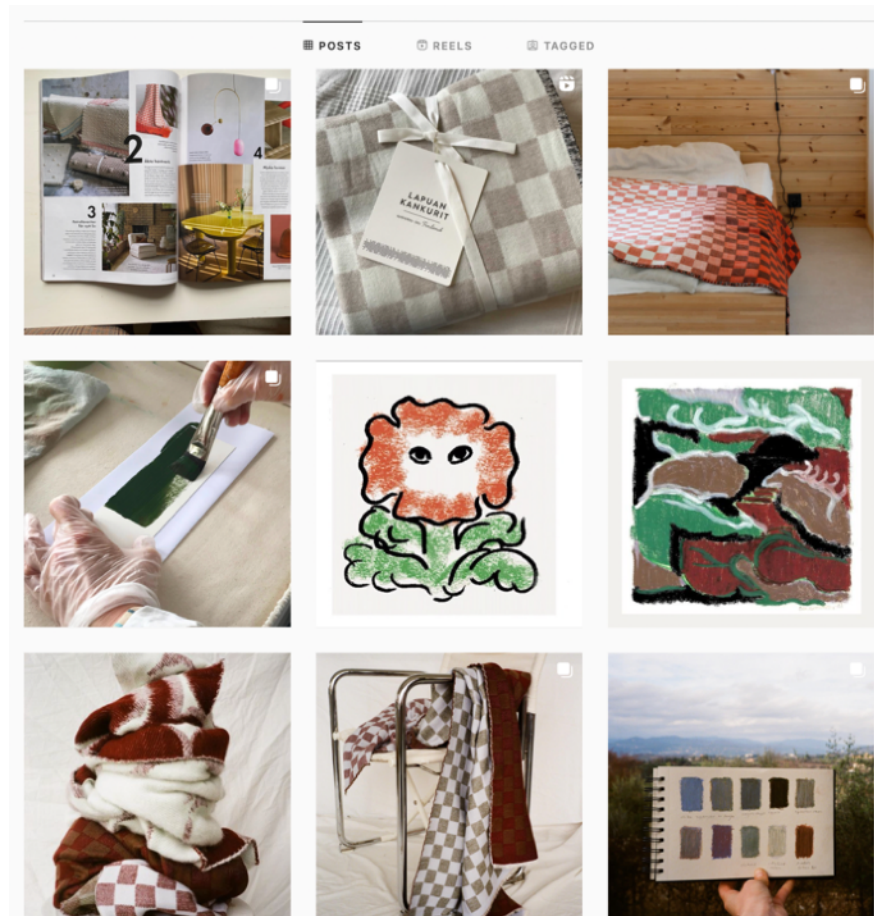


Figure 5. The Instagram feed of Finnish textile designer Ida Korsström

But while a personal logo and a website are essential tools, a social media presence has become a must for self-promotion, key in showcasing new work, and essential in becoming part of the design community. When building a personal page on Instagram (see an example in Figure 5), some things to consider are an audience and personal goals. Instead of searching for likes and followers, it is recommended to define a good strategy for posting and to think like a marketer.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Laja 2022

<sup>21</sup> Making the Market 2020, 8

<sup>22</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022a

Instagram can be a pocket-size portfolio or a platform for artistic processes. Once you find your own style of public posting, make content production an integral part of your weekly work.<sup>23</sup>

A well-managed Instagram page will also be a place for posting regularly, preferably according to a schedule, to enable a constant interaction with the audience. “Social media can be more important than a website,”<sup>24</sup> says Milla Vaahtera, one of the founders of the UU market, because it has become more than a publishing arena - it is a gathering place for millions of people that are in search of visual information, and a place for recruitment.

Not to be neglected, is the portfolio as a digital file, which can be sent through e-mail for marketing purposes and for job applications. Together with a CV, a portfolio is an important document that can be printed out and saved for references by clients and employers. More detailed guides for building a portfolio can be found from Ornamo<sup>25</sup> and TEK,<sup>26</sup> but the fundamentals are to create a consistent visual style that can differentiate from the work of others, and to relate all the information in a clear and legible manner. The purpose of a portfolio is to present projects, whether school or client work, that the designer has been involved in to date. The content of a portfolio should be tailored to the particular client or employer in question and should have the same aesthetic as other documents submitted. Preferably a small .pdf file, a portfolio should be about 15 to 20 pages, in the format of an A4 or A3 document that can be easily printed if necessary.

### 3.3. Finding projects and marketing

Developing skills as a designer, at its best, should be accomplished through persistent hard work and valuable feedback. While students have access to the feedback of their university teachers and peers during their studies, that ends with graduation and navigating the market for projects becomes a greater challenge. For entrepreneurs and freelancers, continuous development can only come through client work, and it is precisely finding the client work that is the difficult part, especially for emerging designers.

Complex tasks for every designer, finding clients and defining a personal marketing strategy go hand in hand. Having a good website and an organised social media platform to showcase new work and recent activity are essential marketing tools on the job market today. Some designers use paid advertising as part of their marketing strategy, in addition to contacting specific companies with

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<sup>23</sup> Making the Market 2020, 8

<sup>24</sup> Making the Market 2020, 4

<sup>25</sup> Ilonen 2021c

<sup>26</sup> Jokinen 2021

email campaigns and expressions of interest. Reaching the right audience is, however, not easy in a digital environment with a flooded market of freely available advertising platforms. One's work should have "a unique quality that creates a clear point of difference"<sup>27</sup> to gather interest, and submittals should be tailored to the aesthetic of the specific companies targeted.

All designers must pitch their work to companies at some point of their career, even if they are very experienced. Pitching, or sending offers, has become part of the way of doing business. This should be done, however, in a wise way. Sending mass messages to companies is not recommended, but e-mails should be well written, and the work submitted, usually a CV and a portfolio, should aim at addressing the needs each specific company might have.<sup>28</sup> As a result, one should understand what clients look for and have a good overview of what is happening in the industry. To someone specialised in bedlinen, one would not send a fashion portfolio, for example. Something to expect when doing this kind of marketing, is that e-mails might be left unanswered; this is very common and is just the reality of work life. Companies have their inboxes flooded with e-mails and offers every day. So, standing out from the crowd is key; what interests someone can be your services and who you are, and how you present yourself - "being an artist and making beautiful pictures is only 50% of the job."<sup>29</sup>

In a recent Ornamo publication, "Making the Market," internationally acclaimed Finnish designer Eero Aarnio gave advice to young designers, providing the example of his own career. Eero pitches his designs to companies even though he often receives inquiries for collaborations.

But first you need a piece of work or a product that is both unique and interesting. I like to approach people directly, either by phone or by mail. It doesn't matter whether you have a photo, a sketch or a prototype at hand. What matters is that you take the initiative and have an interesting idea backing the product up, and you have faith in it yourself.<sup>30</sup>

If the company is interested, they will contact you and express an interest to collaborate.

The next part is, of course, the negotiation, which Eero recommends should start already in the beginning of a collaboration.

I'm very intuitive in my artistic work, but when it comes to contracts, I'm quite pragmatic. At the beginning of negotiations, I present my

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<sup>27</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022b

<sup>28</sup> Young Finnish Design Connexion-service

<sup>29</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022a

<sup>30</sup> Making the Market 2020, 11

tentative product concept and explain my proposal for licensing, royalties and payment schedules,<sup>31</sup> Eero says.

Negotiating is rather daunting at first, but I can share from my own experience that it becomes easier with every new project. When I started as a freelancer I asked for the assistance of peers, and even that of my clients in pricing my work—there is no shame in being a beginner and clients are aware of your novice status when they agree to work with you. It is impossible to altogether avoid being taken advantage of; it happens to everyone at some point but learning from it and moving on with more wisdom is all one can do.

Just as important as using online tools in finding projects, is to become a part of the local and possibly the international design community where one can be discovered.<sup>32</sup> There are different ways in which this can be accomplished, the most obvious being exhibiting at fairs and galleries, gathering media attention and being published. The first chances of exhibiting would ideally start already during university studies and should continue throughout one's career. Many successful Finnish designers, for example, have exhibited at The Interior, Design and Furniture Fair Habitare<sup>33</sup> individually, or as part of the Protoshop<sup>34</sup> and Talenshop<sup>35</sup> exhibitions. These exhibition spaces are given to designers free of charge and are very much sought for. They have also gathered a lot of attention from the international media in recent years, and although much of what is exhibited is furniture and industrial design, textile designers have been given a fair amount of space during each show. While Habitare is very popular in Finland and showcases mostly Finnish design, another much appreciated venue for exhibiting in Scandinavia is the Stockholm Furniture and Light Fair<sup>36</sup> and its Greenhouse area, where new designers and design schools from all over the world can compete to exhibit. Additionally, there are also galleries that exhibit and sell the work of established and emerging designers, the most celebrated in Finland being Lokal<sup>37</sup> and the UU Market.<sup>38</sup> Exhibiting is a great opportunity to make new contacts and to get an overview of what is happening on the design scene.

In addition to the local exhibition fairs, textile designers can also participate in international trade shows, where clients attend specifically with the intention of buying designs. Some of the trade shows that have been popular with Finnish

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<sup>31</sup> Making the Market 2020, 11

<sup>32</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022b

<sup>33</sup> Habitare website: <https://habitare.messukeskus.com/?lang=en>

<sup>34</sup> Protoshop website: <https://www.imudesign.org/protoshop/>

<sup>35</sup> Talenshop website: [https://www.imudesign.org/protoshop/2022\\_fi/2022-talenshop/](https://www.imudesign.org/protoshop/2022_fi/2022-talenshop/)

<sup>36</sup> Stockholm Furniture and Light fair website: <https://www.stockholmfurniturefair.se/en>

<sup>37</sup> Lokal website: <https://lokalhelsinki.com/fi/etusivu/>

<sup>38</sup> UU market website: <https://uumarket.fi>

designers and agencies are Heimtextil<sup>39</sup> in Frankfurt, Germany, the Premiere Vision<sup>40</sup> show in Paris, France, and the Evolution Amsterdam<sup>41</sup> show in The Netherlands. Participating at the fairs is expensive for designers, but they are means for selling work internationally and even locally. Fairs are exceptional platforms for networking, selling work directly to clients, and becoming acquainted with the newest materials and trends in the textiles field.



Figure 6. Maija Louekari Hetkiä print, winner in the Marimekko competition, 2003



Figure 7. Milla Vaahtera, exhibition at the Finnish Design Museum, open call competition win, 2018

Participating in design competitions is another great way to grow professionally and to learn how to develop new ideas quickly. They are an important part of working in the design field and offer emerging designers an opportunity to show their mastery and land their first client jobs. The work submitted is anonymous and what the client sees is the project. While a lot of experience helps in producing a good submission, a good idea will speak for itself despite the lack of experience of the submitter. Many designers have seen their careers launch after winning an important competition, Eero Aarnio,<sup>42</sup> Milla Vaahtera<sup>43</sup> (Figure 7), and Maija Louekari<sup>44</sup> (Figure 6) to name a few.

Being informed of the resources available through the design organisations and industry promoters in Finland is also necessary in keeping up with the opportunities for exhibiting and networking. Finland has different professional organisations that designers can join and stay informed about the local

<sup>39</sup> Heimtextil website: <https://heimtextil.messefrankfurt.com/frankfurt/en.html>

<sup>40</sup> Premiere Vision website: <https://www.premierevision.com/en/?>

<sup>41</sup> Evolution Amsterdam website: <https://evolutionfair.com>

<sup>42</sup> Making the Market 2020, 11

<sup>43</sup> Making the Market 2020, 6

<sup>44</sup> Marimekko Maripedia

developments in their field. The organisations that are the most relevant to textile designers are Ornamo, the oldest community for designers in Finland, with a history dating to 1911, and Texo,<sup>45</sup> the Finnish organisation for textile artists and designers. Although these organisations have paid memberships, the services they provide are valuable to the industry and worth the investment; a way to first get acquainted with them is through student memberships.

