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## A Conversation With Jacob Slevin

A designer and an entrepreneur, Jacob Slevin has succeeded in what many hope, but few succeed in doing – at just 26 years old he is a self-employed CEO of a dynamic, fast-growing company devoted to web products, the first of which is Designer Pages.

A free social application for finding and managing products in architecture and design, Slevin co-founded Designer Pages with his long-time friend Avi Flombaum, with whom he also publishes a highly-trafficked architecture and design blog called 3rings.

Trained as an architect at Cornell University where he also studied real estate finance, his background includes stints at Frederic Schwartz Architects and FXFOWLE Architects. We spoke to Slevin about what it takes to branch-out on your own, how to build a following, points to consider when working with a designer/architect, picking-out salon-appropriate furniture, and more.



*When did you first realize you might be able to make a career out of your passion for design?*

I admittedly wasn't sure how I'd apply my architecture background to my career. I knew in my gut that I wasn't going to be happy entering into an architecture firm and spending my early years as a CAD monkey (not that there's anything wrong with that)... it just wasn't for me. So it was somewhat "luck" that I stumbled upon DesignerPages.com. I was working on my thesis in Cornell's New York City studio and concurrently working at FXFOWLE Architects. One of my roles at FX was to help update the product and material library. It just seemed like such a tedious project without any end in sight, and worst of all, it was one of those assignments where most of the work I'd contribute would all be outdated a few months later. That's where the idea for DesignerPages.com first emerged. I was fortunate to have a close friend working as the Chief Technology Officer for a hedge fund in New York City, and when he heard this idea, he likewise became very excited. And the rest is history...

*In a few words, how would you describe your aesthetic?*

When designing a space, I'd probably contend my aesthetic is mostly minimalist and modern... let's say simple but meaningful design. Having moved from architecture now to web-architecture, I like to think I bring that same flavor to the web.



*What does it take to start your own company? What made you feel like you were ready to make the jump?*

I don't think I ever said to myself, "I'm ready to start a company." In fact, saying that at first was a little self-threatening. I knew I had an idea, in particular, an idea I felt might be able to change how designers work, and for me it was more about fleshing out that idea... almost a study of industry behavior and how I might influence that behavior. I knew that if I were able to improve a workflow, the money would be there. But soon I realized this idea was bigger than I'd initially contemplated, and further, we would need money to continue developing this idea. So I was forced to quickly explore market size, monetization strategies, and more. It was a quick and steep learning curve... we raised the first \$350,000 in six weeks, mostly from Presidents and Principals of highly-regarded architecture and design firms in New York City. That was probably the smartest thing I ever did... I knew I needed support, guidance, and validation, from experienced professionals whom would help propel this concept forward. I'd probably advise any entrepreneur looking to make the jump into starting a company to likewise identify "mentors" to help coach the company out the door.

*Do you think of yourself as a business person or as a designer?*

My mother is trained as an interior designer and my father works on Wall Street. So growing up, I always thought of myself as a business-savvy designer. Today, my responsibilities as CEO of Designer Pages encompasses both worlds... that's probably why I love my job so much.

*What do you think salon owners should consider when deciding what architect and designer to work with?*

My guess is anyone coming to a salon values their appearance, and wants to feel sexy. So a salon owner is meant to feed into that desire... possibly even tease and augment that desire. One way to make people feel sexy is to deliver a sexy experience. You'll need a good architect and designer to help craft and deliver that package. Warning: it may cost more money in the short term, but I promise it will be worth every dollar.

*What should they consider when picking-out furniture for their space?*

This is just my practical side speaking, but I'd want to select furniture that "wears" well considering the context. I'd probably suggest dark colors to avoid staining from hair products and/or coloring. I'd probably suggest a fabric you can wipe clean with a sponge. Then for furniture that does not interface with human contact, I'd probably look for a lighter palette. I think there's probably a lot of opportunity to play with reflection and responsive furniture also to somewhat compliment all the mirrors I'd expect to see on the walls.

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## Sophisticated Salon Design

Aspiring world famous stylist in need of inspiration for your next salon design concept? Look no further! A curated selection of vanities, mirrors, shelving, swivel seating, chandeliers and flooring are sure to get you started!

