

Creative Creatures

The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.



18 / Godfried Konings, graphic designer, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Really, I do not want to write about Godfried Konings, but rather about his daughter Iza who is on her way to become a creative creature herself. Iza is my granddaughter, sort of. I have known her since she was one or two years old, already then a very Dutch blonde with great intellect, great creativity, a great smile and a great lopsided eye you cannot forget. I love her. One day, I picked her up at kindergarten when she was not yet six and had politely requested to be taken out to dinner at a sushi place. She proved to be the most expensive blonde I took to a Japanese restaurant, ever, for she kept ordering new selections of sushi, plate after plate, as if they did not cost an arm and a leg.

Her father Godfried I met ten years after he and his wife Arian had emigrated from the Netherlands to America. They and Ans and I left Holland in the same year, 1994. They first settled in New York City; we began our odyssey in the western states. We eventually met in New Mexico because a mutual friend thought we should meet. Surprise: I learned that Godfried had been an intern at the design studios in Amsterdam where I, one of the partners, was just about to leave for another endeavor in 1986. I did not remember him, but he remembered me. We found we had lots of mutual acquaintances and former colleagues to gossip about. And we became friends who tried to get together as much as possible in New Mexico to drink beer and cognac and criticize in a very Dutch way called “kankeren” first the country we originated from, then the country where we had decided to settle, or vice versa. We agreed on each and every detail, and late at night we would drive home, he to his mountain split-level house down from the ski valley north of Santa Fe, I to my desert abode near Abiquiu, both feeling very content

with our shared world view and knowing without the slightest of doubts ours was the only just one. I miss those evenings. Since I moved to Kansas, we were only able to meet three times, in Santa Fe, and once, luckily for a couple of days, in Matfield Green when Godfried, Arian, Iza and her younger brother Jan for their first time came out to the Midwest, “to inspect this prairie of yours.” I am happy to say they wrote a favorable report.

Godfried was educated at St.Joost Art Academy in Breda, then offering the best graphic design education in northern Europe. In New York he was commissioned by a couple of financial institutions such as JP Morgan to create annual reports, brochures, and corporate identity programs. After he moved to Santa Fe, he started ARGK Graphic Design, Interactive Design, Identity Branding, and worked for the Santa Fe Art Institute, SITE Santa Fe, UBS, Globicity, Forest Guild, Hyperion, Art in Transit, College of Santa Fe, NM State Investment Council, and many other clients before he, with Arian, who is a marketing expert, started a second company called Oots!

Essentially, Made by Oots!™ is a design and marketing company of products aimed at children. Godfried designs, Arian sells—to market leaders such as Target, YoYo, Barnes & Noble, AllModern, Abe’s Market, Offbeat Products, and many museum stores, as well as through Amazon. Their “All American Classic” yet eco-friendly lunchbox became one of their success products presented by Oprah Winfrey, in the Today Show, in the New York Times, and elsewhere.

After their first successful years they extended their product range with more “Dutch Design,” this time also by young designers such as Suseela Gorter (‘Flat Flowers’), and by Tom Welling (‘ByeByePet’) and Ben Fritz, who created a smart ‘Woodmobiel’ that can be turned into different vehicles or structures by kids themselves. “One day, Ben was asked by one of his grandchildren: ‘Can we build a house?’ That sounded like fun, but with WHAT? Ben looked for something that fit the bill, but couldn’t find anything to help him build that house. So, he started developing his own do-it-yourself kit that would let him and his grandchildren build life-size wooden toys. ‘Woodmobiel’ was born and became a big hit in the Netherlands with kids and (grand) parents alike, with (pre) schools as well as aftercare facilities.” In America, Iza and Jan were involved with the test audience.

“Dutch Design” has quite a name around the world. The Dutch were great font designers ever since the printing press was invented and graphic pioneers from the moment publications started to reach larger publics, way before WWII. Art, architecture and design already received broad support from national and local government in the 1930s. Most famous is the promotion by the former PTT, Dutch post office and telephone services, whose policy to engage young visionaries over the years brought about an immense treasure of unconventional art, architecture, product design, and well-designed print that became an inspiration for other government agencies and for the private sector. As a result the Dutch art and design climate was envied by colleague artists and designers in many other countries, and “Dutch Design” became an international trademark worth money in the bank. “I do miss this favorable climate,” says Godfried. “It allows for perfection, experimentation, innovation—a permanent feeling of momentum—and it delivers so much efficient beauty ... It stimulates an ever present avant garde.”

Ton Haak, January 2013

Photo: Jan on one of his “Woodmobiel” creations