

## Change by Design

Formation of Studio 10A provides return to scenic design.

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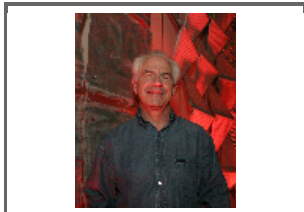
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By JANE HOLAHAN, Staff Writer

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Studio 10A owner Tom McPhillips stands in front of a stage wall at

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include a number of popular stars, such as Martina McBride and Bonnie Raitt.

Their work isn't limited to concerts though.

For example, Studio10A is hoping to design a new setting for the lighting of the White House Christmas Tree for the U.S. National Park Service.

(You can see the 3D video pitch at [Lancasteronline.com](http://Lancasteronline.com).)

Rhoads designed the set for "Walking with Dinosaurs — The Arena Spectacular," which recently played at the Sovereign Center in Reading, and the storage cases that held the Star Wars artifacts in the touring "Star Wars: In Concert," which recently performed at the Giant Center.

"We'll do the design and then put it out for other companies — Atomic or others — to build," McPhillips explains.

Like other Lititz entities Tait Towers (concert sets) and Clair Brothers (sound design), Atomic Design is huge in the entertainment world. (Is it something in the Lititz water?)

McPhillips is known for creating backdrops that are visually effective, light and easy to transport.

His best-known designs are three dimensional "walls," such as the wafer and pillow wall, which can take on a chameleon-like quality and look quite different with lighting changes.

The key to good design, McPhillips says, is understanding clients and what they need to convey visually, whether it's at a corporate event or a rock concert.

What's the image Michael Buble (an Atomic Design client) wants to convey on stage? What is the audience expecting?

"You want to convey a strong sense of their visual identity," McPhillips says. "Getting the client to recognize themselves in that environment is the biggest challenge."

For example, Rhoads worked with 16 corporate sponsors during the U.S. Open Golf Championship at the Oakmont Country Club.

His job was to create an environment, a room that would convey the right image of each corporation.

"My job is to understand their company and what kind of vibe they want to give off," Rhoads explains. "Is it corporate funky? More traditional?"

Some clients know what they want, others don't have much of a clue or are on the wrong track.

That understanding is the key to good design, according to both Rhoads and McPhillips, and it comes with experience.

Sometimes, success can draw you away from the things you love.

Just ask Tom McPhillips, founder of Atomic Design in Lititz, one of the country's leading scenic production shops.

"Atomic was founded as a design company," McPhillips says. "As time went on, we started building stuff. Most of the stuff we built were projects I designed."

But as Atomic Design's reputation began to grow, the company and the projects got bigger and bigger and construction became a major component of its work.

### VIDEO: Studio 10A's 3D video pitch

It was impossible for McPhillips to keep the hands-on approach he liked so much.

"The one-stop design and construction business I started in 1993 has grown so fast and become so successful that it ultimately started to inhibit me from doing what I love to do most," McPhillips explains. "It became less about design and more about building."

And what McPhillips loved the most was "the design stuff."

"The idea of giving up designing wasn't going to work for me," he says. "So we thought about breaking off."

Earlier this year, McPhillips, along with designer Mike Rhoads and animation specialist Charlie Cook left Atomic Design (though they still maintain a working relationship with their former company) and formed Studio 10A.

(They named themselves after the address of Atomic Design, which is 10 Wynfield Drive in Lititz. The plan was they'd have their offices there, but they have since moved to Front Street.)

The company will continue working with many of Atomic's clients, which include a number of popular stars, such as Martina McBride and Bonnie Raitt.



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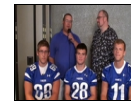
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"You've got to capture the personality of the artist. That's the most successful design," McPhillips says.

His clients have been quite eclectic, from Ozzy Obsourne and Oz Fest to charismatic Christian televangelist Joyce Meyer and her TV set.

McPhillips was born and raised in England.

A graduate of London's St. Martin's School of Art, now part of the University of the Arts, McPhillips had every intention of becoming a painter or sculptor.

With a connection at the Young Vic theater, he got work in its design department.

"I liked it, and by the time I left school, I was working in theater and television design as a scenic artist," he says. "It was right at the beginning of videos, and I fell into that area, painting and designing sets."

It was a wide open world and McPhillips soon found himself working with a variety of pop acts, such as Culture Club.

He started a partnership with a lighting designer, which led to his going on tours and becoming more involved with designing sets.

That's how he met fellow Brit Michael Tait, of Tait Towers.

"I came to Lititz around 1983 or '84," McPhillips recalls. "I started working with Michael."

On one trip, he brought his wife and kids along, and everyone agreed that Lititz would be a nice place to live.

"I was very fortunate to find a place like this," he says. "It's an incredible luxury to be here."

Rhoads is a hometown boy who graduated from Conestoga Valley High School and Penn State.

He had been working at Sight and Sound and the American Music Theatre and designing sets for local theater companies (which he still does) when someone told him to check out Atomic Design.

"I never knew this level of design was going on here," Rhoads says. "It's one of the top design shops in the world, and Tom is one of the top designers in the world. I wanted to be a part of that."

He started working at Atomic 10 years ago.

"I could never have gotten a better education anywhere," he says.

Both men agree that set construction "is a young man's game" and they are both happy to be focusing on design.

Joining them is computer whiz Charlie Cook. His specialty is building 3-D computer renderings, which have become an essential part of the design world.

One aspect of their new business that they are interested in expanding is rentals.

"A lot of the time, an event planner can't afford to buy set designs, but they can rent them," McPhillips explains. "We've really begun to infiltrate the market pretty strongly."

With the economy the way it is, rentals are becoming a bigger part of the corporate and entertainment worlds.

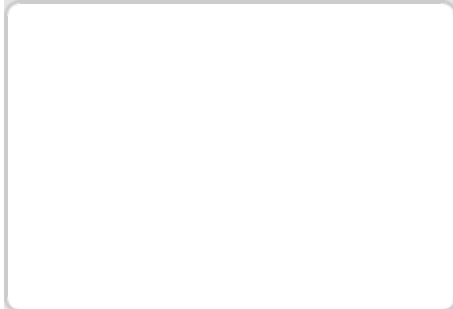
As McPhillips returns to his design roots, he understands how much the world has changed since he founded Atomic Design.

It's not only the technology — the computer 3D graphics in particular — but just how design has become such a huge part of our world.

"The visual world is more important than ever," McPhillips says. "Now, whatever you think of, you can create."

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