#### 4. Examples of designers

When working as a freelance designer, finding clients and projects is perhaps the most difficult task, but it is doable and the many designers that work as freelancers in Finland alone are very good examples to learn from. I personally follow my favourite designers and find a lot of inspiration and encouragement when I see them succeed. Following others should not be a means for comparison, envy, or copy, but a way to keep up with what is going on in the industry in a constructive way, and to find leads for personal development. As an example, a strategy used in the Professional Portfolio class at Metropolia, is to search and analyse examples of Instagram pages and websites of designers that the students like. Some of the things to consider are how the designers present themselves to their audience, how they talk about their work, where they exhibit, and of course, what companies they collaborate with. I personally think that learning from others that are successful at what they do is one of the best ways to learn, keeping in mind that most of them have worked for many years and that they all started with little to begin with.

I am very pleased to present three examples of designers in this section, that have launched their careers in different ways. They come with different backgrounds and have very different styles, yet each of them has carved a personal path towards success. Some have worked as entrepreneurs and employees before working as freelancers, and all of them work with agents to a certain degree. What is especially encouraging from their experiences is that they have all managed to employ themselves full-time and to provide for themselves through their design work. Some of them have had challenges in their careers such as burnout and professional failures, but they have managed to overcome their challenges and to learn from their experiences. What all of them have in common is impeccable professionalism and a clear understanding of their strengths and identity as designers.

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<sup>45</sup> Texo website: <https://tekstiilitaiteilijattexo.fi>

#### 4.1 Salla-Maaria Syvänen<sup>46</sup> - freelance textile designer

Salla-Maaria Syvänen is a Finnish freelance designer that mostly works independently, consulting companies in print and fashion design, creative and art direction, product and textile production, as well as trend and future forecasting. Salla can do everything, as she mentions herself on her website. Her career has been rather versatile since she holds two Bachelor's Degrees, one degree in fashion design, and another degree in fashion engineering, coupled with a Master's Degree in textiles and fashion. Salla is a designer with a lot of education and expertise, something that has helped her reach clients in ways that other designers cannot. She has the technical skills needed in product development in addition to design, and a good understanding of production processes.



Figure 8. Studio Pulla lookbook, 2017

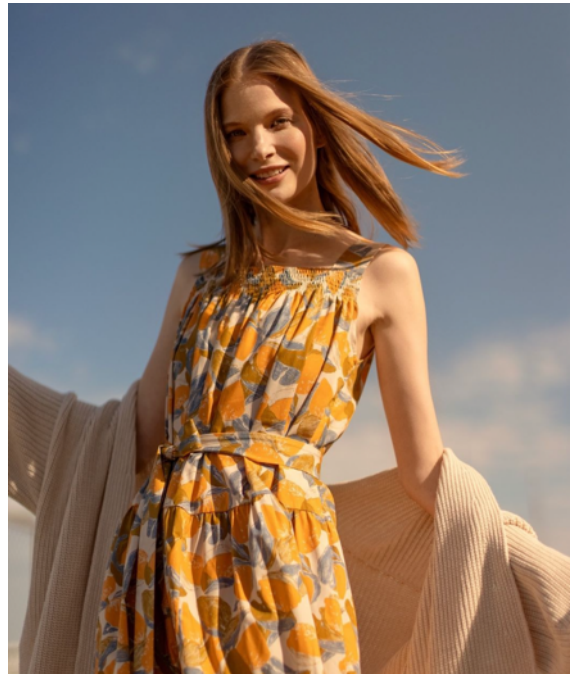


Figure 9. Salla-Maaria Syvänen for Voglia, 2022

During her career, Salla has worked as an employee for companies such as Rovio Entertainment Ltd. and Microsoft Mobile Oy, and together with designer Elina Peippo she founded Studio Pulla (Figure 8), a surface pattern design studio that operated for a few years and produced work for Finnish companies such as Samuji, Finlayson, and Vimma, to name a few.<sup>47</sup> In 2016, Studio Pulla was one of

<sup>46</sup> Salla-Maaria Syvänen website: <https://www.sallamaariasyvanen.com/>;  
Instagram: @syvanen\_studio

<sup>47</sup> Salla-Maaria Syvänen LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sallamaariasyvanen/?originalSubdomain=fi>

the exhibitors at the Protoshop exhibition of the Habitare fair (Figure 10),<sup>48</sup> and the duo has also exhibited in Paris at the Premiere Vision Trade Show.<sup>49</sup> For the past six years, Salla has been working freelance as a sole trader and with an agent for the Asian market and has collaborated with different fashion and interior brands in a variety of design tasks.

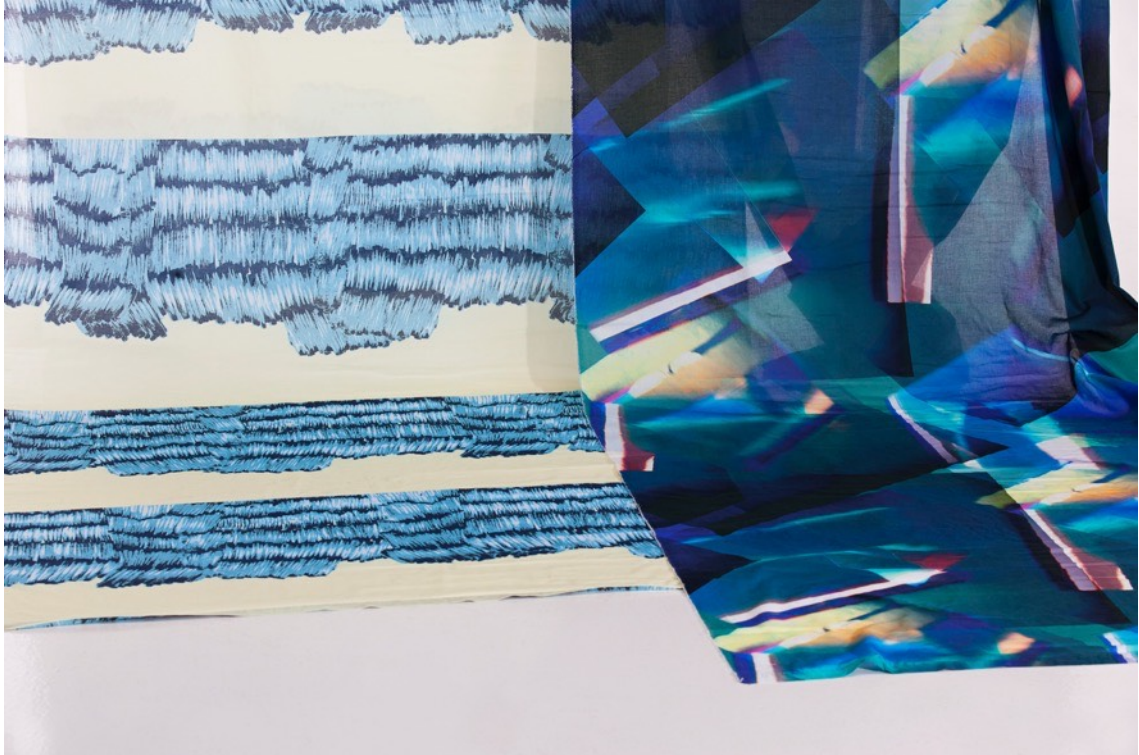


Figure 10. Studio Pulla at the Protoshop exhibition in 2016

It was very refreshing to talk to Salla about her work and to learn more about her as a designer. In our interview,<sup>50</sup> Salla talked openly about her experience as creative director for the Finnish fashion brand Voglia (Figure 9), how she applied for the job, and what her responsibilities were during her time with the company. She mentioned that in her opinion, companies are not only interested in the experience a designer has, but first and foremost want to see the designer's potential, or "handwriting," as she called it, and if they are a fit for the company. I think this is very important for emerging designers to know because it is easy to fear approaching potential clients due to a lack of experience. She also talked about how every working day as a freelancer is very different, and the tasks she works on vary greatly from project to project. While she mainly focuses on designing, her tasks vary from conceptualising and searching for inspiration, to creating patterns and production work sheets, and to communicating with clients

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<sup>48</sup> Protoshop 2016

<sup>49</sup> Studio Pulla 2017

<sup>50</sup> Syvänen, interview 07.10.2022

and manufacturers (Figure 11). Currently, Salla is working for three textile and clothing companies for longer commissions, and she is continually updating her collection of prints that she sells to several companies independently, and through her agent for the Asian market.



Figure 11. Salla-Maaria Syvänen for the Malva museum in Lahti, 2022

To conclude our interview, I asked Salla if she had any advice for young designers, and her recommendation is that designers should work at continually improving their skills in order to create beautiful designs in good repeats. This is a very important aspect to remember, since the repeat is essentially what makes a pattern sell; clients like to see patterns that sit well on their products. Salla also wants designers to be more gentle to themselves and understand that they cannot produce brilliant work all the time. Some days are less productive, and the failures should be taken with humour. She thinks everyone will flourish when they invest time in themselves and give time to their craft.

#### 4.2 Eveliina Netti<sup>51</sup> - freelance surface designer and illustrator

Eveliina Netti is a very talented young Finnish surface designer and illustrator that has worked as an in-house designer with Vallila Interior, and since 2019 as a freelancer. She agreed to be interviewed for this thesis although on maternity leave, and her contribution is very valuable. Eveliina holds a Bachelor's Degree in textile design and a Master's Degree with a focus on illustration, and in addition

<sup>51</sup> Eveliina Netti website: <https://www.eveliinanetti.com>; Instagram profile: @eveliinanetti

to her studies in Finland, she has also studied abroad. Eveliina worked as pattern designer and collection coordinator at Vallila (Figure 12) but wanted to gain a broader experience from the industry, which is why she wanted to freelance. Despite starting on her own during the corona pandemic, Eveliina has managed to fully employ herself through her business and to earn more than when she was working as an employee. She credits her success to the fact that she is specialised both in surface design and in illustration (Figure 14). In our interview,<sup>52</sup> Eveliina was very open to talk about her experience working freelance and with an agent.



Figure 12. Eveliina Netti for Vallila Interior, 2018



Figure 13. Eveliina Netti for Puuvilatehdas, 2018

Eveliina has been working with the Scandinavian Pattern Collection agency since she started freelancing, but their cooperation started already during her time at Vallila Interior. The SPC agency represents Scandinavian brands, as well as designers to the Japanese market. While working for Vallila, Eveliina's designs



Figure 14. Eveliina Netti for Nightingale Health, mural, 2018

<sup>52</sup> Netti, interview 13.10.2022



Figure 15. Eveliina Netti for Reima, 2021



Figure 16. Eveliina Netti for Reima, 2021

were successfully marketed in Japan through the SPC agency. This allowed her to establish a good relationship with the agency already then, and to join its portfolio after starting to work freelance.

Since then, Eveliina has licensed a few patterns and received commissions for illustrations, posters, and product design regularly. Evellina has been collaborating with the Young Finnish Design agency as well, but her collaboration has not yielded any results during the past year. I am glad she mentioned this with honesty because this is the reality in many cases. Some collaborations are successful and some take time for various reasons, as much as the agent tries to find suitable work for every designer in their portfolio.

