

MICHAEL AINSWORTH/Staff Photographer

Designer Bryan Peterson demonstrates that good design is where art meets commerce.

PROFILE

# Brand Man

Bryan Peterson employs all of his artistic talents to create compelling design

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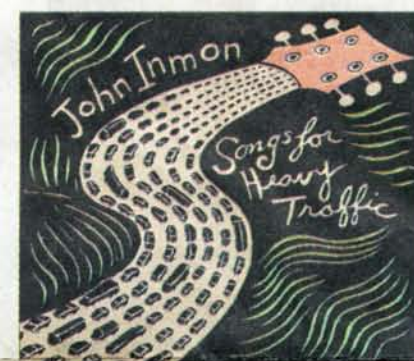
**W**e live in an age of design. No company underscores the credo better than Apple, whose iPod, iPhone and iPad have revolutionized personal electronics. Increasingly, design is a necessary, albeit elusive component for corporations, universities, musicians and a staggering array of products. Design can be the difference between failure and success.

"It's the first point of contact," says Bryan Peterson, who owns a seven-person graphic design firm, Peterson Ray & Co., a West End mainstay since 1985. In addition to being one of Dallas' top graphic designers, one whose clients have included TXU Energy, Atmos Energy and Centex Corp., Peterson is a boogie-woogie pianist who plays with an Austin rock band.

Whether it's a CD cover or a corporate brochure or a university package, "branding," Peterson says, is the raw material "of any public impression. It's what you hear, what you see, what people talk about. It's your message, your service, your collateral, your logo."

Art, he says, plays an increasingly vital role in the process.

Like a songwriter or painter — Peterson is both — a graphic designer



Album cover designed by Bryan Peterson

has the mandate, he says, of figuring out first his central idea or theme. Once you do, "everything tends to fall into place."

Sheila Gallagher worked with Peterson during her days at Centex.

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# Bryan Peterson, designer

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The process was helped dramatically, she contends, “by how Bryan listens to clients. Many designers do not. But Bryan doesn’t design for the sake of designing. His designs are always creative, never boring, and yet they’re very simple. We always had some kind of idea floating around, but the more we talked to him, he would come up with things we would have never thought of.”

Centex was so happy with Peterson, Gallagher says, that it stuck with him from 1988 to 2008 (Centex was eventually sold to Michigan-based Pulte Homes). Other clients have included Hunt Oil, Baylor College of Dentistry, Brinker International and Southern Methodist University.

Now 56, Peterson was born in Wyoming but as the son of a Shell Oil executive spent his childhood in seven places, including Pittsburgh. His 2003 textbook, *Design Basics for Creative Results*, is used in graphic design classes at Harvard University. He has crafted CD covers for Austin roots rocker Jimmy LaFave, guitarist John Inmon, the late Bob Childers and *Ribbon of Highway Endless Skyway*, a Woody Guthrie tribute album.

Whether using



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**Peterson Ray & Co.** produces designs for corporate and university publications.

photography or art or a striking combination thereof, “Bryan had a way of taking our thoughts,” Gallagher says, “and creating a remarkably workable concept.” She calls him “a modern-day Renaissance man,” citing not only his gifts as an illustrator and painter but also his musical talents. He writes lyrics and music, has recorded two solo CDs, plays in a local party band — the Fuzztones,

made up entirely of graphic designers from Dallas — and frequently plays keyboards for LaFave and other musicians.

His work with LaFave underscores his ability to listen. LaFave never works with a set list; his band listens to the song he starts and has to jump in immediately.

Rick Johnsen worked with Peterson when Johnsen was executive director of marketing and communications for

George Fox University in Newberg, Ore. Johnsen says Peterson’s designs helped account “for a 10 percent increase in revenue from 2004 to 2006. Applications increased 24 percent.” Johnsen says Peterson’s musicianship is among the reasons he picked him for the job.

“Good design,” Johnsen says, “comes from the soul. And as a musician, Bryan gets that.”