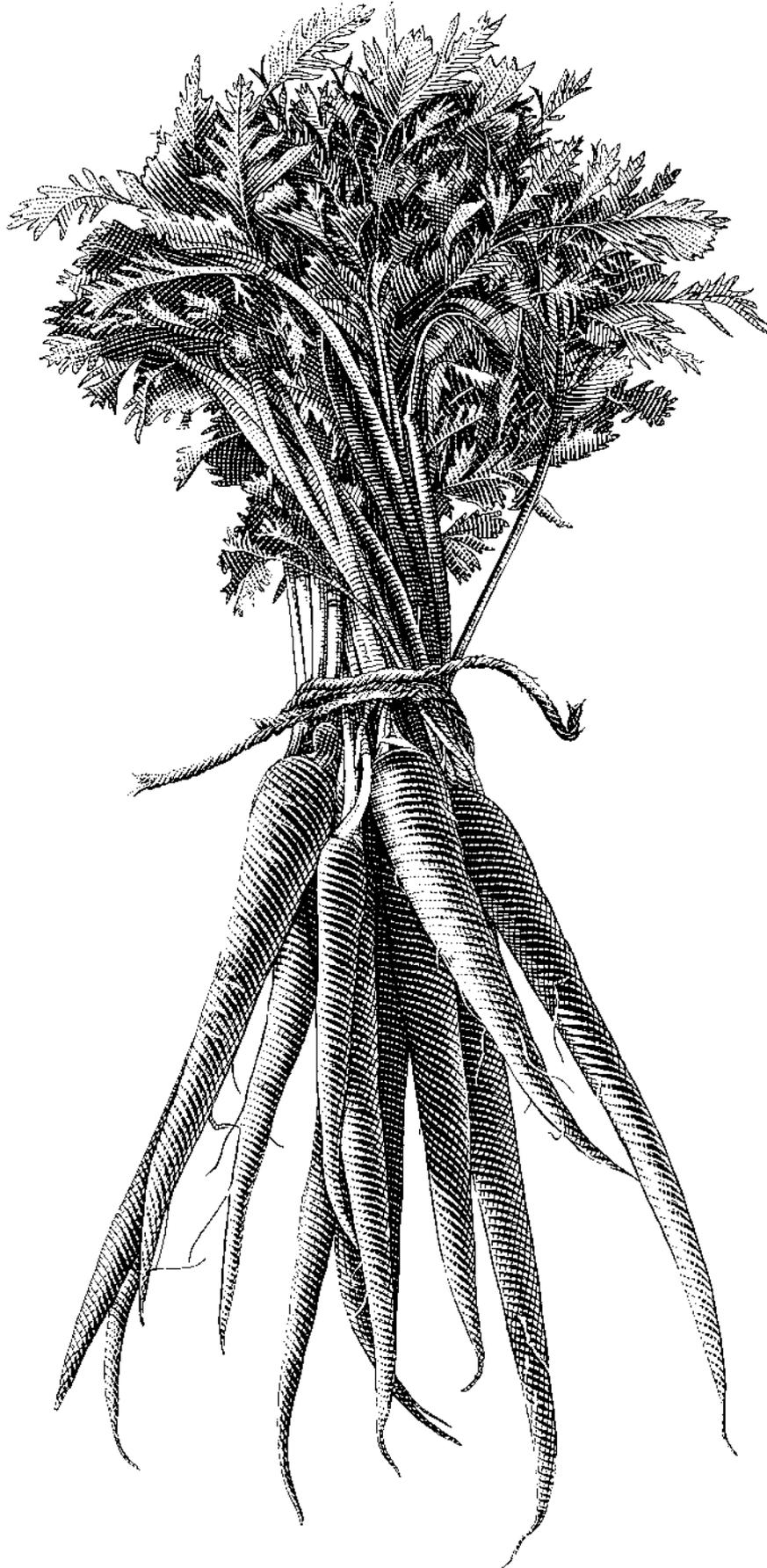


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# Craig McGill



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Craig may be very lucky, or perhaps more likely - very hardworking and talented. Australia's only freelance currency designer and co-creator of the famous Wine Dogs series of books kindly shares a look into his amazing career path.