Important to note about Eveliina is that although she works with agents, most of her work comes directly through clients (Figure 12). One of her most successful collaborations is with the Finnish children's brand Reima, that orders patterns from her regularly (Figures 15 and 16). Her playful style works very well for the brand and her designs have obviously been very popular. However, despite her success, Eveliina is aware that the work situation for freelancers is unstable, and she keeps her eyes open for full time work opportunities.

Eveliina's advice to new designers is that they should be wise in choosing their collaborations. Agents are very helpful when working abroad, but she thinks it is possible to establish good client relationships also independently, especially in Finland. She would like designers to talk more openly about their pricing and to

help each other with negotiations. She also made important points about working as a freelancer: the work needs to be fairly remunerated given that a large percentage of the fee charged to clients goes to paying taxes and supporting the business, and that it is important to learn how to manage contracts.

### 4.3 Minni Havas<sup>53</sup> - freelance textile designer and illustrator



Figure 17. Minni Havas for Minna Parikka



Figure 18. Minni Havas Camofruit Night blanket, UU Market

Minni Havas (married Suova) is an accomplished Finnish artist, designer, and illustrator. Minni has studied fashion design and fine arts and has a very distinct style. She is specialised in drawing in pencil, making photorealistic illustrations and surrealist patterns and artworks. She has been working as an illustrator since 2008, starting with Agent Pekka. She has also worked as an entrepreneur with her own fashion brand for a few years, until 2013, and is now mainly working with illustration and pattern design, for brands such as Finarte and Vimma (Figure 19). As an artist, she has exhibited her works privately and in group exhibitions. She has worked with drawing, ceramics, and textile art. Her solo exhibition, “Desiren” opened in the Kämp Garden Room gallery in Helsinki in February of 2022, and her upcoming exhibition will be at the gallery of The Finnish Institute in Stockholm, from February to March 2023.

I am grateful that Minni agreed to be interviewed,<sup>54</sup> as her work is inspiring, and she is a very experienced designer and illustrator. She joined Agent Pekka at the recommendation of a friend who was working there and has mainly illustrated for

<sup>53</sup> Minni Havas website: <https://www.minnihavas.com>; Instagram: @minnihavas

<sup>54</sup> Havas, interview 04.11.2022

large companies with her agent. Some of her clients have been the international *Revolution* and *WAD* magazines, and organisations like Citroën and Diesel, but also the Finnish brands *Minna Parikka* (Figure 17) and *Hartwall*.<sup>55</sup> Minni has also made her own products over the years, such as blankets (Figure 18) and ceramics, which she has sold through *UU Market*.<sup>56</sup>



Figure 19. Minni Havas for *Vimma*

Her experience working for an agent has been very good, and it is something she can recommend to other designers. She appreciates having someone that can negotiate contracts and a fair fee for the work, which is of help especially when dealing with larger organisations. She has received sufficient commissions to manage financially and have time for her artistic activities and personal projects. However, when dealing with smaller customers, she works independently, because she values personal contact and a faster payment period.

To support her art projects, Minni mentioned that she applies for separate funding, some of the organisations that have supported her being *Taike* and *Kuvittajat Oy*.<sup>57</sup> I appreciate very much that Minni mentioned receiving sponsorship, because there are resources available for Finnish artists and designers that are worth exploring. Applying for financial support is something many designers need to do along the way, as the costs for acquiring materials and equipment, arranging a gallery exhibition, and even going to the fairs can easily amount to thousands of euros.

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<sup>55</sup> Agent Pekka

<sup>56</sup> *UU Market*

<sup>57</sup> Havas 2022



Figure 20. Minni Havas for Finarte, 2022

Minni's most recent important collaboration in Finland has been with the rug and home accessory manufacturer Finarte. Her collaboration started with the collection "Zeniitti" that was released in 2019-20. Her newest collaboration with the brand, "Blending,"<sup>58</sup> was released during the Habitare 2022 fair (Figure 20). About the collaboration, Minni mentioned that it started at her own initiative, when she contacted the brand and expressed her interest to work with them. They had already been captivated by her aesthetic, so it was a good match. Now she submits her ideas to them and the new designs she works on are the result of a dialogue between the two parties.

To conclude our interview, Minni mentioned a few recommendations she has for young designers. She talked about the importance of a good portfolio, that has a clear aesthetic, even though it does not contain a lot of work. What designers share in their portfolio and online on their social media is also what the clients will be interested in and order. She also mentioned the importance of a degree of humility. One should listen to clients, and I would add to also be responsive to the feedback from teachers and peers already while studying, something that will help in developing a style that is original and marketable. Lastly, Minni warned against working too much and getting a burnout, something very common in the field.

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<sup>58</sup> Ratilainen 2022

## 5. Working with agents

### 5.1. What is a design agent

The terms “agent” and “agency” can refer to the same, or to different things in a design context. A design agent is usually a person, or organisation, that is responsible for marketing and selling the work of freelance designers. Agents conduct negotiations on the behalf of their designers and agree with clients on fees and contracts. Larger organisations, that represent many designers, can sometimes call themselves agencies, but their purpose and function are the same as those of an agent. They both sell and market design work on behalf of their designers. However, the term “design agency” can also be used by companies that employ designers and provide design services to clients in their specific fields of design - graphic design agencies, interior design agencies, etc. In this thesis, the terms “agent” and “agency” refer specifically to organisations that market and sell the work of freelance designers.

For clients, agents are attractive to work with, mainly because of the work they do in selecting the designers or artists in their portfolio. The client can expect a quality product and a prompt delivery from designers that have already been vetted as able to fulfil certain requirements. The Central Illustration Agency, one of the most prominent agencies for illustrators in the UK and working globally, has described its work as that of curating.

Years ago, prior to the advent of affordable websites, then blogs, then the explosive arrival of social media, agents were critical to getting an artists’ work seen by the commissioners of most influence. Self-publishing has changed all that, anyone can get their work out there now, but as a result everyone does, which leaves clients with a mountainous haystack to search through for that elusive glittering needle.<sup>59</sup>

Agents do this editorial work of sifting through the work of thousands of images and products from different designers and present tailored solutions to their clients, not only providing them with the best of the best, but also saving them precious time.

For designers, agencies are attractive to work with because of the opportunity of becoming the next promising talent and having their work directly accessible to the established agency clientele. According to the CIA, with the arrival of social

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<sup>59</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022b

media and immediate self-publishing arenas, there was a moment when the marketing power of agencies weakened, but this did not last very long.

The overnight flood of unedited imagery quickly became an overwhelming mire of mediocrity. Clients and artists alike realised they needed the curatorial graft that agencies provide.<sup>60</sup>

Given this curatorial work of established talent and the opportunity to be seen on a single quality platform, agencies have become competitive working environments, pushing boundaries and creating some of the most exquisite work that is sought after by clients.

## 5.2. How agents work

Agents are usually specialised on specific styles and markets, and they attract certain customers that are a fit for their profile. Consequently, it is important that designers are aware that a style suitable for the agent they want to work with is crucial to their marketability. The internet is a great resource for researching agencies, however, agents also scout for talent at fairs and universities, which means that personal involvement and participation in various branch activities on the part of the designer is fundamental to their success.

The more prestige and history an agency has, the more difficult it is to be taken on. This means that a very good portfolio and a great array of skills are required when applying to work with an agent. Some agents have portfolio submission guidelines on their websites, but if there is a phone number, it is also safe, and sometimes recommended, to give a call and ask for specifics. Portfolios are submitted digitally, usually as small pdf documents, but links to personal websites, or other web-based portfolio sites are also accepted by most agents. The application process might seem daunting, but however difficult it might be to get an agent, it is important to remember that their interest is to sell, they are scouting for talent, and when there is talent and perseverance, opportunities will come.

A few tips on how to build a successful application portfolio are, first and foremost, to build a consistent and “unique visual language that is immediately identifiable and speaks for itself” and to show a variety of subject matter that reflects an ability to work with several kinds of clients and projects.<sup>61</sup> A designer should also share as many projects in situ as possible and prove their ability to work in different sectors. As a beginner, such work is rarely available, so the portfolio should include mock-ups that show the potential of each project in convincing real-life situations, and of course, university projects that have been taken to a prototype level and are beautifully documented. When it comes to the

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<sup>60</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022b

<sup>61</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022a

number of images or projects to submit in a portfolio, the Central Illustration Agency has given as guideline a number of 30 that “offer and entirely coherent and unique visual language, a breadth of subject matter and of world class quality.”<sup>62</sup> While comparing portfolios can be dangerous, looking at the work of established designers can be a good start, keeping in mind that they usually have already had many years of experience and have already worked with many clients.

Once onboard the agency, the agent will do the marketing and sales work on behalf of designers for a fee. Some agencies require a monthly fee for their services as well as commissions, while others take only commissions from the work they sell. An agent will typically ask for 30-50% of the sales price per project.<sup>63</sup> This might seem like a lot at a glance, but the fee is justified given the work that goes into establishing good client relationships and managing all of the contracts, negotiations, and payments on behalf of the designer. A good agent will, of course, be earning, which means that their designers will be earning as well. Nevertheless, when they establish a good name for themselves and acquire enough projects under their belt, some designers choose to leave their agencies and work independently, earning more than when they were working with their agent.

One of the great opportunities of working with agents is that many negotiate licenses on behalf of their designers and know the price for good design. While in some fields, such as fast fashion, most patterns are sold outright, in other fields, such as furniture design and interior textiles and wallpaper, internationally, more and more of the contracts negotiated are for licenses. This means that the designer, and the agent, will be receiving residual income for the work licensed. Residual income is income that is paid regularly to the seller on a yearly or quarterly basis, as royalties, depending on the contract negotiated. This is a desirable situation for both agents and designers, as it ensures a somewhat stable income if the work sells. It is important, however, to keep in mind that license contracts are not necessarily always the most advantageous financially. There are situations when it is better to sell outright, such as when the value of the work does not match the estimated revenue from royalties. This is because royalties are percentages calculated according to the negotiated price of the product and remuneration is dependent on sales. For example, when products are planned for short sale periods, it is perhaps more advantageous to sell outright, whereas when companies plan to use the products for many years, licensing contracts can be a better option. Managing and negotiating license contracts and keeping track of due royalty payments can be rather tedious for designers, so having an agent to help is desirable in this case.

Licensing is a way to lease out designs for someone to use under set conditions, which are usually negotiated under legally binding contracts. There are two main types of licensing pattern designs, exclusive and non-exclusive. Exclusive licensing

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<sup>62</sup> Central Illustration Agency 2022b

<sup>63</sup> Holowko a

does not allow the licensee to license the same design to different buyers under the same conditions of the contract for which it was licensed. When licensing non-exclusively, a designer can license the same design to multiple clients, which creates the potential for multiple streams of income. At the end of a licensing contract, the design can be licensed again to the same client, or it can be licensed to others. When licensing, the author retains the copyrights for their designs, versus selling outright, that transfers the copyrights to the buyer. Licensing contracts can be difficult to understand, especially when dealing with international buyers, so legal advice is highly recommended.<sup>64</sup>

When working with an agent, designers are provided with briefs for the different projects the agency is involved in or are given specific commissions. Agents keep portfolios for all their designers and regularly review the work available. Sometimes, the agency has specific portfolio pages for all their designers on the agency website, presenting them publicly to their clients and making it easier for the clients to get a quick glance at the potential of each designer. Designers are not responsible for marketing their services to the agency clients themselves, but usually provide the agency with marketing materials and update their portfolios on a regular basis. With the recent developments in social media, especially after the corona pandemic, most of the marketing that is done to promote design work is now done digitally. Many client meetings are no longer face to face and having quality digital material is of utmost importance. Designers should also understand the need to continuously be active and otherwise market their know-how on whatever channels they prefer, as this ensures that their profile is fresh and attractive - the prestige of the agency also grows when designers find projects independently and are successful.

