

# A NEW SPIN ON TRADITION

Guided by school mentors and a love of handcrafted excellence, George Brown grad student Petra Cuschieri wins the AACE Award for a rebrand that turns tradition contemporary

by Alison Garwood-Jones



**Student AACE**  
**Petra Cuschieri/George Brown College**  
Toronto  
[petrac.ca/georgebrown.ca](http://petrac.ca/georgebrown.ca)

▲ *Cuff & Collar: The aim of this project was to restore value to a seemingly obsolete skill and service by creating a functional and accessible brand. Petra Cuschieri created a strong and versatile graphic language for use across a variety of applications. The design makes reference to a contemporary aesthetic while maintaining a sense of tradition.*



George Brown design grad Petra Cuschieri took top honours in the student category at the AACE Awards for her thesis project, "Cuff & Collar," a rebrand of a 30-year-old tailor shop. The idea was simple: Restore the value of a seemingly obsolete trade by preserving and promoting a beautiful skill and the tradition behind it.

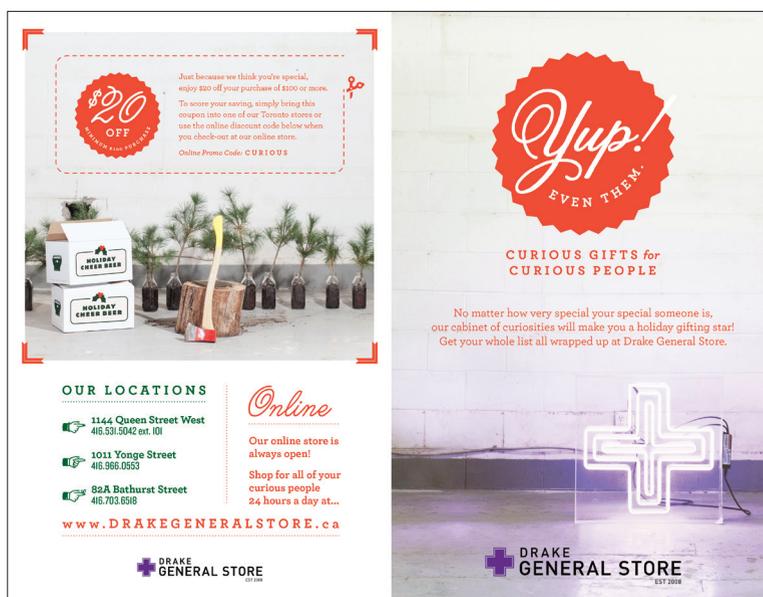
Using Adobe Illustrator, Cuschieri created a new business logo: A simple orange-and-white line drawing resembling a coaster motif that features a freshly starched Oxford button-down shirt encircled in Monosten type. For continuity, Cuschieri die-cut the font onto price tags, business cards and office notepads, then laser-etched it onto wooden hangers and tailor pencils.

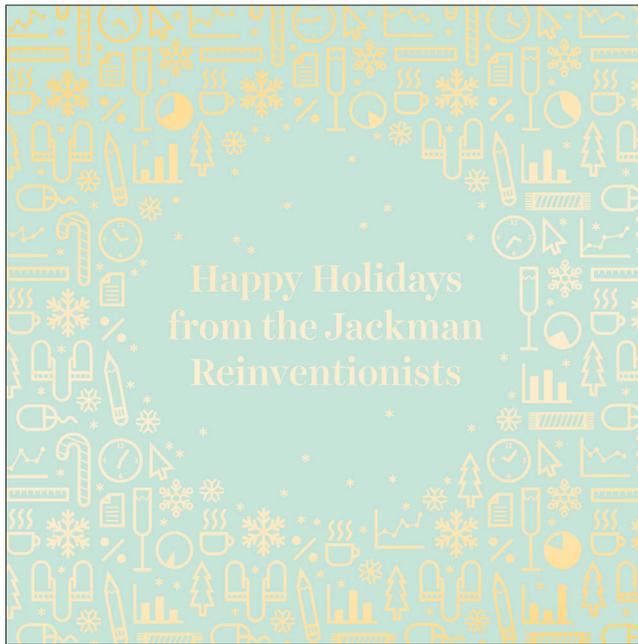
More than just a cosmetic makeover, the project offered a new business strategy. Tapping into the spirit of the age and our revived interest in handmade crafts, Cuschieri reconfigured the layout of the store from a one-man workshop into a community sewing hub, where people of all ages could gather to learn to stitch, mend and fashion new clothes, and maybe even get some respite from their digitally-driven lives. She screen-printed three instructional posters in the same friendly and contemporary style, and hung them about the space. "They teach basic sewing skills," says Cuschieri.