<p><b>Schonbrunn Vanity Set 3440/SC</b></p>	<p><b>34" Southcrest Console Vanity C ...</b></p>	<p><b>Antiqued Curved Mirror</b></p>	<p><b>Diamond Mirror</b></p>
<p><b>Elise Frameless Mirror</b></p>	<p><b>Elana Mirror</b></p>	<p><b>Crystal Chandelier</b></p>	<p><b>Small Crystal Chandelier model: ...</b></p>
<p><b>T04 "Imperio"</b></p>	<p><b>White Ella</b></p>	<p><b>Emily H Swivel</b></p>	<p><b>#166SWIVA</b></p>

A collection of salon furniture on designerpages.com

*If you were to open your own salon, what would it look like?*

I'd like to play with varying attitude and experience to match a particular hair styling aesthetic. I've always thought that a salon could break out from having the same aesthetic throughout. I imagine every salon in the world has clientele with varying style trends... funky, formal, simple, colorful, angry, etc. So it would be fun (at least for me) to play off that... to design distinctive worlds of experience living in harmony. I'd love to own a salon where a client could identify the stylist he/she might want to work

with based on where their station sits in these competing worlds within a salon. And then of course because I'm a pseudo-narcissist, as the salon owner I'd want my own world to myself... it would have to be bigger than all the other competing worlds, but it would only have one station, possibly constructed of platinum. Now I think my imagination is getting the better of me.

*Designer Pages has a large and respected audience. What are some of the key ways you were able to get the word out about Designer Pages? Are there three things you think a salon owner could leverage from your learning of building an audience... a network... a community... in order to build their business?*

Probably most important, be innovative! People like to see progress. Next, be loud. It's very important that anyone starting their own business enjoys the necessary exercise of self-promotion. After launching this company, I quickly became a twitter-addict and likewise try to upload mobile photos to Facebook every day. And lastly, look to collaborate with other forward thinking people and companies... there's always a lot of opportunity for cross-promotion and synergy even if you need to look far and wide.

*What do you think the best way is for a salon to leverage social media? How else can salons use online to further their business?*

Salons can use social media in an infinite number of ways to expand their brand awareness and build loyalty among new and existing clients. Whether you're creating a fan group on Facebook that offers martinis the first Saturday of every month or experimenting with unconventional "hashtags" on Twitter to bring your brand into new conversations streams online - there is absolutely a piece of the social media pie for everyone. Personally, I'd recommend developing a clever, crowd-sourced PR stunt like "Send us a picture of you on your absolute worst hair day for a chance to win an \$800 haircut by [insert famous stylist name here]." Did I mention that social media is also free?

*How do you look for new growth opportunities?*

Opportunity is everywhere - you just need to keep your eyes open for it and to start strategizing ways to create something meaningful once you've identified what direction you're going in.

*Does it ever frustrate you that you can't reach more people than you already do? What do you do in that situation?*

This is going to sound silly, but when I become frustrated about not being able to reach more people, I look for strategies to reach more people. It's as plain as that. Hitting a wall (in this instance "reach boundaries") forces someone to discover better solutions. There are no secret tricks of the trade. I wish there were, but there aren't. All the avenues are clearly defined. It's just a question of being clever and exploring untouched territory in a way that's different than your competitors.

*What's your favorite design shop in NYC?*

Probably the Future Perfect. I'm partial to up-and-coming Brooklyn based designers.

*Favorite architect/building in NYC? In the world?*

I've always loved the Machado and Silvetti pavilion in Robert F. Wager Jr. Park in Battery Park City. I also love The Blue Building designed by Bernard Tschumi. Internationally, I've always loved the Pompidou Centre in Paris designed by Renzo Piano... I suppose I'm not alone. I also really love Moshe Safdie's re-design of the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Memorial Campus.

*What does your apartment look like?*

Very contemporary. The palette is red, black, and white, incidentally our company's color scheme. Bamboo hardwood floors. White marble countertops. Deep sitting window sills, also with white marble countertops. Oversize ceramic tiles in the bathroom. I have a 52inch TV plugged into a Mac Mini, which operates as the brain of my apartment. And lastly, a long view of the Statue of Liberty from the 38th floor in midtown isn't too shabby either... well, only shabby when both elevators in the building break (which has happened once).

*What's the best gift you've ever received?*

My brother and sister teamed up and bought me a beautiful compass set in mahogany wood. I think that's a gift I'll probably have for the rest of my life... can't say that about anything else.

*Who cuts your hair?*

Rino in Flushing, NY. I've been going there since I was a kid.

*Anyone's hair you wish you had?*

Brad Pitt in Legends of the Fall, but not forever... just a few months or so.

*What is the first thing you notice when you walk into a service oriented space (i.e. salon, spa, restaurant)?*

*One rule of thumb you think everyone should follow? One thing everyone should avoid?*

I always notice the ceiling heights... I tend to dislike cramped feeling spaces.

*When I type in hair on designerpages.com some interesting things pop up. If you were to design a whole hair salon off the site could you do it? Could you provide the links of the items you would choose?*

You can build anything with the products listed on our site. [Click here to see the collection we created for you.](#)