Agents may also organise competitions that are open to other designers outside their portfolio, or competitions that are open only to the designers they represent.<sup>65</sup> By organising competitions, not only do agents market themselves and their company, but they may also do recruiting and establish themselves as promoters of talent in the industry, something that is very attractive to clients and funding organisations.

While there are many positives in working with an agent, it is also important to note that the collaboration between a designer and an agent is not always fruitful. There are several factors that may affect the relationship, and some are due to the lack of projects, or a very competitive environment within the agency itself. An agent might also focus on marketing mostly some of their designers when their style is in great demand. It is therefore important to have an open relationship, based on trust and good communication, where both parties can easily express their wants and needs. An agent can be an important source of work for a freelance designer, but many designers are not provided with enough work by their agents, which means that they also need to actively find their own projects,

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<sup>64</sup> Holowko b

<sup>65</sup> Young Finnish Design b

and sometimes work part time doing other things. Despite these challenges, working with an agent can be a very positive experience. It offers designers the opportunity to be part of a supportive community of like-minded artists that often face the same experiences, it provides access to mentorship from industry professionals with many years of experience in selling design work and opens doors to new opportunities and client work that come with being part of an established institution.

### 5.3. Examples of agents

There are a few agencies in Finland and in the Nordics that work with textile and surface pattern design. Each of them operates differently and has its own target market. Some agencies might prefer designers with a similar aesthetic, which makes it easier for them to sell their designers' work to their target market, but there are also agencies with a carefully curated team of designers that have very different and distinct styles and approach a wide array of clients. I have selected a few agencies for a more in-depth discussion in this section. More agents and agencies, also international, are listed in the resources section of this thesis for further exploration.

#### The Scandinavian Pattern Collection Agency<sup>66</sup>

- agency based in Sweden and Japan, specialised in licensing surface pattern designs

The Scandinavian Pattern Collection operates between Scandinavia and Japan, selling patterns from Scandinavian pattern designers to the Japanese market. The agency is located in Sweden and Japan, but the designers work on a freelance basis and live in the Nordic countries. The SPC agency is an example of an agency that has a very distinct target market. According to its website, the agency currently has 31 designers in its portfolio. Although each of the designers has their unique and distinguishable style, it is obvious that they were selected based on an aesthetic which can appeal on the Japanese market (Figure 21).

Sachiko Imaizumi from the Scandinavian Pattern Collection, Andfika Co., Ltd agreed to be interviewed<sup>67</sup> for this thesis and gave a lot of interesting insights about the company and its operations. Together with her business partner that lives in Sweden, Sachiko started the agency because they both saw a big potential for pattern designs. Today, the SPC licenses patterns for fashion, home, stationery, and small gift items. In addition to representing the agency brand, the SPC also arranges for individual commission work with clients, but their focus is licensing patterns, resulting in royalties with a guaranteed amount. The agency does not do recruitment but considers the profile of each designer that expresses interest in

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<sup>66</sup> Scandinavian Pattern Collection website: <https://www.scandinavianpatterncollection.com>

<sup>67</sup> Imaizumi, interview 05.10.2022

joining, and if they are a match for the agency. At the moment, new designers must wait to join the portfolio, because the agency has enough to support its workload.

The Japanese people are very interested in the life in Scandinavia, and Scandinavian design has been very popular in Japan for many years. As a result, a very effective marketing strategy for the Scandinavian Pattern Agency has been to present each designer and their lifestyle together with the presentation of their designs. A personal aspect to the work of each designer, their inspiration, and the context in which the designs are produced is something people find very interesting. Consequently, many of the designs the SPC presents come with a story.

SCANDINAVIAN PATTERN COLLECTION

Scandinavian Pattern Collectionでは、北欧各地で活躍するデザイナーたちが暮らしから創り出すパターンのコレクションと、日本企業とを結ぶライセンスをサポートしています。

採用実績    デザイナー    カジュアルライン    美しいTOKYO    文化イベント    インスピレーション    もっと見る

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Figure 21. The Scandinavian Pattern Collection website

Something that is very inspiring when talking with Sachiko is her obvious commitment to the company she leads, the designers she represents, and the clients she strives to serve. No given designer is ever number 1, but the mission of the agency is to match each designer with a suitable client depending on their strengths. For some of the agency designers, the workload coming through SPC might not be enough, but the agency constantly strives to get more deals and projects in order to support everyone in the portfolio. In addition to these things, the agency understands that designers are not always inspired and that there are days when their work is not very good; as a result, the company tries to establish a relationship based on honesty and dialogue with its designers, that can improve the outcome of each collaboration.

### The Patternsfrom Agency<sup>68</sup>

- agency based in Finland, specialised in licensing surface pattern designs

The Patternsfrom Agency, located in Finland, works only with Finnish freelance designers in its portfolio and operates mainly on the Finnish and Asian markets. There are 10 designers part of the portfolio, that create patterns for the three categories defined by the agency, which are Classy, Lovely, and Whimsical. The agency has a very structured licensing scheme for their pattern library of more than a thousand patterns, and pricing for four categories, depending on pattern complexity. Clients can buy rights to use the patterns from the agency pattern library on three levels, for different markets and pattern categories. It is possible to also commission the agency designers for tailored pattern services or pattern collection coordination. In addition to selling patterns, the Patternsfrom Agency offers services to designers, such as business coaching, portfolio reviews, and the opportunity to participate at international trade fairs. The agency also organises different events that promote surface pattern design and are involved in supporting the community of textile designers in Finland.

### Agent Pekka<sup>69</sup>

- agency based in Finland, The Netherlands, and the US, working with a wide range of disciplines

Agent Pekka is an agency that represents some of the most talented designers and illustrators in Finland, as well as international stars. They are established, as well as emerging artists, that create work across disciplines, from 3D animation, to illustration, and typography. Since its launch in 2007, the agency has supported the success of many Finnish designers, such as Lotta Nieminen, Janine Rewell, Linda Linko, Minni Havas, and Antti Kalevi. Although Agent Pekka does not

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<sup>68</sup> Patternsfrom Agency website: <https://patternsfrom.fi>

<sup>69</sup> Agent Pekka website: <https://agentpekka.com>

specifically work with textile pattern design, many of their designers create surface patterns for various applications, such as packaging design and fashion.

## 6. Design Case - A woven fabric collection with Young Finnish Design for Annala Oy

I have been a member of the Young Finnish Design Agency since October 2021. Given the difficulties in finding employment during the corona crisis, it made sense to try out different options for finding work. The agency was looking for textile designers at the time and it was a perfect opportunity, as they had been previously mostly working with furniture and product design. I found out about the opportunity through a recruitment email the agency sent to the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The application process included a portfolio submittal and a curating process, as Young Finnish Design relies on the support of outside consultants for curating its designer portfolio. After completing the application process, I had an interview with Elisa Luoto and Heidi Huovinen that run the agency, where I talked about my strengths and about the kinds of projects I would like to be involved in.

I was immediately introduced to the current projects the agency was involved in at the time and I expressed my interest in participating in the project with Annala. I found this project to be the most interesting and suitable for my skills. I was late in joining the project, but thankfully the deadline was extended, and I could also submit my designs. I have since participated in other projects involving furniture design, opportunities I have taken to develop my skills in this field, as it is something I do not have much experience in. Although I am aware that I have few chances of having my work selected by clients, I want to take all the opportunities I am given and grow professionally. I have personally found that with each project and competition I have participated in, my self-esteem and confidence as a designer have grown.

Something unique about the Young Finnish Design agency is that its mission is to support emerging designers in landing their first cooperation and selling their work. The agency was founded by Elisa and Heidi after finishing their studies at Aalto University. They found themselves with little opportunities to sell their designs to companies and they wanted to develop a service that would help link designers and manufacturers. To support its operations, the agency charges a monthly fee to their portfolio designers, as well as takes commissions for the work they help sell. At the moment, the Young Finnish Design agency supports 20 emerging designers in its portfolio, each with a different background, that are regularly marketed to companies and have access to direct assignments and closed competitions.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Young Finnish Design Our Story

Young Finnish Design is a relatively young agency, but it has already helped many Finnish companies in finding new designers to collaborate with. One of the agency's strategies is to organise competitions that are open to all of the designers in their portfolio, as well as to students from Finnish universities and other established designers from Finland.<sup>71</sup> Young Finnish Design also offers an e-mail submission service to designers outside the agency, and supplies names of companies that are looking for new products each month. The designers that have a subscription to this service (Connexion), can submit their portfolios through the agency to the specific clients they are interested in collaborating with.<sup>72</sup> In the case of Annala, the company contacted the agency directly and expressed their need for new designs, and an assignment was given directly to the designers in the agency portfolio; a competition was also organised in connection with the project, which was open to everyone for participation.

### 6.1. The collaboration from brief to submission

The brief for the YFD x Annala Collection was rather open. The company was looking for new designs that would fit within its existing collection of upholstery fabrics. Annala is specialised in weaving fabrics for the contract market.<sup>73</sup> The company weaves using wool, for naturally fireproof fabrics that do not require finishes, and combines weaving structures that are suitable for high wear upholstery. The YFD designers had free hands to envision something that would fit the profile of the company and to design patterns that would work for upholstering chairs and sofas for public spaces. The only limitations given were the medium, the size of the patterns and of the elements, and the colours used. The patterns had to be designed using the Adobe Illustrator programme, be delivered in full repeat at a specific size while making sure that the elements are suitable for weaving on a Jacquard loom and use the colours of the yarns readily available at the Annala factory in Lapua.

The design process for this collection was relatively short; I used about two weeks to design the patterns, put them in repeat, and prepare the presentation. It is impossible to estimate the exact number of hours I used, but the work was done on a part time basis, and it did not exceed 40 hours during the two weeks of work. After envisioning my proposal, I created the patterns from already existing sketches that were done even a few years prior to this assignment, and for different personal projects. All the resulted patterns were unpublished, original works, tailored specifically to the client.

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<sup>71</sup> Young Finnish Design 2022 a

<sup>72</sup> Young Finnish Design Connexion

<sup>73</sup> Annala's website: <https://www.annala.fi/annala-kankaat/kankaat/>

I submitted a total of four patterns in two colourways, that worked together as a collection. The submission included, but was not limited to, a mood board in which I clearly explained my vision for how this collection would be used in public spaces and mock-up pictures of each of the fabrics in both colourways (see an example of a final product versus a mock-up by comparing Figures 22 and 23). The aim of the presentation was to explain my vision for the company and to show the potential of the patterns. As a result of the presentation, Annala chose three of the four patterns presented to be part of this new collection with YFD. The collection resulted in a total of eleven patterns from six designers.

The three patterns that Annala selected from my submittal are Flowers, Axel (the original name X's - the plural for "x"), and Squares. My aim for the collection was to create patterns that would become new classics for the company, and that could work together, as well as independently in a project. I carefully studied the identity of the company and the patterns they already had in their collection before deciding what direction to take my own ideas. The result is a balanced and energetic collection that features a floral design with classical tones as the hero pattern, coupled with a small patterned and versatile Axel, and another classic with a twist Squares, a pattern full of movement and tension.

As a designer, I am of course influenced by my favourite artists and designers, as well as my lifestyle and the things that I like. Although tailored to the client, this collection was nothing less than a reflection of my identity. It features a bold William Morris -like floral in contemporary colours, and two playful geometrical patterns that echo the paintings of Juan Miró. My work is spontaneous and even though some of my repeats are assembled and finished digitally, I usually draw and paint them clean on paper by hand. Working in a 1:1 scale, sometimes on large pieces of paper stretched on the floor, I like to work fast, and I rarely sketch; I sometimes refine my ideas in my head before I start working, but usually I start from a simple idea or subject matter, and let my patterns flourish on white paper, composing as I go.

