Jess Cruz-Abalos

BRAND DESIGNER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR
jess@jcruz.design | Escondido, CA | Portfolio: **jcruz.design**

SUMMARY

Award-winning Brand Designer and Creative Director with 17+ years of experience building brands, leading creative teams, and bringing big ideas to life across identity, campaigns, and packaging. Has partnered with major brands and licensors including Marvel, National Geographic, Sanrio, and the NHL, translating strict brand guidelines into work that feels fresh and connects with consumers. Co-founder of two boutique design agencies, with hands-on experience taking brands from strategy and concept through final execution. Experienced in packaging design for mass-market retailers such as Target, Walmart, and Costco. Skilled in creative direction, cross-functional collaboration, and delivering polished, on-brand work on tight deadlines.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Merchandising & Packaging	Creative Leadership	Technical & Software
• Packaging Design & Structure • Retail Displays, POS & POP • Licensed Product Design • Concept-to-Shelf Execution • Print Production & Prepress	• Brand Identity & Strategy • Art Direction & Team Leadership • Vendor & Supplier Management • Cross-Functional Collaboration • Project & Timeline Management	• Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop • Figma • Claude • Webflow • Canva • ClickUp & Asana • Mailchimp • Microsoft Office • Mac & PC Platforms

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EXPERIENCE

Co-Founder & Creative Director — *That One Couple*
OCTOBER 2023 – PRESENT | SAN DIEGO, CA

- Drive the overarching creative strategy, brand vision, and end-to-end visual identity execution across digital channels, marketing campaigns, and physical brand touchpoints.

- Lead cross-functional marketing teams and direct third-party creative partners (photographers, videographers, copywriters) to bring cohesive brand narratives to life across multi-channel campaign ecosystems.
- Combine consumer insights, data trends, and intuition to build performance-focused digital platforms and high-converting campaign assets that drive brand growth and customer retention.
- Oversee full production lifecycles, ensuring creative integrity, brand consistency, and high craft across web, print, packaging, and digital media within agile timelines.

Senior Freelance Designer & Brand Designer — *Jess Cruz Designs*
JANUARY 2020 – SEPTEMBER 2023 | SAN DIEGO, CA

- Oversaw the conception and end-to-end execution of comprehensive brand identity systems, packaging concepts, print collateral, and web designs for diverse consumer-facing clients.
- Managed end-to-end project schedules, creative briefs, production budgets, and asset distribution across multi-platform launches.

Creative Director — *JPW Communications*
JULY 2021 – DECEMBER 2022 | CARLSBAD, CA

- Served as strategic Creative Director directing multimedia teams through 8+ simultaneous complex marketing, brand, and communication outreach campaigns from initial strategy through execution.
- Defined brand storytelling hierarchies and visual systems, elevating client brand equity while ensuring narrative alignment across all digital, print, and community-facing channels.
- Streamlined creative operations and production workflows through new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), improving campaign delivery efficiency and cross-departmental alignment.
- Mentored, inspired, and managed junior designers, fostering a collaborative, growth-oriented team culture focused on creative excellence and accountability.

Co-Founder & Creative Director — *The Cowlick Appeal*
AUGUST 2014 – DECEMBER 2019 | OCEANSIDE, CA

- Spearheaded creative strategy, brand positioning, and business growth for a multidisciplinary creative agency, delivering high-impact visual identity and web design systems.
- Managed multi-channel project lifecycles from concept through technical production, maintaining strict quality control across print, packaging, and digital assets.
- Built and maintained client relationships, articulated creative concepts to key stakeholders, and directed cross-functional project execution.

Graphic Designer — *The City of Carlsbad*

AUGUST 2014 – DECEMBER 2015 | CARLSBAD, CA

- Collaborated with community leaders to translate complex narratives into engaging print, digital, and event-based experiential marketing collateral for public initiatives.

CONSUMER PRODUCTS & MERCHANDISING EXPERIENCE

Graphic Designer: Packaging & Merchandising – *Life Gear*
OCT 2012 – APR 2014 | DEL MAR, CA

- Engineered and designed retail packaging, digital collateral, and large-scale retail floor displays, POS, and POP materials for top-tier licensors including National Geographic.
- Successfully brought consumer products from initial concept to retail shelf at major national retailers including Target, Walmart, Costco, and Safeway.
- Managed vendor communications and collaborated cross-functionally with product development, marketing, and sales teams to align product design with retail merchandising strategy.
- Created high-converting sales collateral, trade show visuals, and presentation materials to support B2B retail buyer meetings.

Designer: Consumer Products & Collectibles — *Upper Deck*
SEP 2010 – OCT 2012 | SAN DIEGO, CA

- Designed collectible trading cards, complex multi-tier packaging solutions, and digital marketing assets for high-profile global licensors including Marvel, Sanrio, and the NHL.
- Oversaw the full production cycle across marketing, finance, purchasing, legal, and prepress departments for mass-market consumer products distributed at Target and Walmart.
- Coordinated detailed technical specifications and print production requirements with domestic and international manufacturing vendors to ensure color accuracy and quality control.

AWARDS & INDUSTRY RECOGNITION

2026 MUSE Creative Award (Gold Winner): Website Redesign for Sabrina Jeffries

2026 Communicator Awards: Corporation or Business, Distinction 2026 - Corporate Identity - General-Logo for the Salty Bitches Brand

2023 3CMA Savvy Award (Silver Circle): Graphic Design Art for City of Tustin Community Rebrand

2023 3CMA Savvy Award: Creative Marketing & Communications – Graphic Design Art for SMUSD Campaign

EDUCATION

San Diego State University — B.A. in Art with an emphasis in Graphic Design
SAN DIEGO, CA MAY 2009
Magna Cum Laude