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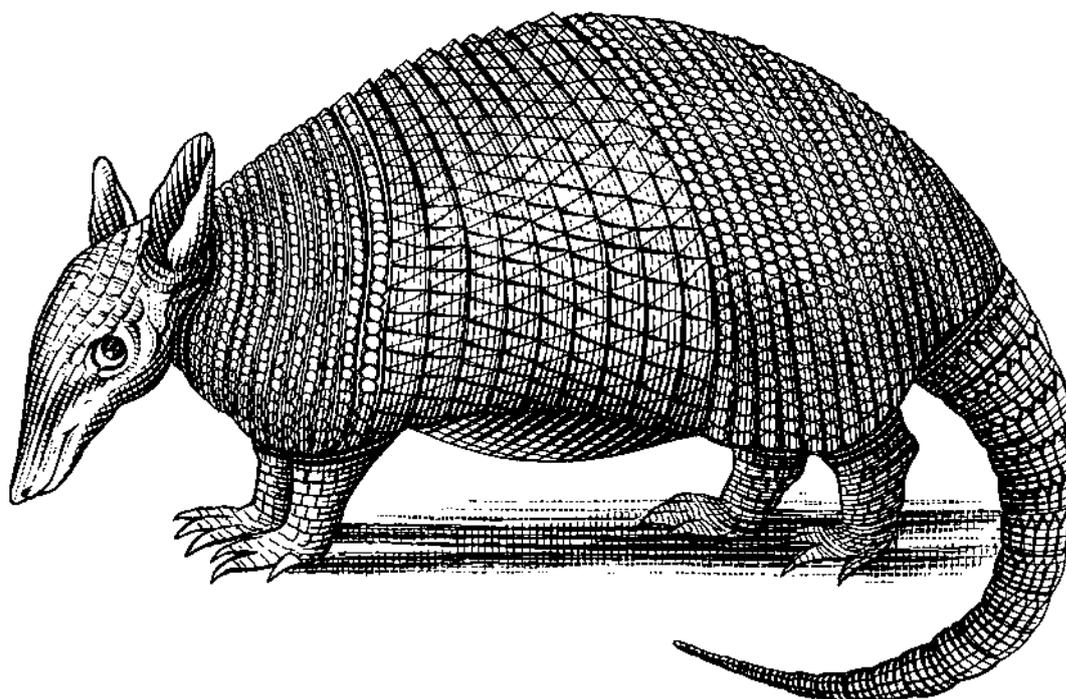
**Outline:** You are self-taught, and set up your own design business at the impressive age of 18. Can you share with us a bit about your early years giving you the foundation and confidence to do this? How has your business developed since then?

**Craig:** I started free-lancing during my final year of High School. I was one of those people who use to draw portraits in the Bourke Street Mall in Melbourne and this helped me develop my drawing skills. I was studying Maths and Sciences in my final year of High School and completed art via correspondence because there were not enough students interested to form a class at my high school. It was a combination of youthful arrogance, isolation and naivety that gave me the confidence to announce to everyone that I was going to be an artist. I felt isolated growing up in the outskirts of the northern suburbs of Melbourne and knew my people were elsewhere. I thought I was going to be a 'fine artist' and never really knew of or understood the realms of commercial art. I'd never even thought about someone being paid to illustrate for advertising or design projects. The thought never crossed my mind and I certainly wasn't exposed to the notion in Broadmeadows that this was possible. If I'd known, I probably would have studied graphic design at university.

I look at some of the cliches in life, whether they are about sport, work or just life and they ring very true. Success is 10% talent and 90% hard work etc etc... but there is one that stuck in my mind more than any other. The only thing that all successful people (commercially successful that is) have in common is that they work harder than everyone else. It's so true. Another motto I love is 'being naive is underrated'. It sure is. Many things in life seem way too difficult or out of reach for countless reasons and I'm sure if I had researched or known a little more about my pursuits in life, I wouldn't have fulfilled half of my ideas. Think less, do more...

**Outline:** As Australia's only freelance currency designer, we'd love to know more about your experience creating bank note designs for countries around the world. What is your process to create this sort of work, in such a unique area of illustration and design?

