

Turning design into a game

An online platform is giving budding talent and seasoned professionals a new way to interact with industry, Li Yingxue reports.

Peng Xiangbin started his first job as a graphic designer in Beijing at the end of July, after moving to the capital a few days earlier. What helped Peng, a fresh graduate from Heilongjiang University, land the job after a week of job-hunting were two logo design projects that impressed the interviewers.

The projects, one for a financial institution and one for a social app, are being used by the companies. "As a college student, it's difficult to have a design portfolio," says Peng. "I've done internships during summer vacations, but only had the chance to do some basic work."

Peng bagged the two design projects by winning open competitions on Whale Design, an online platform that brings together companies and designers.

Whale Design, which launched in 2017, takes companies' design requests and floats competitions for designers, with the winner being allowed on work on the company's project and earning a bonus as well. Peng's first win came on his second attempt when he took part in a contest and won a prize of 20,000 yuan (\$2,933), which gave him the chance to work directly with the clients.

"I had no experience of talking to clients before, and the staff at Whale Design helped me," says the 24-year-old. Besides taking part in Whale's design contests, Peng also uses the platform to see other designers' works. "I learn from them, comment on their work (on the platform) and



Top: Wang Simin (third from right), founder of Whale Design, at a meeting with colleagues. Below: Some of the winning designs (from left) — logo applied on name cards, digital invitations, and packaging. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

discuss ideas," Peng says. Designer Luan Peng's talent was spotted by a friend who suggested he participate in the Whale Design competition, which he did, and later he got a job there. He likes the platform as the background of the designers does not matter. "It is a place that gives young designers a chance to show their talent," says Luan, who won a contest to design a logo for a children's education company on the platform. "They sent our work to the kids who studied at the educational insti-

tion, which makes the result more credible." Luan, 24, moved to Beijing just before Peng, after he graduated from the Dalian Neusoft University of Information this June. "As design straddles art and science, and a designer's work is not regular, Whale Design is a way for the best designers to be selected for a project," Luan says. "The platform is quite new and I want to see how far it can go. Besides, I can join competitions at the same time." Whale Design has competitions in various categories, including graph-

ics, illustration, clothes, space and products, so Luan says he can learn from his colleagues — professional designers in other fields. One of those is Wang Simin, founder of Whale Design. "He is good at balancing design and presenting it which I need to work on," says Luan. Before he came back to China in 2015, Wang, 31, used to work at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, an architecture, urban planning and engineering firm in New York. Wang studied civil engineering at the University of Michigan, and then went

to study architecture at Cornell University, where he gained his master's degree in 2014. He set up an institute of design in 2013, to teach designers online. Then he found that while there were many good designers in China, they could not find proper projects to display their talent. Equally, companies struggled to find qualified designers. "China has about 20 million designers, and my intention was to find out a way to match good designers with companies," says Wang. Whale Design is like a game, says Wang. "So, all the registered designers are gamers who join open competitions and gain points. Then, members with more points can take part in invitational tournaments and closed competitions." Wang says they don't look at the backgrounds of their designers. "Only work talks." So far, more than 3,000 designers are on the platform, with about 80 percent of them in full-time jobs. The platform is also a place for designers who want to change fields. For example, if an architect wants to do graphic design, he or she can take part in a logo competition to see how it goes. Meanwhile, Wang and his team are developing the platform to provide a whole service chain for companies, so that "the designers can focus on design, and we will help companies complete their projects." Wang Xiaoyu, the winner of the sign design contest for Peking Academy, is working with Wang Simin's team to complete the design. "I've taken part in many design competitions; Whale Design has the most categories. It gives me a chance to bring what I learned in the US back to China, and let me understand how projects work here," says the 28-year-old, who completed his master's degree in architecture at Columbia University in 2016. As for Whale Design founder Wang Simin, he feels it is a bit of a loss that he does not have much time to design. "I wish I could be a designer on the platform," he says.

Contact the writer at liyngxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Playlist

BOOKS Mao's mottos

Kong Dongmei, the late chairman Mao Zedong's granddaughter, was at the 28th National Book Expo in late July in Shenzhen to meet the readers of the paperback and hardcover editions of her book, *Mao Zedong Mottos*, printed by People's Publishing House. The book contains 360 quotes, covering four themes, offering a shortcut to Mao's thoughts. Kong says the original sources of the quotes are stated for further reference. Work on an English version of the book is in progress.



Lessons for the 'now'

Israeli writer Yuval Noah Harari has made a big name for himself in China with *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. The Chinese version of Harari's latest book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, by China Citic Press, which was translated as *A Brief History of the Present*, explores neither the past nor the future, but focuses on the 21st century, and its challenges, like artificial intelligence and climate change.



