

# 2011 The Year in Review

Friday, December 23, 2011

I used up two more of my nine Autodesk lives this year. I was forced to transition out of product design, and then six months later transition yet again out of consulting delivery. The word transition is apt, since there is no real firing and re-hiring that goes on, because one of the advantages of working for a larger company is the extensive range of jobs and placements that are available. The org chart has been getting more fluid these days as they now “align” sales with the division reorganizations that happened last year. For a brief while there, I was working in my favorite manufacturing space again.

I’m now in portfolio management in [Autodesk Consulting](#), which is the job of packaging up intellectual property (software, skills, methods etc.) used on one project to sell on many others. This means that for the first time at Autodesk I’m in management, rather than on the production floor. I keep getting the feeling that they’ll catch on pretty soon, and discover I’m not actually producing anything real anymore and the jig will be up. Of course, the next Autodesk reorganization will probably find me on the wrong side of the airlock; sort of like the first spaceship sent off in the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, containing the hairdressers, telephone handset sanitizers, advertising account executives and other ‘important’ people. On the plus side, there have been a number of new hires in the local office, which hasn’t happened in several years. Ironically, they are in the product design team that I was forced out of. My room at the office is again full of people – by and large English speaking, so we call it the English ghetto. I’ll probably have to move if they hire anyone else.

We became empty nesters this year as Alexandra headed off to the [ETH](#) (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule or Federal Technical University) in Zurich. This exposes itself in a myriad of minor ways. Like the reduced pile of shoes at the door, the reduction in the girth of garbage bags at the curb, the reduction in laundry time, etc. Other subtleties include changes in the morning sleeping pattern since she doesn’t wake me up going to school at 05:30, the availability of potato chips long after the bag is opened, and the absence of a snowdrift of stuff on the stairway – making the upstairs accessible again.

On the downside, it looks like her original choice to take architecture, that she made when she was like six, isn’t working out and she’s currently looking for a different university. One on the ocean and – almost as a second thought – one that has a study program involving a job **not** working in an office. Places like the University of Barcelona and Simon Fraser have come up.

Samantha is also back in Europe to start a master’s program with UW Architecture in Rome in the new year. I’m not sure if it will last all of next year, but that’s the plan so far.

The uncertainty associated with changes in my job has pretty much put the kibosh on searching for a house. The motivation to buy isn’t huge in the first place anyway because it’s really expensive for what you get here, but there are a few options still open. Jackie and I have finally agreed on the criteria to be used to judge houses... it’s whatever Jackie wants. The search area has also been expanded a bit to the area within 15 km of the office and not just within Muri/Gümligen.

Besides local vacation trips to Copenhagen, CERN in Geneva, and Berlin, Jackie and I returned to Canada for the first time in three years. I'm sorry if we missed visiting anyone. It was good to see my parents and the family again. There was, however, a bit of culture shock, as nearly every day we were stuck in traffic for one reason or another. The size and scale of Canada was reinforced when we were planning to take a vacation within a vacation and visit Quebec City. But Samantha said "That's really far you know." Oh yeah. If we spend 8 hours in a car travelling back and forth we kind of burn up the three days vacation time. So instead, we went to Montreal.

Things haven't changed that much in Canada, but I think I have. There is nothing like a radical life alteration to put things in perspective. I certainly have a less American viewpoint now and tolerate jingoistic rhetoric even less than I did before as a Canadian. I follow things like the occupy movement and debates around proposed American freedom of speech laws (SOPA and PROTECT IP) with a very anti-American viewpoint now. But working for an American company like I do, this is a hypocritical stance. I have to rationalize it by separating the American people from their institutions. I believe these recent political changes are defining this decade and indicate a profound shift towards grass roots political activism that will be a huge force for good instead of evil.

I haven't started wearing a scarf, donned an earring, or taken up other European affectations yet, but maybe I will next year. Jackie keeps threatening to buy me some spandex for riding my bike, but I'm still resisting - mostly because of a fear of muffin tops. I've quit smoking again. I've held to it since my birthday except for one minor slip. I can't guarantee it, but it seems to be easier this time. It's mostly an attitudinal shift rather than a major cessation effort. Otherwise, life is pretty comfortable here, despite the melt-down in nearby European states.

As my latest hobby, I bought a 3D printer, called an [Ultimaker](#). I'm still learning how to use it, but hopefully I can make in plastic some of the things that I was planning to make in metal. The time consuming thing is the 3D design of the pieces and not the actual manufacturing. This is a powerful paradigm shift that moves the means of production out to the masses. It may take a few years but it will be very popular one day. I started a [blog](#) to keep track of these developments. So far it isn't much, but I'm working on it... slowly. Writing a blog is more like writing a series of English essays than anything else. Oh what fun! It does have the advantage that the blog content isn't tied to Facebook and won't necessarily disappear when that happens.

I'm still working on my Android phone translation software project, but even less quickly than before. I just installed [Cyanogenmod](#) on my phone. Other software is on hold as I re-evaluate what it takes in terms of the percentage of my life to bring a program into the world. One of my open source projects, [HTML Parser](#), celebrated its 10th Birthday on April 3, 2011. Time flies when you're having fun.

All the best in the new year,

Derrick