## Flowers

The idea for the Flowers pattern came from peony sketches I had done months prior to the project. Peonies are among my favourite flowers, but they are very difficult to draw and paint. For a few days in a row, I had bought peonies from the supermarket, sat down next to my bouquet to paint in aquarelle, only to find them open and destroyed in a matter of minutes. This was rather frustrating, as I am very particular about the way I want flowers to look like in my patterns. So, after a couple of days of failures, I bought the last bunch of peonies and decided on a different strategy. I was to draw the flowers fast in black ink, one of my favourite mediums. I drew the peonies as they opened and made four different drawings. As a result, the finished pattern features the same three flowers in different stages of development. Not only did this strategy work very well as a method of representation, but it also provided me with several different elements that make

the pattern rich and interesting. While initially I did not know what to do with my sketches, they waited for a few months in my stash of drawings until the right opportunity arose for them to bloom on a fabric.



Figure 22. Annala X YFD Flowers pillowcase



Figure 23. Flowers pattern mock-up - Bianca Byggmästar

Building the repeat for the Flowers pattern was rather tedious, as I knew it had to flow very well on a sofa in order to be interesting for the client. It was the work of trial and error for a couple of hours with size reshapes and millimetre moves in one direction or another. What helped me in the development process, however, was having an exact size given by the client for the repeat. Enough variety and movement had to be created within the required size and that was achieved not only through the qualities of the elements themselves, but also through their placement: two diamonds are formed within the composition, that aid in hiding the repeat and in guiding the eye vertically and horizontally through the fabric (Figures 24 and 25).

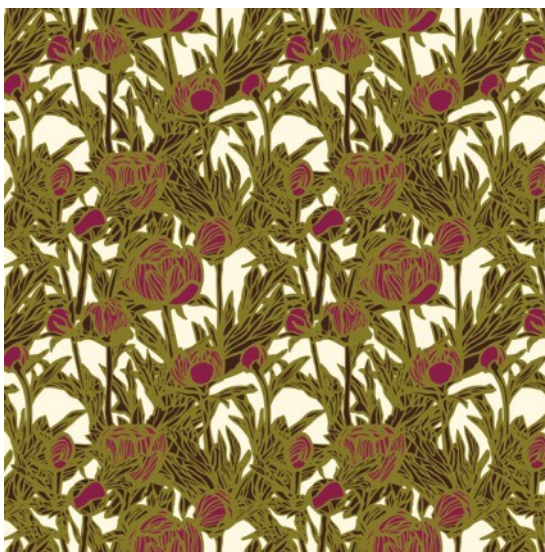


Figure 24. Flowers pattern colour option 1 - Bianca Byggmästar

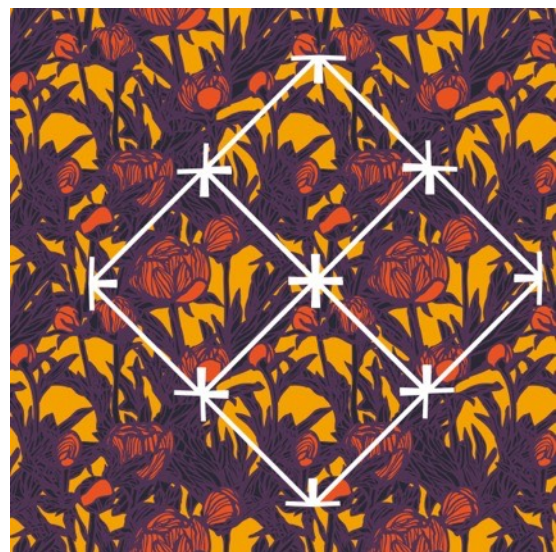


Figure 25. Flowers pattern colour option 2 pattern construction - Bianca Byggmästar

## Axel

Axel was a pattern that I had drawn a few years prior to starting my textile design studies, not knowing what it would someday become. All the elements had been digitalised, and even the repeat was ready in black and white, waiting for colour. The simple pattern is based on the “x” and “=” signs that I hand drew in a naive way on paper using a grid and twisting the “=” signs randomly to build flow and interest in the pattern. At the time it was designed, this pattern was not made with anything specific in mind, it was just a geometry exercise based on a library book about the symbolism found in the architecture of the Antiquity. These two simple elements were used by many European civilisations, and most likely by others around the world. They are very basic but have been made to dance on fabric using shape and colour (my work), and skilfully chosen woven structures (the work of the client). When reviewing my collection of drawings in search for ideas for the collection for Annala, this was one of the patterns that struck with potential.



Figure 26. Annala X YFD Axel woven fabric

Axel became a versatile and playful pattern, that works very well for high traffic upholstery given its structure (Figure 26). The variety in the pattern shapes a repeat that is impossible to discover and hides stains while preserving its appearance. This makes the pattern a perfect choice for public spaces. In addition to these properties, I personally think the pattern is successful also because of the interesting placement of its elements. A web of diagonals, vertical, and horizontal lines flow in all directions and allow for a very efficient use of the fabric when upholstering (Figure 28). A new piece can start wherever the previous piece of fabric was cut. But despite all the properties of the design, when I presented it to the client, I also carefully chose colours that would show the hidden qualities of a

pattern made with such simple elements - the pattern can easily transform from basic to elegant through the use of colour, making it a good choice for many interior projects (Figure 27).

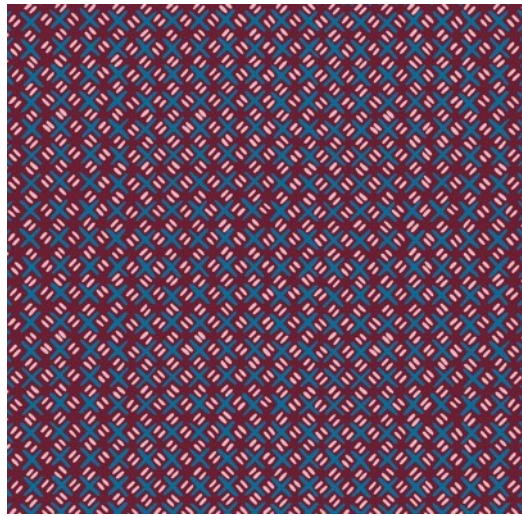


Figure 27. Axel pattern colour option 1 - Bianca Byggmästar

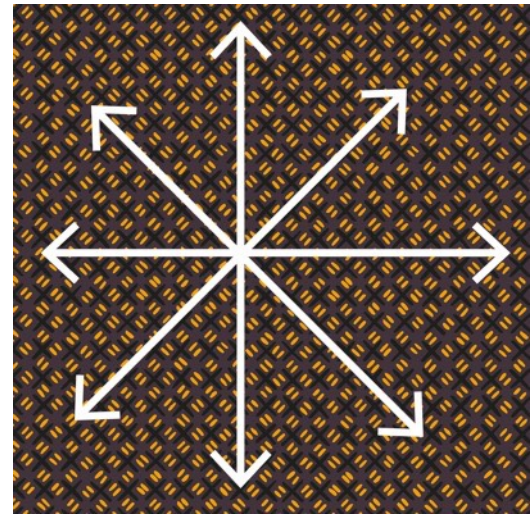


Figure 28. Axel pattern colour option 2 pattern construction - Bianca Byggmästar

## Squares

Squares, the last pattern in my collection for Annala, is a mid-size pattern with classical, yet modern tones. The pattern is classical in its theme, but at the same time modern in its approach. The squares are not square on purpose, but are hand drawn in an irregular manner, to create movement and an almost psychedelic surface. The tension in the pattern can be increased or decreased with the use of colour contrast, making the pattern versatile in its use in public spaces. Classical with a twist, Squares resulted from a quick sketch I initially drew for a knitting pattern. After scanning and transforming the lines into shapes, the first version of the Squares pattern was not so appealing to me. Something was missing, and it was tension. After increasing the size of each square, the pattern was ready. Now there was a pleasant ratio between positive and negative space and the repeat was seamless. Just like Axel, Squares is upholstery friendly. There is minimal waste when upholstering multiple pieces because there is no need to match patterns for most applications. However, the pattern is not quite as versatile as Axel, in that the design only forms vertical and horizontal lines - there are no optical diagonals to guide the eye though the fabric (Figures 30 and 31). Nevertheless, Squares is a pattern with a lot of potential. The design is suitable for restaurant and hotel interiors, and given its two colours, it could be woven to be reversible, making it also multipurpose (Figure 29).



Figure 29. Annala X YFD Squares, a reversible woven fabric

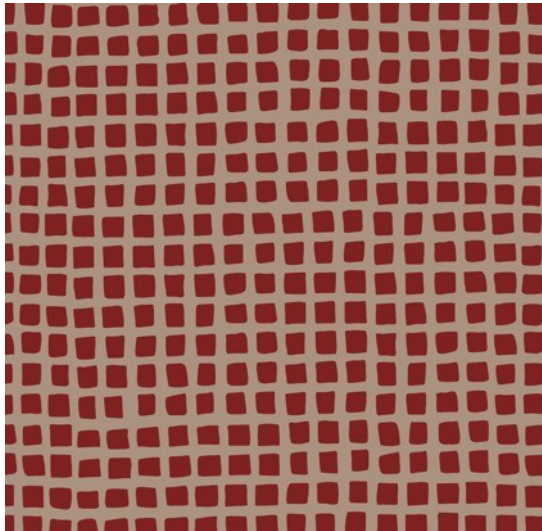


Figure 30. Squares pattern colour option 1 - Bianca Byggmästar

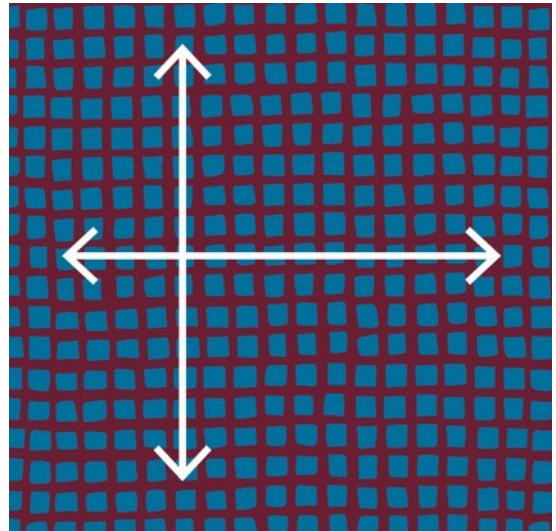


Figure 31. Squares pattern colour option 2 pattern construction - Bianca Byggmästar

All in all, I think my collection was successful because of the great variety and possibilities the three patterns offer. The collection features both floral and geometrical designs, and the scale of each pattern is appropriate for furniture upholstery. Although designed for the contract market, all the patterns can be used in domestic projects as well, and the combination of classical and modern elements in each pattern makes them marketable.

This project was very rewarding for me as a designer in many ways. The dialogue with Annala and the Young Finnish Design Agency worked very well, and everyone collaborated towards the best result with professionalism. I was

positively surprised that Annala also trusted my vision for each pattern and that there were little modifications done to the original colour options I initially submitted. Working for a Finnish company with history and tradition was, of course, a dream come true, but perhaps the most rewarding for me personally was to see Annala's and my visions of sustainability align. The warp of the fabrics is made using recycled polyester, and the weft is made with responsible and traceable wool. Although selling my work is important to me, one of my greatest personal goals is to bring responsible design to this world. As much as I strive to bring happiness in the lives of my clients with my designs, I also want to create timeless products of good quality that endure the trends of the times. I am very happy that my first pattern designs to be produced on the Finnish market are also used for durable fabrics and woven locally using carefully sourced materials.