Food matters



In his four-volume book, *Tastes*, published by Qingdao Publishing House, Chua Lam, the Singapore-born, Hong Kong-based gourmet and food writer, focuses on food stories and anecdotes from China, Japan, Europe and South America. The series is a collection of his latest articles. For Chua, 77, it is not only food that matters, but the attitude to life.

Better beings

Ted Dintersmith, an American education philanthropist who has won awards for his education-themed documentary, *Most Likely to Succeed*, spent a year in 2015 exploring 200 schools in the United States. In the Chinese version of his book, *What School Could Be*, recently released by Zhejiang People's Publishing House, Dintersmith says that both Chinese and American people value the betterment of their future generation. In the book, he uses more than 70 anecdotes, to offer solutions to problems faced by educators. His solution is called PEAK which stands for "purpose, essentials, agency and knowledge".



MEI JIA

Pack all these hot picks for the beach

By KATHY WITT

Ah. Sunscreen-scented days and nights spent cuddling over a good book, a soundtrack of ocean waves and kids' laughter playing in the background. Nothing beats a summer road trip to the beach — a much-anticipated outing for so many families that can only be enhanced by tossing a few choice travel goods into the back of the car. Stake your claim to a stretch of sand with the Beachbub All-In-One Beach Umbrella System (\$139.85). Beachbub is a snap to set up: Insert the pole upright through the Build-A-Base; attach the two wings to form a pouch and fill with sand; attach the third wing and stuff sand against the sides for stability. Voila! Cooling shade and sun protection. It comes complete with durable and lightweight umbrella, the base kit, sturdy oversized carry bag, sand

scoop shovel, towel hook and a tool to help create a compact hole to easily push the pole into the sand. The whole beach-ready kit and kaboodle is very manageable and weighs less than 10 pounds (4.5 kilograms). No need to bake in the sun or rent an umbrella. Base colors include yellow, blue and green. You've created a comfy shelter from the sun's bright rays; now add a piece of luxury with a sand-free beach mat. It's paradise found with the patented Sandlite Mat (\$49.99), a soft and comfortable woven mat that stays sand-free. It may look just like any other towel or picnic blanket spread out on the beach, but it won't get all gritty with sand, nor will it fly up with a good wind, whipping sand all over your lotioned-up legs. Spill your tall cool one? No worries. The liquid will bead on the mat's surface and wipe off easily.

Sand doesn't hide in the folds of the mat, either, so you won't drag sand home with you. Offered in a variety of summer-fun colors and patterns, the mat is quick-drying and lightweight, and it folds neatly into a small carry bag. Capture all the fun of a beach getaway with the Polaroid Snap Touch Instant Print Digital Camera with Touchscreen Display (\$179). Point, shoot, print, share: Smudge-proof 5-by-7.6-cm prints are ready in under a minute, thanks to the "Zink" zero ink print technology. Pics can be posted to most surfaces with peel-back adhesive paper and also saved to the Snap Touch for uploading to computer and social media platforms. No digital screens, convoluted menus or sluggish uploads to deal with. Peer through the viewfinder, snap the button — have print in hand. Blending the nostalgia of the

old Polaroid Instamatic with a tech-savvy instant-print digital camera, the Snap Touch lets you take selfies with a built-in selfie mirror and group shots with a self-timer feature. Download the free Polaroid mobile app and have fun creating with access to stickers, filters, borders and other easy photo editing options. Best of all: No computer connections are needed. You simply send photos to a smartphone via Bluetooth connectivity. It is all the fun of a photo booth, but in a compact size that tucks neatly into purse or pocket. Pack a book or, in this case, a book series the whole family can get engrossed in to pass the time in the car, on the beach or before bedtime. *The Nocturnals* is a critically acclaimed series that introduces three animal pals: Dawn the fox,

Bismark the sugar glider and Tobin the pangolin, and their many adventures, plus enough plot twists to keep everybody hooked through all four books: *The Mysterious Abductions*, *The Ominous Eye*, *The Fallen Star* and *The Hidden Kingdom* (\$15.99 each). Authors Tracey Hecht and Sarah Fieber have created a nighttime landscape filled with strange and mysterious happenings, danger and drama, and humor (and cliffhangers) aplenty, as the unlikely and endearing trio test their mettle against disappearing animals, giant beasts, poisoned fruit and vanishing watering holes. But the fun doesn't stop when the books are closed; there is an entire summer reading kit, all based on the characters in its series and perfect for middle grade readers and younger siblings, that extends reading fun to games and activities, including word searches, matching games, face painting and other arts and crafts, and more.

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