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Nico Taus (left) and Frank Chartrand run Bureau, a design firm located in Sudbury. Both are graduates on Cambrian College. Chartrand is completing a bachelor's degree in communications studies.

Small town, international design

BY ED VEILLEUX

You might not recognize Frank Chartrand or Nico Taus if they were walking down the bowling alley here on campus, but if you were shown a slide of their work, you'd have a "Eureka" moment.

If you've been to Huntington University's new website, attended the River and Sky Festival this summer, or ventured to any recent La Slague events — then you've seen Taus and Chartrand's work.

Together, the duo forms Bureau — a local design firm.

Both designers are Cambrian College graduates, and Chartrand chose to further his education at LU (at Huntington, no less).

"When I graduated from Cambrian, I realized I didn't really want to work for anyone in town," Chartrand recalls. "So, it was either I take off or I go do more school then do my own thing. I wanted to take it slow, and maybe, over a year or two, I could gather some good clients and do some good work that I really wanted to do."

For Taus and Chartrand, starting Bureau seemed a perfect fit.

"We've always been friends, and we have the same aesthetic interest so we joined up and just decided to (start Bureau)," Taus said.

Taus spent time working at Perryna Advertising in Sudbury, and for 50 Carleton before co-launching Bureau with Chartrand.

Meanwhile, Chartrand studied communication studies at Laurentian University and is currently working on finishing his Bachelor's degree in the field.

"It worked out pretty well that as soon as I was finished (at LU), Nico was ready to move from 50C, so we joined up and did this."

For Taus, Bureau is his full time job. For Chartrand, who also teaches at Cambrian College in the graphic design program and promotes music in the city, it is a

bit more of a balancing act. Both say they devote 40-plus hours to the business on a weekly basis, with some weeks pushing up as far as 50-some hours.

"We wanted to do the best design work that we could, with every project and use the sort of aesthetic design that we were seeing in New York and Amsterdam and Montreal," Taus explains. "We wanted to do work that was international level. We don't believe that just because you're from a smaller town that it needs to look like smaller town material. That's really the driving force behind the project."

After some brainstorming the two came up with Bureau as a name.

"It's an important name because we wanted to target both the Francophone and English communities, together as one, and not favour one over the other. Bureau works in both languages," Taus said.

The name Bureau also leaves the options open for the two, who never wanted to be pigeon-holed as graphic designers. A name like "Frank and Nico's Design" wouldn't have allowed the company that flexibility, according to Taus.

"You never know in ten years where we're going to be at, or how many people are going to be working for us," Taus said.

Chartrand finds it funny that although Bureau means office, or place of work, they "both work out of our homes. We don't actually have an office. Our name is office, but we don't have one."

All jokes aside, the two say they are trying to push a global office. They work with copywriters in the UK and and Montreal.

"In the 2000s, it's something that's possible now with new media and the Internet," Chartrand said. "You can work with people, and you don't have to be in an office with them nine-to-five, getting sick of

each other and all that."

The two have a lot of Skype meetings.

The two have known each other since Grade 6. They remember jamming, playing punk-rock songs and playing in bands together growing up. They attended the same high schools, went to college together and now work together.

"We're not sick of each other," joked Chartrand.

Playing in bands together growing up, led to the two doing artwork for their CDs and such, and there a love for design was born.

In their spare time, Chartrand and Taus still play together. They make up part of Vicious Cycle, a local band which spent a month this summer touring Europe.

"That obviously exposes you to a lot of new cultural things," Chartrand said.

Taus chimed in: "Ultimately, that opened our eyes to how design is done (in Europe)."

Coming from a "punk-rock background" has helped the duo, according to Chartrand.

"If there was a client we really disagreed with — the way they did business or the industry they were in — then we'd have the strength to say, 'No, we're not really comfortable working with your organization.'"

Taus agrees that the musical background has helped.

"I think it's helped us be more well-rounded (as designers). Coming from that background, we know how to do gritty stuff, against the grain, and not (just work) that is more accepted in the corporate world. Then having gone to design school, we learnt the clean and slick design. We can do punk-rock concerts and corporate identity in the same day."

Having their own business has been a rewarding experience, both designers agree.

"Whatever you put into it, you get out of it," Chartrand said.

"You're not working for somebody and doing them tons of favours, and going out of your way to deliver something on time to a client and still getting the same salary or benefits. At typical design agencies or ad firms, the designers role is to just create stuff and give it to the account manager or creative director and they present it to the client. Whereas we can create it, present it, defend it and then go with it. There's no middleman. There's no passing of the baton to someone else."

Taus explained: "You get a direct benefit for your own work, even more than an economic gain, you get a sense of fulfilment from actually executing your own idea and seeing it through to the end instead of someone telling you what to do and doing it. When you feel passionate about your own solution, then it's easier to sell."

The two further complement each other, and Bureau, by naturally working an almost 24-hour cycle. Taus is a self-proclaimed "night owl," and calls Chartrand an "early riser."

"A lot of the time, our company will actually be working nearly 24 hours because I'll stay up until 3 a.m. working on something, and he's up at 6."

Chartrand says it works out great that way.

"It works out for the (Bureau) blog because we're constantly putting stuff on it. It's going on all day and all night."

Despite working constantly, even on weekends when needed, Taus said it's manageable.

"You're always working, but you don't quite notice it as much because it's something you want to do. That's the bottom line with this company. We're not doing it because everyone has got to work and it's an easy solution. We do it because, first of all, we love designing. Even if it failed someday, I would still

be designing and we would still be working together. It's something we love to do."

Although the group eyes expanding one day, Chartrand said, "There's something great about being small and staying true to your original plan. Once you grow to become a bigger agency, then you might lose track of what your clients want, or your actual needs for those clients. Small team, big clients. We can still take on small, non-profit jobs. We do pro-bono jobs to give back to the community."

The two agree that they wouldn't sell franchises, or sell the name, but would consider starting chapters elsewhere if they met designers with the same vision, who were as committed as they are. They say they are eyeing comfortable expansion, taking things as they come along.

The next project for the duo is a magazine called Statement. It will be a quarterly publication that interviews artists, musicians. The magazine will not be bordered and can interview any interesting people, not just artists, Chartrand said.

The first issue, the winter issue, can be expected out on Dec. 1.

The magazine will look to push the borders on interviewing, the two said.

"We will ask questions that even kind of wants to ask, but are scared to," Taus said. "We're going to dig deeper. We want to get on a personal level with the artist. We want to get into their minds a bit."

Chartrand added: "We're not going to be shy about it."

The two say CBC's Jian Ghomeshi, of The Q fame, was their inspiration.

"He's such an amazing interviewer," Taus said. "He interviews like I've never seen."

For more on Bureau, visit their website, bureaugroup.ca or twitter.com/bureaugroup.