## 6.2. Collection launch and marketing

As a whole, the YFD x Annala collection was envisioned as a customisable collection of contract fabrics to suit various projects. The concept behind the collection was to offer interior architects the fabrics woven in custom colours, given that the colours would be chosen from the colour palette available at the factory. There is a minimum order of 20 meters for custom designs, but it allows architects to customise each pattern to the parameters of each project. The fabrics are also readily available by the meter in select colours for consumers, and cushions in different sizes can be ordered from the Annala web shop. This way of presenting a collection is new to the Finnish market and speaks in favour of the company, that can deliver locally woven contract fabrics faster than foreign competitors.

The collection was launched in August 2022 at the Design Helsinki B2B event in Helsinki, Finland, the first event of its kind on the Finnish market and has since been presented at different events. Design Helsinki was very popular with architects, as well as with the public and international visitors, and it served as the perfect venue for presenting the collection. After this event, the collection was also featured at The Interior, Design and Furniture Fair Habitare in September 2022, and was exhibited at the Young Finnish Design, as well as at the Annala stands. In addition, all the fabrics were selected for the Habitare Materials exhibition, and some fabrics were used for upholstery and drapes at the Avotakka stand designed by Nemo Architects (Figure 32). Having the possibility to also exhibit at Habitare personally, I took my designs to my stand and fit them together with my other designs. To my knowledge, since Habitare, the collection has also been promoted at other events for furniture upholsterers in Sweden and Finland. This has increased the visibility of the fabrics and has gathered a lot of attention to the collection.



Figure 32. The Annala X YFD Flowers pillowcase at the Avotakka stand during Habitare 2022

Also in the picture: chair - Parolan Rottinki, blanket - Lapuan Kankurit, curtain fabric - Annala X YFD Blizzard, designed by Ruut Joensuu

Annala and Young Finnish Design found it also very important to promote all of us designers together with our work. All of us had the opportunity of visiting the Annala factory in Lapua and be part of the photoshoot of the collection, as well as contribute to the text associating the promotion material. Each design features the name of the designer behind it, as well as a story about the pattern and our personal vision for its use. This information is mentioned on all the channels the fabrics are advertised on. Additionally, the designers had the opportunity of presenting their work at the Annala stand during the Design Helsinki event, and at the Young Finnish Design stand during the Habitare fair. All of us could experience the first reaction of the public to our designs and receive feedback for our work. People expressed a lot of interest in my patterns, and I could see the value in creating a collection of such variety because while some clearly appreciated my Flowers pattern, others very much liked Squares and Axel. This promotion has been of great value to me personally, as it has helped me grow in confidence, motivation, and appreciation of my own work

Since the collection launch, it has been promoted through different media channels. Annala and Young Finnish Design have promoted the collection on their Instagram accounts, as well as on LinkedIn. I have also been involved in promoting the collection and my patterns on my Instagram profile. So far, the collection has been featured in the October issue 2022 of the Glorian Koti magazine (Figure 33), and hopefully the public will soon see the patterns in use in

various interiors. All this work in promoting the collection has offered me a great insight into just how much effort companies make in order to sell their products. Although good design still seems to be the fundamental factor for sales, it should be promoted in order to reach the right clientele.



Figure 33. The Annala X YFD Flowers fabric in the October 2022 issue of the Glorian Koti Magazine

To conclude, I would also like to mention that Annala has been very pleased with our collaboration.<sup>74</sup> Not only was it important for them to receive a wide array of proposals from the Young Finnish Design agency that they could choose from, but they also appreciated being in the position to support emerging designers in their careers. For me, and for other designers in the agency, this has been the first major collaboration with a Finnish textile manufacturer, and an opportunity for personal development.

<sup>74</sup> Young Finnish Design 2022b

The project timeframe has been as follows:

December 2021	- pattern design and proposal submitted to Annala Oy
January 2022	- collection review by Annala Oy and the Young Finnish Design leadership
February - April 2022	- sample weaving and colour research
May 2022	- collection photoshoot and visit to the Annala factory in Lapua, Finland, together with the other designers selected
August 2022	- collection launch at the Design Helsinki B2B event in Helsinki, Finland
September 2022	- collection presentation at the Habitare Interior, Design and Furniture Fair, Helsinki, Finland

## 7. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have related some of my experiences working as a freelancer, and those of others, with the aim of understanding how design is marketed today and what can be done to become successful as a freelancer. Working freelance is not easy, it requires many skills, patience, and investing time and resources. It also requires becoming a public person, acquainted with sharing your work and believing in your vision and in your abilities. Freelancers often work more than full-time employees, but with less security. Working as a freelancer is by no means an ideal. It is, however, very rewarding to have success and to see your creations come to life. I would say that despite the pitfalls, it is worth the effort for those that have the motivation to pursue such a career; there are also many resources available for networking in Finland, through organisations that support designers, and offer financing and opportunities for exhibiting.

I was very inspired by the experiences the interviewed designers shared. I wanted to ask precisely young designers to talk about their work because I think it is important to hear the new generation of creatives share their success. The media often talks about those past, and their accomplishments, but while there is a lot to learn from them, now we live with different challenges. What I have seen myself while working, and what the interviewees have confirmed, is that to be successful, it is important to have a variety of skills and to be educated. There might be exceptions, but the more exposure to different ways of thinking and approaching problems, the more nuanced and richer our set of skills becomes. The way I see it, education compensates today for many of the opportunities we no longer receive from the job market, because fewer and fewer designers are hired full-time. Reading about the daily routines and the variety of tasks the interviewed designers work with, it is also clear that learning how to manage a freelance business should be seen as a long-term project. Each designer has created their own path towards success, and their careers have brought them different challenges and opportunities.

While I targeted some of the interviewed designers because I wanted them to share their experiences in working with agents, it was a surprise to hear that all of them are working with agents despite being successful in their independent endeavours to find client work. Collaborating with agencies is an experience that all of them recommend, and so do I. It is perhaps not so easy to find a suitable agency in Finland, given the competition, but there are also international agencies. Being successful with an application, however, requires a lot of skill and a very well defined and interesting style of working. So, the more we practice our skills, the better we become at what we do. My research revealed that what agents appreciate the most from their designers is originality.

It was very interesting to hear the perspective of an agent that is so passionate about her work. This is true also of the other agents presented in this thesis, although not all were interviewed. They share the same vision, and this is obvious from the history of the agencies they run and from the success of their designers. Agents are people with very good skills in selling work. They recognise talent and know how to market it. It is good news for us Finnish designers that agencies in Finland and in the Nordics are successful, because this provides us with opportunities.

My project serves as an example of a successful collaboration with a brand through an agent. For me personally, working with an agent has been a great opportunity to grow professionally. There are many projects that are not openly available to everyone but are distributed through connections and networking. This is how the market functions. Most clients prefer to work with established and experienced designers because they have a better guarantee for success, so being part of an agency has given me, an emerging designer, the opportunity to have my work viewed and to start collaborating with a brand. I hope other companies will follow the example of Annala and give a chance to designers that are less experienced, because they have a lot to offer, and they need the opportunities to develop their skills, which in the long run also adds value to the design field.

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Figure 2. Thesis Framework. Bianca Byggmästar

Figure 3. Marimekko 2022. <[https://www.marimekko.com/fi\\_fi/vastuullisuus/tulevaisuuden-tuotteet/marimekko-x-spinnova](https://www.marimekko.com/fi_fi/vastuullisuus/tulevaisuuden-tuotteet/marimekko-x-spinnova)>

Figure 4. Reeta Ek 2022. <<https://www.reetaek.com>>

Figure 5. Ida Korsström 2022. <<https://www.instagram.com/idakorsstrom/?hl=en>>

Figure 6. Marimekko. Maija Louekari. <<https://yle.fi/a/3-6851555>>

Figure 7. Milla Vaahtera 2018. Aleksi Tikkala. <<https://millavaahtera.com/Dialogue-Exhibition>>

Figure 8. Studio Pulla 2017. Verna Kovanen. <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BVPgwqfAJoa/?hl=en>>

Figure 9. Voglia 2022. Sanna Lehto. <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CcxD2rUOTMG/?hl=en>>

Figure 10. Protoshop 2016. Johanna Kinnari. <[https://www.imudesign.org/protoshop/2016\\_fi/tuotteet-ja-tekijat-2016/](https://www.imudesign.org/protoshop/2016_fi/tuotteet-ja-tekijat-2016/)>

Figure 11. Malva X Voglia 2022. <<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cjp9MqRtiXg/?hl=en>>

Figure 12. Vallila Interior 2018. <<https://www.eveliinanetti.com/textileproduct>>

Figure 13. Puuvillatehdas 2018. <<https://www.eveliinanetti.com/textileproduct>>

Figure 14. Nightingale Health 2018. <<https://www.eveliinanetti.com/illustration>>

Figure 15. Reima 2021. <<https://www.eveliinanetti.com/textileproduct>>

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Figure 17. Minna Parikka. Minni Havas. <<https://agentpekka.com/artist/minni-havas/minna-parikka-6>>

Figure 18. UU Market. <<https://uumarket.fi/collections/textiles/products/camofruit-blankets>>

Figure 19. Vimma. <<https://www.minnihavas.com/vimmacompany-patterns>>

Figure 20. Finarte 2022. <<https://finarte.fi>>

Figure 21. The Scandinavian Pattern Collection 2022. <<https://www.scandinavianpatterncollection.com/hej-moi>>

Figure 22. Annala 2022. Katja Lösönen.

Figure 23. Bianca Byggmästar 2021.

Figure 24. Bianca Byggmästar 2021.

Figure 25. Bianca Byggmästar 2022.

Figure 26. Annala 2022. Katja Lösönen.

Figure 27. Bianca Byggmästar 2021.

Figure 28. Bianca Byggmästar 2022.

Figure 29. Annala 2022. Katja Lösönen.

Figure 30. Bianca Byggmästar 2021.

Figure 31. Bianca Byggmästar 2022.

Figure 32. Bianca Byggmästar 2022.

Figure 33. Annala 2022. Katja Lösönen. Nousevia Nimiä & Iloa Väreistä. Glorian Koti. 10.2022. 13.

## Resources

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## Appendices

### Interviews

Interview by email with Salla-Maaria Syvänen, freelance designer

Interview date: 07.10.2022

1. Could you please write something about yourself? Where did you study and what kind of work experience do you have?

I am Salla-Maaria Syvänen, a quite hard-boiled Textile and Fashion Design professional, since I have three separate degrees in the field of Textiles and Fashion. First of all I have an MA from Aalto University in Textile Arts and Design, then I also have a BA degree in Fashion design from Lahden Muotoiluinstituutti LAMK, and another BA in Textile and Clothing Engineering from Lahden Ammattikorkeakoulu LAMK too. Overall I have studied over 12 years of Textiles and Fashion (which some may consider a bit mad :D ).

My career however is quite versatile, I think most of all because I have the degree also in Fashion Engineering, which has taken me to weird work life occupations. I have worked for example in Rovio Entertainment Ltd. and Microsoft Mobile Oy, in both companies as a specialist in the field of soft materials and fashion.

I have been an entrepreneur with my own company Tmi Salla-Maaria Syvänen for over six years now. I consult many different companies with for example Print and Fashion design, Creative- and Art Direction, Trend/Future Forecasting, and product/textile production run-through and all kinds of textile- and clothing related tasks.