Guiding Cuschieri's efforts were professor Paul Bonsell of Toronto's George Brown College and Paddy Harrington, the executive creative director at Bruce Mau Design. "All our students graduating in design have an industry mentor for their thesis," explains Luigi Ferrara, director of George Brown's School of Design. The idea is to teach them the project management skills they'll need in the field and to keep them thinking in terms of what constitutes a viable business idea. "If we can get them to think from all angles, not just the creative and technical, they'll have a better understanding of what their clients needs are and how to meet them."

Describing how she benefited from her two meetings and final presentation in Harrington's

► *Drake General Store Holiday Campaign: A fun identity and promo piece based on a concept of multiple personalities. The challenge was to create a versatile system to organize portrait, product and information for each page, while maintaining consistency.*





▲ *Jackman Holiday Card: A mix of work-related and festive/winter-themed icons in mint green and gold (a soft and subtle nod to the season) were the perfect solution for a unique holiday greeting.*

▲ *Salerno Lake: A flexible set of logos designed for multiple applications, including event posters and T-shirts. The fish-hook detail and colour scheme evoke nature and cottage life, while the coordinates and large-mouth bass are specific to the lake itself.*

▼ *Zeus Tour Poster: Cuschieri designed the poster in a letterpress/wood-type style to emulate the band's classic rock-'n'-roll sound.*



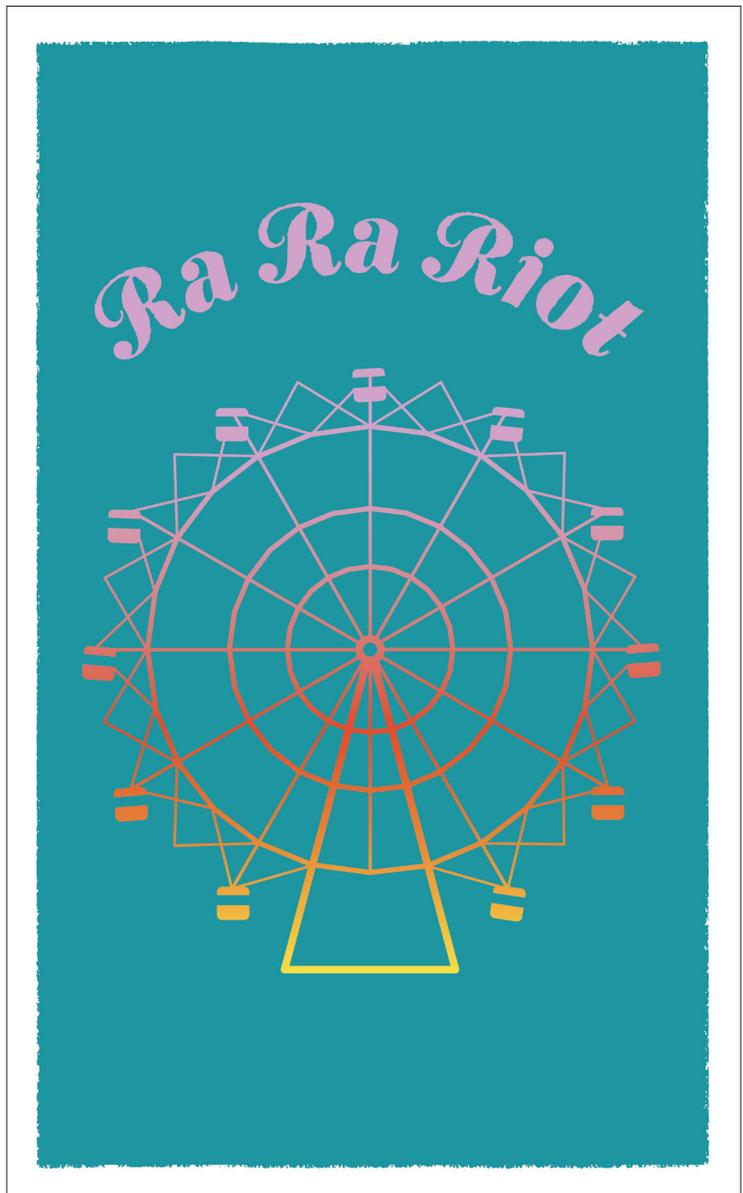
office, Cuschieri says, “Instead of telling me how things should look, or specifically what to do, Paddy talked a lot about creating a clear alignment between concept and strategy.” He emphasized doing lots of research, knowing how to explain the relevant issues and then delivering solutions that documented her process, including why she chose certain colours and shapes. “He also reminded me that being a talented designer would never be enough if you’re not able to talk about and defend your work. It all goes back to good storytelling.”

