

# DESIGN LIFE NOW

NATIONAL DESIGN TRIENNIAL 2006

## Podcast Transcript: Chip Kidd

I am Chip Kidd. I am a graphic designer and writer in New York City.

*The Good Life* is the most recent novel by Jay McInerney. *The Good Life* is basically about a group of well-to-do New Yorkers in both society and the financial world, who are sort of trying to sort out their lives, and then 9/11 happens and takes some of their lives, and it leaves the others sort of trying to make sense of it all.

So what I wanted to do was find an image that would reflect a sort of domestic scene, but also one of the tragedy of that day, and, of course, many photographs were taken that day, and some of the ones that stuck in my mind were of the surrounding buildings and businesses that were covered in ash, covered in the ash of the buildings and the people that all burned up.

And one of the photographs was of this woman's coffee table, in which she had a bowl and a fork and magazines, and, obviously, she was having her breakfast at the coffee table when this happened, and she had to abandon it, and then came back later and photographed it, covered in this sort of gray/brown ash. So it's this perfectly tranquil domestic theme that is interrupted by this horrible thing that happened.

The novel, *Father's Day* (Philip Galanes), is about a young man's coming to grips with his father's suicide, there's a scene in which the son finds this yellow sweater—that was his father's, and I decided to just focus on that. For the title and the authors' names, I would put it all on the label in the collar of the sweater.

I decided to get an actual label made, and I found this little outfit somewhere in the Midwest. I phoned them up and told them what style of label I wanted. First of all, she said, "You realize, we do labels for sweaters, not labels for novels," and I said, "Yes, I understand that. That's fine," and then she said, "When would you like to have this?" And I said, "Well, how soon can I have it?" And she said, "Well, the normal time is four to six weeks, but you could have it in a week, although I don't think you'd want to do that." And I said, "Well, why not?" And she said, "Well, because that will cost you an extra \$25.00." And I said, "Well, you know, I think I could probably spare the expense."

Augusten Burroughs writes these sort of personal essays about things that happen to him. The book, *Dry*, is a memoir of his time in rehab. He was a very successful young advertising executive in New York, and he was an alcoholic, and he had a serious problem, and his coworkers gave him an ultimatum that he would have to go into rehab or be fired, and they said, "P.S., you'll probably die because you will drink yourself to death."

I tried to make the cover itself look like it was in denial the way he was. I wanted to make it look as if all of the type were made of something water-soluble, so it looks like—it's literally running, like mascara on a woman's face in the rain or if she's crying.

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For *Magical Thinking* (Augusten Burroughs), I wanted to present a scenario where, the impossible is happening in terms of the physical properties of a given thing; in this case, water, again, and the title, *Magical Thinking*, refers to the idea that you can make things happen with your brain simply by thinking about them that aren't really possible in the real world.

So it's an image of somebody pouring a glass of water, pouring water down into a glass, but halfway down, before it gets to the glass, it literally makes a U-turn and starts to go up towards the ceiling, and it's done in a very photo-realistic way by the photographer, Geoff Spear, so that it looks really real.

Design is a response to a specific problem.

You are given a problem to solve, and then you let the problem itself tell you what your solution is.