

Graphis, March/April 1994 (Volume 50)

By Forrest Richardson

Bing Crosby used to refer to his annual Pebble Beach Golf Tournament as a "clambake." Although the event involved elaborate planning, international media coverage, and appearances by scores of celebrities, the man at the helm insisted on having us think of it as a simple gathering of friends. In his view, the magic was bringing people together and having fun. Without camaraderie, it would be just another tournament - just another event in a sea of events.

Now, before anyone gets the idea that I'm going to compare Houston designer Chris Hill with Bing Crosby, let me set the record straight: I am.

In 1984, while teaching design students at Texas State University in San Marcos, Hill had the idea of bringing in professionals to interact with students. What began as an afternoon seminar has steadily grown into a three-day conference called The Creative Summit. For the past ten years, hundreds of students from Texas and neighboring states have had the opportunity to spend time with well-know designers, writers, illustrators and photographers. This year's summit takes place on the weekend of April 8-12.

Any professional who has attended one of the summits will likely relate the same set of casual steps. First, Chris plans the program: "Hello, this is Chris Hill. Ya'll want to come down to San Marcos next month to talk with some of my students?" For those speakers needing more incentive than a weekend in the peaceful Texas Hill Country, Chris hits them with the area's star attraction: "If we have some extra time, we'll take you over to see Ralph the Diving Pig at Aquarena Springs Resort." Casualness aside, the summit regularly includes top designers in its ranks. Members of the advisory board are: Mike Hicks, Kit Hinrichs, Doug Johnson, Anita Kunz, Eric Madsen, McRay Magleby, Martin Pedersen, Forrest and Valerie Richardson, Lana Rigsby, Jack Unruh, Michael Vanderbyl, Fred Woodward, and Don Weller.

Yet the conference provides an environment where students are not intimidated by professionals and where the pros don't feel the need to put on an act for their peers. The summit is about real people talking about real projects. It's about students being given the chance to show their work and find out how it stacks up outside of their own, small world.

Most important, the summit is an attempt to make a qualitative difference in our industry. Each year, the speakers serve as judges for a competition of works submitted by student. Last year, more than 1,500 entries were submitted from 16 different schools. These were juried down to 68 accepted pieces, competing for ten Ralph awards and one Best of Show, which merited a Macintosh computer. (Ralph awards are named, of course, for Ralph the Diving Pig) There is also an award for best school.

Pictured here are award-winning pieces in the student exhibition at the 1993 Creative Summit, works that should inspire all of us to support education in our field and to embrace the idea of joining together and investing in the new blood that will take up where we leave off. If you plan to be in Texas in April and want to stop by, you'll surely be welcome. But what's more important is that we follow in Chris Hill's footsteps by doing similar things in our own back yards-that we take the time and invest the energy to plan some clambakes of our own.