Cuschieri describes the challenges she overcame to come up with the right thesis topic and a simple, award-winning branding solution. “I was supposed to graduate in 2010, but was having a hard time finishing a different thesis I’d started.” She describes that project as an overly conceptual proposal geared to teach kids basic design principles through typographic building blocks and colouring books. The idea, however, proved too ambitious, and would eventually overwhelm Cuschieri. Needing a break, she took a design job with the independent record label Arts & Crafts.

“It was pretty much my dream job at the time.” In those two years, Cuschieri got invaluable experience creating hand-drawn lettering and hand-rendered typography on a number of albums and concert posters for bands, including Broken Social Scene. “I wasn’t planning on going back to school,” she says, “but it started to weigh on me, so I went back and finished one class, then changed thesis topics.” The second time around, she adds, “I chose something simple and I really had fun with it.”

Assessing Cuschieri’s tailor rebrand, Ferrara believes there is a big appetite among the generation raised digitally to re-explore the analog world, and to see how it blends with new technologies. “With Petra’s thesis project, what’s so beautiful about it is that it feels contemporary, and yet, there’s something so





▲ *Pony Tricks*: Hand-drawn text, texture and bold colour were utilized to communicate the intimate and expressive nature of a collection of acoustic songs.

▲ *Quilt Pattern/Screen Print*: Part of a series of screen-printed patterns based on traditional quilt blocks. A fondness for textile design and needlework lay behind this personal project of Cuschieri's.

▶ *Ra Ra Riot Screen-Printed Poster*: In this simple yet vibrant representation, the Ferris wheel and bright colour palette express the energy and youthfulness of the band.

▼ *The Rucksack Willies*: The tone was set for this album in a package design based on the theme of letter writing. The beautiful photographs, well-worn colour scheme, hand-drawn typography and old ephemera work together to evoke the nostalgic and wistful thoughts present in the band's songs.



analog about it," says Ferrara. "I find that bridge fascinating."

With many students, Ferrara observes, "there's an inverse thing happening: They're more obsessed with the future than the past, so they're being inspired in a reverse direction and showing a total lack of awareness for historical currents." Cuschieri, by contrast, brings tradition forward and adds a fresh spin. The best work always does.

Since graduating, Cuschieri took a job as a junior designer at Jackman Reinvention, a Toronto-based management consulting firm specializing in retail reinvention, with a tagline: "If

you don't like change, you'll like irrelevance even less." It's a perfect fit for her skills: "On the creative side, we do branding and package design, which I really like, but we also do all the retail interior design"—all the things her thesis covered. She pauses and adds, "I'm sure my AACE award helped land me this spot." For now, she's thrilled to be a working designer.

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To see more of Petra Cuschieri's work, go to the Current Issue section of [appliedartsmag.com](http://appliedartsmag.com)