2. What is your current title and when did you start working for Voglia?

I have worked with Voglia Oy between 2019-2021, currently I don't have an ongoing commission with the brand. During my commission for Voglia I created 30% of the fashion design, all prints for the collections and an entire brand renewal together with Paula Polkumaa Tmi. My title was Designer/Art Director since I created both.

3. What kind of experiences have supported you in accepting this role? Was this a role open for application, or were you invited to apply?

I saw the advert about the job opening either in Ornamo or Suomen Tekstiili & Muoti job webpages, so the search for the job was open for everyone.

As a textile designer I think that to have jobs or commissions it's not that much about your professional background but your handwriting. The company always

first of all is interested in your textile design work and creativity, and if you suit to the company brand, secondly the professional background of yours.

On top of my handwriting, I of course also at that point had quite a heavy background in working freelance together with companies such as Joutsen Oy, Finlayson Oy, Hakola Oy, Junkyard. I also consider that my quite in-depth knowledge in production run-through and garment making makes me a good candidate for companies to hire. I can speak to subcontractors and to production easily, because I understand their processes.

4. What does your typical working day look like? What kinds of projects are you involved in for the company?

I focus on designing and producing design. My workday can consist of for example design conceptualising, searching for inspiration (browsing through information in for example internet, social media and libraries or having interviews with customers), creating (mostly drawing by hand or by computer) actual designs, creating production work sheets (recipes for production on how to produce designs), and being in touch with the actual production with phone calls. There never is a similar day.

5. There are two designers working for Voglia, you and Paula Polkumaa. Do you buy services from outside the company?

I can not speak for Voglia, since I am an entrepreneur myself, but as an entrepreneur I can say and I know that most Finnish textile- and clothing companies buy services outside the company. Some use freelancers all the time, some companies only for short commissions or individual designs.

6. Do you do any freelance work for other companies?

Currently I work for three textile- and clothing companies for longer commissions. I also create and continuously update a collection of prints which I sell to several companies, which means that they just buy a print created by me for their collection. I also have a print agent for Asia, so I do not have to sell all my prints by myself and it makes the income more steady.

7. What do you mostly like about your work?

I think it's insane that I am able to make my income with what I love most, drawing prints and being creative. I also think that I am in a very happy position because of that since it's a position not that many are able to be especially in Finland. I keep on amusing myself all the time by creating something I thought I wasn't even able to make, in prints, products and knits for example :) I love to create.

8. Is there any advice you would like to give students and young designers in the field?

You can never understand your craft too much, I mean learning and searching knowledge about materials, techniques and details or anything that relates to your field makes you a better designer. And you can learn new things for your entire life. And technique is also important because all designers need to consider sustainability first. We don't need any more bad, nonfunctional products in this world. So prepare yourself to being able to create good, because what is good, is also beautiful and true.

And for a textile designer technique is an important tool: understanding how good and beautiful repeat is created, is vital. Nowadays everyone can create patterns with Illustrator, but not that many patterns are actually good when you take a look at the repeat, or you see the design on product. Learn how good repeats are made.

To conclude: Creativity is inside you, and it will spring to life as is, but you have to study technique to master your craft.

9. Is there anything else you would like to say about your work as a textile designer?

Be gentle to yourself. Sometimes you have to make 100 bad sketches to create 1 brilliant one, but those 100 will guide the way. And even you would be producing crap for the whole day, take it with humour, at least you practiced. No-one is brilliant 24/7, but when giving time to yourself, you will flourish.

Interview by email with Eveliina Netti, freelance designer

Interview date: 13.10.2022

1. Kerro itsestäsi, esim. taustastasi ja mitä tahansa muuta, mitä haluat kertoa.

Olen 31-vuotias tekstiilisuunnittelija ja kuvittaja. Olen opiskellut Aallossa vuosina 2012-2019 (sisältäen kaksi vaihto-opiskelua ja vuoden kandin ja maisterin välissä, jolloin kävin töissä) Kandiopinnoissa keskityin tekstiilisuunnitteluun ja kuosisuunnitteluun, mutta maisterissa vaihdoin pääpainon kuvitukselle.

Opiskelujen aikana ja tutkintojen välissä olin useamman vuoden töissä Vallilalla kuosisuunnittelijana ja mallistokoordinaattorina. Halusin kuitenkin laajentaa työnkuvaani ja ammattiosaamistani, joten irtisanouduin 2019 ja loppuvuodesta aloin työskennellä yrittäjänä toiminimellä. Olen työskennellyt yrittäjänä siitä asti, teen kuoseja ja kuvituksia aikalaille 50-50. Vuosina 2020-2022 olen myös saanut 2 lasta ja olen parhaillaan pienen vauvan kanssa kotona äitiyslomalla.

2. Milloin aloitit työskentelyn agentin kanssa ja miksi? Miten se tapahtui? Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt tällä tavalla?

Aloitin agentuurissa Scandinavian Pattern Collection vuonna 2020. Kyseinen agenttuuri on japanilais-ruotsalainen, ja he edustavat skandi-kuosisuunnittelijoita exclusiivisesti japanin markkinassa lisensointi periaatteella. Sama agentti edustaa itsenäisten suunnittelijoiden lisäksi myös joitain isompia firmoja, mm. Vallilaa, ja olin työskennellyt agentin kanssa vallilassa, jossa useat vallilalla tekemäni kuosit olivat menneet myyntiin japaniin agenttuurin kautta. Perustettuani toiminimen kysyin haluaisivatko he edustaa minua nyt kun olen itsenäinen suunnittelija, ja he pyysivät minut mukaan SPC:iin.

3. Minkälaisissa projekteissa olet ollut mukana? Oletko työskennellyt lähinnä Suomessa vai myös kansainvälisesti?

Suurin osa työstäni tapahtuu ehdottomasti suomessa ilman agenttuuria, mutta olen saanut agenttuurin kautta muutaman toimeksiannon. SPC:n alkuperäinen bisnesmalli on ollut lisensoida kuoseja, mutta koronan myötä kysyntä romahti tyystin, enkä esimerkiksi minä ole saanut kuin 1-2- kuosia lisensoitua agenttuurin kautta. Sen sijaan kuvitus toimeksiantoja, julisteita ja tuotteita, on tullut heidän kauttaan aina välillä. Suomessa minulla on ollut pari isoa vaki-asiakasta kuosien tilaajina, mm. Reima on tilannut lastenvaatekuosinsa minulta useaan eri mallistoon, ja tämä on ollut minulle iso ja tärkeä asiakkuus. Muuten suurin osa töistäni koostuu yksittäisistä/satunnaisista tilauksista.

4. Oletko saanut riittävästi työtä kuukausitasolla? Onko sinun pitänyt ottaa myös muuta työtä?

Yrittäjyyteni ensimmäinen kokonainen verovuosi 2020-2021 oli tosi hyvä, töitä riitti kktasolla oikein sopivasti työmäärän ja palkkiotason puolesta (vuosituloni ovat olleet yrittäjänä paremmat kuin palkansaajana tekstiilifirmassa). Mutta kuten mainitsin, minulla on enemmän satunnaisia asiakkaita kuin vakiasiakkaita, joten takeita saman tahdin jatkuvuudesta ei tietenkään yrittäjällä ole. Olen työllistänyt itseni hyvin pelkällä yrittäjyydellä, enkä ole vielä tarvinnut lisätöitä. Tosin teen kahden eri alan hommia, kuosisuunnittelua ja kuvitusta, yksistään kumpikaan ei olisi riittänyt hyvään palkkatasoon. Yrittäjänä tulevaisuus on aina vähän epävarma ja jännä, ja vaikka minulla on mennyt alkuun hyvin yrittäjänä ja olen ollut tosi tyytyväinen yrittäjyyteen, niin pidän aina kaikenvaralta silmät auki myös mahdollisille kiinnostaville työpaikoille.

5. Haluatko sanoa jotain siitä, mikä ero on työskennellä itsenäisesti tai agentin kanssa?

Agenttuurin kanssa työskentely on toki siitä mukavaa että joku muu hoitaa kaikki sopimusasiat ja neuvottelut, etenkin kun kyse on ulkomaista, tässä tapauksessa japanista, jossa sopimuskiemurat ovat monimutkaisia ja kielimuuri rajoittaa, joten on tärkeää että tässä on agentti välissä etsimässä kiinnostavia toimeksiantoja ja myös hoitamassa käytännön asiat, niin että saan itse keskittyä vain tekemiseen. Suomessa itsenäisesti työskentelyssä ei ole ongelmaa, olen itse oppinut oikein

hyväksi neuvottelijaksi ja sopimuspohjani suomessa ovat selkeitä ja hyviä, eikä hinnoista neuvottelukaan ole mielestäni lainkaan vaikeaa. Suomessa olen siis aivan tyytyväinen ilman agenttia, mutta ulkomailla joissain tapauksissa esim. lisensointi kuvioissa agentti on tosi hyödyllinen, koska tällaiset sopimukset ovat huomattavasti haastavampia sekä laatia että hoitaa.

#### 6. Oletko tyytyväinen kokemukseesi? Suosittelisitko agentin kanssa työskentelyä muille muotoilijoille?

Olen ihan tyytyväinen kokemukseeni SPCn kanssa, mutta olen myös hyötynyt siitä vähemmän kuin olisin toivonut. Ensisijaisesti syynä ovat vaikeat ajat, sillä olen ollut heidän edustettavanaan vain korona-aikaan, jolloin markkinat ovat olleet surkeat. Voin suositella kyllä heitä sinänsä, koska tiedän heidän olevan hyviä siinä mitä he tekevät ja tiedän että he tekevät parhaansa löytääkseen meille suunnittelijoille hyviä diilejä. Lisäksi olen ollut vuoden Young Finnish Designer -agentuurin edustettavana Suomessa, mutta heidän kauttaan kohdalleni ei ole osunut yhtään työtä, ja sen sijaan olen saanut paljon toimeksiantoja suomessa itsenäisesti, ja niin paljon kun heistä pidänkin, niin valitettavasti en osaa suositella heitä koska yhtään diiliä ei ole koko vuoteen syntynyt. Lisäksi Scandinavian Pattern Collection rahoitusmalli toimii niin että vain toteutuneista toimeksiannoista agenttuuri ottaa prosentuaalisen palkkion, eikä muita kuluja ole, kun taas YFD Suomessa laskuttaa kk-maksua, joten kuluja on joka tapauksessa vaikka myyntiä ei syntyisikään. Tätä kannattaa harkita agenttuuria valitessaan. Sanottakoon vielä että todella hyviin agenttuureihin on usein vaikea päästä, koska he ottavat uusia edustettavia vain vähän ja harvoin, mutta esimerkiksi kuvituksen ja kuosisuunnittelun alalla oikeasti kovia agenttuureja ovat esim. Napa, Pekka ja vaikkapa japanissa Kippis.

#### 7. Haluatko antaa jotain neuvoja nuorille muotoilijoille?

Agenttuurit ovat hyödyllisiä välikäsiä etenkin ulkomaiden / lisensointi diileissä, jotka voivat olla monimutkaisempia kuin suora myynti, mutta tosiaan kannattaa miettiä mikä on itselle sopiva agenttuuri ja agenttuurin maksuperiaate eli prosentti palkkiosta vai kk-maksu. Kotimaassa suosittelen luottamaan myös omaan neuvottelukykyyneen, koska sopimusneuvottelut eivät ole rakettitiedettä, ja kollegoilta voi aina kysyä apua sopimuspohjista ja hintatasoista. :) Kannattaa myös ehdottomasti olla tarkka oikeuksistaan ja omasta hintatasosta. Yrittäjänä täytyy muistaa että palkkio ei ole sama kuin palkka, vaan karkeasti noin puolet palkkiosta menee työkuluihin, eläkkeeseen ja veroihin, joten tämä täytyy ottaa huomioon hinnassa, töitä ei kertakaikkiaan pidä myydä liian halvalla. Puhukaa hinnoista ja sopimuksista avoimesti kollegoiden kanssa! Rahasta vaikenemisen kulttuurin on syytä jäädä menneisyyteen, sillä avoimuus ja yhteistyö hyödyttää kaikkia.