**Craig:** When I was 18 years old I answered a tender in the newspaper from the Reserve Bank of Australia Note Printing Branch who was looking for a portrait artist. I didn't have a portfolio at the time, so I drew a dozen or so portraits for the interview. I was also only one of two from over 400 applicants that didn't have tertiary education but that didn't stop me getting a 2nd interview, for which I





Front cover design, typography and illustration for Australian Financial Review (portrait of Allan Greenspan)

drew a completely new portfolio. Apparently my pen and ink illustrations were the most 'banknote' like in style and I got the gig. It took a few years of training from the NPB's master craftsman for me to reach a quality that could be used on a banknote. It's a unique style of illustration that is really based on master engravers. There are lots of tricks and rules to this type of illustration and I was lucky enough to find myself in an environment where I could hone the skill. At the time, there were only about a dozen artists in the world who had the skills to execute a banknote. My work appeared on the original Australian \$100 note, the Australian bi-centenary \$10 note, the Papua New Guinea 10 Kina note and the entire Cook Island banknote series as well as on other currency such as bonds and traveller's cheques. I didn't know it at the time, but the skills I developed over my 8 years at the Note Printing Branch enabled me to be known worldwide as a currency artist and receive commissions from international and well as Australian agencies whenever they wanted a banknote style of illustration for a campaign. The advertising world found me and that was just lucky for me because I knew very little about it at that time.

**Outline:** Could you share with us some of your favourite bank notes - either created by you or another illustrator?

**Craig:** My favourite banknotes were and still are my

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mentor Gordon Andrew's wonderful first decimal series of banknotes for Australia. The quality of design and portraits are still the most modern in the world. Unfortunately, they have all been replaced by the plastic ones we use today. Also a fan of some of Shepard Fairey's work on a modern note.

**Outline:** Your character and scene illustration work on your website demonstrates an incredible level of detail in your line work, a complex looking process! How long does it take you to create your work, and is there a typical process?

**Craig:** My style is very labour intensive. It's all hand-drawn with pen and ink and can sometimes be drawn 600% larger than the end print size. A portrait that is banknote quality may take up to six weeks to complete.

**Outline:** Could you tell us more about your experience etching and hand engraving?

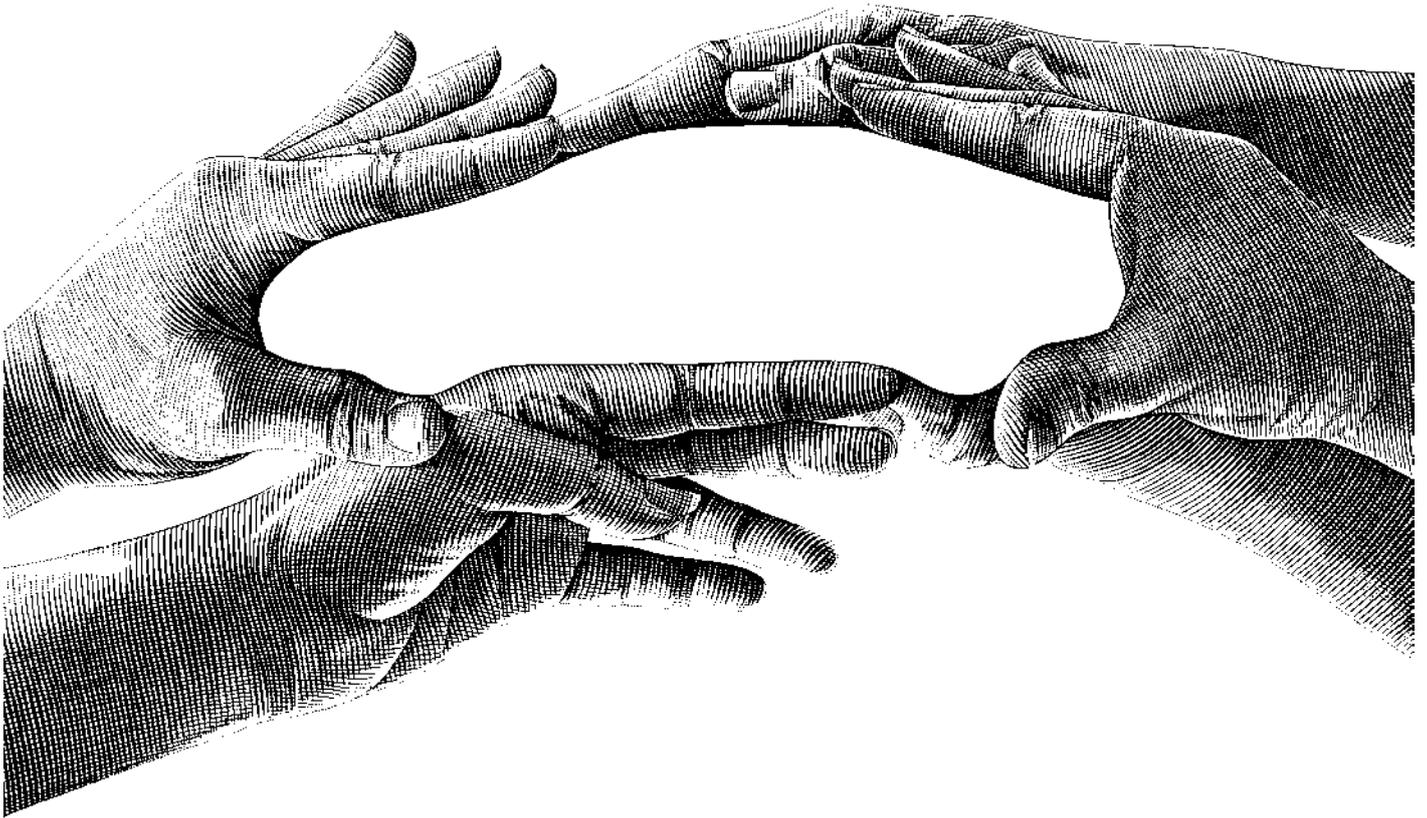
Although my style is made to look like a tradition etching, I haven't actually done any etching or engraving for over 30 years... it's all hand drawn.

**Outline:** You've created stamps with Australia Post - we'd love to hear how this project came about and the work you created.

**Craig:** I've designed and illustrated 11 stamps for Australia Post over many years and recently had 5 of my dog photography portraits also appear on stamps. These were from our *Wine Dogs* book series that were designed by my partner Susan Elliott. I guess my appeal to Australia Post is that if they commission me, they know that I can supply a stamp that has a vintage feel to it. My style lends it self to commemorative and historic subject matters.

**Outline:** On a completely different note, it was great to hear that you were a part of the amazing and popular *Wine*





*Commission for use in advertising campaign for Honda (Australia).*

*Dogs book! Would you mind sharing a little bit about this project, the inspiration and resulting book created?*

**Craig:** Thank you. If we'd known more about the publishing game, including the costs and distribution problems, we would never have embarked (excuse the pun) on the *Wine Dogs* project. Sue and I started a small graphic design agency in early 2000 and during that time published a tourism book for an outback Queensland town. It gave us the confidence that we could design a book but that's the easy part. The idea of *Wine Dogs* was born when Sue and I were travelling around the wineries of the Barossa and McLaren Vale. We noticed that a dog would greet us in every winery car-park that we drove into... I mean every winery. We'd get out of the car, pat the dog, take a pic of the dog, and then the dog would lead us to the tasting room. At the end of our holiday we had a hell of a lot of dog pictures and I joking said to Sue, "There's probably a book in this!" As soon as we hit a quiet time with the design business, we hit the road to create the first *Wine Dogs* book. We thought it would just be a small book that we could craft without the influence of a client. The grand ambition was to make back our money one day... That was 11 years ago and we've release 12 editions around the world since – all being best-sellers. At the start of the project I didn't even own a decent camera and after commissioning the photography on the first edition,

decided to become a dog photographer myself. A job that has taken me to over 3,000 of the most beautiful wineries in the world. It's the perfect job for a lover of travel, food, wine and dogs.

**Outline:** We'd love to hear about any projects you are looking forward to in 2015.

**Craig:** *Wine Dogs* now takes up 90% of my time and I'm fortunate to be in the position where I will only except high-end illustration commissions. That keeps me in love with drawing in between the book projects. We are currently working on a 6th *Wine Dogs Australia* edition and a special *Wine Puppies* book and have trips to the USA, South Africa and New Zealand planned for next year. There is also talk of a *Wine Dogs* TV show. Apparently there is life in the old dog yet...●

**{CLICK!} Craig McGill**

Website [www.winedogs.com](http://www.winedogs.com)

Website [www.mcgilldesigngroup.com](http://www.mcgilldesigngroup.com)

Website [www.realnasty.com.au](http://www.realnasty.com.au)