#### 8. Onko sinulla ollut joku tärkeä projekti josta haluaisit kertoa?

Tällä hetkellä tärkein projektini mammalomalaisena on vauvan hoito! <3 No mutta, olen tykännyt oikeastaan kaikista työprojekteista, joita osakseni on

sattunut, sekä kuvituksen että kuosisuunnittelun hommista. Toki yksi rakkaimmista asiakkaani on Reima, koska he ovat pysyneet vakiasiakkaina usean kauden, heidän kanssaan on ihana työskennellä, tuotteet ovat laadukkaita ja mallistoon tehtävät kuosit runsaslukuisia ja monipuolisia.

Interview by email with Minni Havas, freelance designer

Interview date: 04.11.2022

1. Kerro itsestäsi, esim. taustastasi ja mitä tahansa muuta, mitä haluat kertoa.

Olen Minni Suova, o.s. Havas. Asun ja työskentelen Helsingissä. Koulutukseltani olen vaatesuunnittelija ja muotoilija (Aalto-yliopisto, 2010). Olen myös opiskellut kuvataidetta Lahden taideinstituutissa. Työskentelin pääasiassa kuvittajana vuodesta 2008 alkaen, jolloin minua alkoi edustaa Agent Pekka kuvitusagenttuuri. Vaatesuunnittelijana työskentelin oman yrityksen ja vaatemalliston parissa muutaman vuoden, 2013 saakka. Olen edelleen tehnyt harvakseltaan kuvituksia, mutta viimeaikoina enemmän keskittynyt kuosi- ja tekstiilisuunnitteluun eri brändeille ja suunnitellut mm. Finartelle ja Vimhalle. Tämän ohessa olen tehnyt piirrosteoksia, keramiikkaveistoksia ja suunnitellut teidetekstiilejä. Olen ollut mukana useissa ryhmänäyttelyissä suomessa ja ulkomailla. Yksityisnäyttelyni ”Desiren” oli esillä helmikuussa 2022 Garden Room -galleriassa Helsingissä. Tuleva yksityisnäyttely Suomen Tukholman-instituutin galleriassa, 7.2.2023-1.4.2023

2. Milloin aloitit työskentelyn agentin kanssa ja miksi? Miten se tapahtui? Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt tällä tavalla?

Aloitin 2008 Agent Pekan listoilla. Ystäväni joka on graafinensuunnittelija, suositteli minua agenttuurin perustajalle Pablo Steffalle. Sain Pablolta kutsun liittyä agenttuurin listoille. Olen edelleen samalla agentilla, mutta teen vain muutamat isot kaupalliset kuvitus työt heidän kauttaan.

3. Minkälaisissa projekteissa olet ollut mukana? Oletko työskennellyt lähinnä Suomessa vai myös kansainvälisesti?

Kuvittajana olen työskennellyt paljon kansainvälisille tahoille, mutta nykyään teen suomalaisille yrityksille kuosisuunnittelua ja tekstiilisuunnittelua. Asiakkaan kanssa on kiva tavata kasvokkain.

4. Oletko saanut riittävästi työtä kuukausitasolla? Onko sinun pitänyt ottaa myös muuta työtä?

En ole koskaan yritykseni perustamisen jälkeen (2008-) tehnyt muuta työtä kuin näitä. Kuukausi tasolla työtä on riittävästi, kaiken vapaaksi jäävän ajan käytän taiteelliseen työskentelyyn, jota varten haen apurahoja.

5. Haluatko sanoa jotain siitä, mikä ero on työskennellä itsenäisesti tai agentin kanssa?

Agentti on loistava välikäsi isojen yritysten ja organisaatioiden kanssa työskenneltäessä, koska heillä on sopimusasiat ja hinnoittelu parhaiten hallussa. Pienempien ja tuttujen yritysten kanssa on helpompi tehdä yksin, koska maksut tulevat suoraan minulle ja ovat nopeammin hoidetut. Myös projektinhallinta on agentin ja ison firman välillä parempaa kuin jos tekisin sen itse. Pienemmissä toimeksiannoissa, on joustavampaa sopia asioista suoraan asiakkaan kanssa.

6. Oletko tyytyväinen kokemukseesi? Suositteletko agentin kanssa työskentelyä muille muotoilijoille?

Suosittelen, jos löytyy oikeanlainen agentti, joka tuntee alan. Minulla ei varsinaisesti ole muotoilu puolella agenttia, mutta uskon että vastaava kokemukseni kuvitusagenttuurin kanssa on sovellettavissa myös muotoiluun.

7. Haluatko antaa jotain neuvoja nuorille muotoilijoille?

Portfolio kannattaa miettiä hyvin, tehdä yhtenäinen kokonaisuus joka jättää selkeän kuvan tyylistä. Työn tyyli ja aiheet voivat alkaa laajentua myöhemmin, aluksi on hyvä miettiä sitä punaistalankaa. Kannattaa myös varoa alihinnoittelua, se ei ole hyväksi muille alan toimijoille. Toisaalta myös sopiva nöyryys, erityisesti kuunteleva asenne on tärkeä. Varoitin myös ylikuormittumisesta, olen itse loppuunpalanut kerran urani alussa, koska otin liikaa töitä. Viimeinen vinkki on se, että asiakas tilaa yleensä sitä mitä itse näytät portfolioissasi tai somekanavissa. Eli jos teet itsellesi mieluisen omatoimisen projektin, ja näytät sen tulokset, niin yleensä myös muut kiinnostuvat siitä mitä näytät.

8. Olet hiljattain julkistanut uuden malliston Finartelle. Mitä voit kertoa tästä kokemuksesta? Milloin aloitit yhteistyösi heidän kanssaan ja miten yhteistyö sai alkunsa?

Kokemus on ollut alusta saakka todella hyvä. Finartella ollaan hyvin avoimia luoville ideoille ja ehdotuksille. Yhteistyö alkoi kun lähestyin heitä sähköpostilla ja esittelin töitani heille, tiedustelin samalla yhteistyö mahdollisuutta. Sopivasti he olivat seuranneet töitani jo pidemmän aikaa, ja olivat myös miettineet yhteistyötä. Tein ensimmäisen malliston, "Zeniitti", heille 2019-20, johon kuului mattoja ja

tyynyjä. Prosessi on lyhyesti se että minä ehdotan kuvioita ja suunnitelmia ja he miettivät mikä parhaiten sopisi muuhun mallistoon. Kun mallit on valittu alamme teknisen vaiheen, jossa mallikappaleita tarkistetaan ja lopulta hyväksytään tuotantoon.

Interview by email with Sachiko Imaizumi from the Scandinavian Pattern Collection, andfika Co., Ltd.

Interview date: 05.10.2022

1. Would you like to briefly introduce the Scandinavian Pattern Collection agency?

I started the project "Scandinavian Pattern Collection" (SPC) with my business partner in Sweden, who is a Japanese lady living there for 20 years. SPC is the registered trademark owned by Andfika. We represent approximately 30 designers under the brand name. We sell a lot of patterns in our collection of SPC submitted from our designers. We sometimes arrange for a commission work with our clients, working with an individual designer without the brand name, in addition to SPC.

2. What drove you to start the agency and what are the main areas you sell patterns to?

In our market, we saw big potentials of pattern designs. Our business field is various, from fashion to home, stationery, and small gift items.

3. Your market is very distinct, as you connect Japanese brands with Scandinavian designers. Do you have a certain aesthetic you follow?

We don't have any specific guidelines to find a deal. We just listen to each designer's preference and see their strength, and try a match-making for them.

4. How does the agency work? Do you have ready projects or does the client select designs from your portfolio? Do you provide your designers with specific briefs? Can all of your designers participate in all projects? Do you have specific projects for particular designers?

30 designers are quite many, so it is not easy to let all the designers join a certain project. How a client picks up whose patterns depends on each case, but we in many cases help them to pick up what would be most appropriate for the project. Each designer has their strength, so a specific designer is not always No.1. Our mission is who would match which company.

5. According to your website, there are 35 designers in the agency. Is there enough work for everyone?

For some designers, work might not enough, and we should get more deals, but many companies approach us because we have various designers in different styles.

6. Would you like to open up a discussion about pricing and fees? For example, what is the percentage the agency receives for a pattern licensed, compared to the designer? (It is understandable if this information is sensitive, but it would be great to know) Do the designers receive up front payments as well as royalties?

The fee structure is confidential, so sorry we cannot share the details with you, but our basic structure is licensing, which means royalties with guaranteed amount.

7. How is recruitment done? How do you select designers for your agency?

We don't do recruitment. When a designer would like to work with us, they approach, and we consider. Actually, we already have a lot of designers, so recently a new designer cannot join and has to wait for a while.

8. Would you like to say a few things about your marketing strategy?

Japanese people dream about the life in Finland, as the happiest country in the world, so we introduce each designer's daily life by photos, in addition to presenting their patterns.

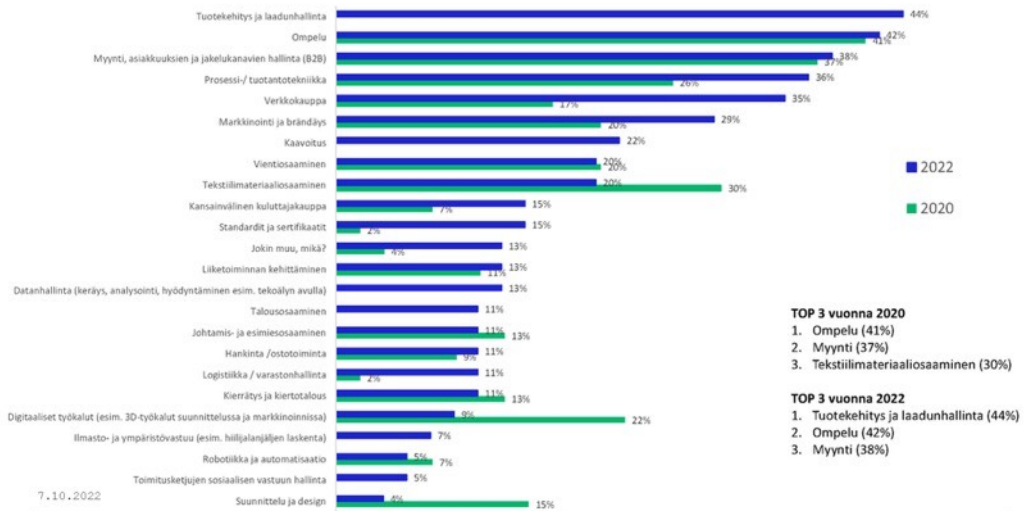
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about the agency and its operations?

Making a designer and a client feel happy is the only thing we try to do. A designer is an individual human being as well as a professional designer, so sometimes they are good, but sometimes they might fall into a slump, or their designs change. We try to establish a good relationship so that we can be frank and honest with each other.

## Suomen Tekstiili ja Muoty Ry, Employer Survey results

The information was received by email on 07.10.2022

**Uusien palkattavien henkilöiden osaamistarve seuraavalle viidelle vuodelle.**  
**Vuosien 2020 ja 2022 osaamiskartoituksen vastaukset (kaikkia kohtia ei ollut 2020 kyselyssä).**



Lähde: STJM osaamiskartoitus jäsenyrityksille 2020 ja 2022