

N SERIES

Abstract

THE ART OF DESIGN

A Netflix original documentary series highlighting artists in the field of design.

ABSTRACT: The Art of Design (2017) | TV-14 | Executive Producer: Morgan Neville



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN - ILLUSTRATION

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 1, DIRECTED BY MORGAN NEVILLE

From New Yorker covers to Instagram sketches, illustrator Christoph Niemann plays with abstraction and interactivity -- and questions authenticity



START THE CONVERSATION

Use these as writing or discussion prompts in a virtual class, or as a source for inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- Christoph Niemann opens the episode asking, “Is this about me, or by me?” After watching the episode, what do you think is the answer to that question? In what ways is that same question reflected in his work?
- When Christoph talks about working under deadline, he says he uses his ‘armor of craft’ to work through the pressure. What do you think he means by that phrase? Have you ever been asked to be creative (or to be expert at something else) under time pressure? What was that like? What tools did you rely on to achieve the goal? How did you feel about the result?
- Christoph creates differently when he is not making commissioned work and not working under deadline. What did you notice about that play-time work that was different from, for example, his New Yorker covers? What is different about his process when he creates this kind of work? How are the processes related?
- In thinking about his growth over time, Christoph talks about his introduction to art (with museums as the ‘gateway drug’), and his desire to continue to grow and improve. Do you have a passion? How did you discover it? If you’ve ever been stuck in a rut, how did you work your way through it?

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**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

- Talk about a particular image or illustration in the episode that stood out to you. What did it communicate to you? What are the clues or details that gave you those ideas?
- Discuss the power of images to convey ideas about society and the world. What other examples can you think of where a work of art or design influences the way that people see a particular place, idea, or situation?
- Christoph Niemann talks a lot about practicing and perfecting his craft. What do you learn from him about the qualities that are required to be a successful professional in the arts? About being a happy and fulfilled professional in the arts

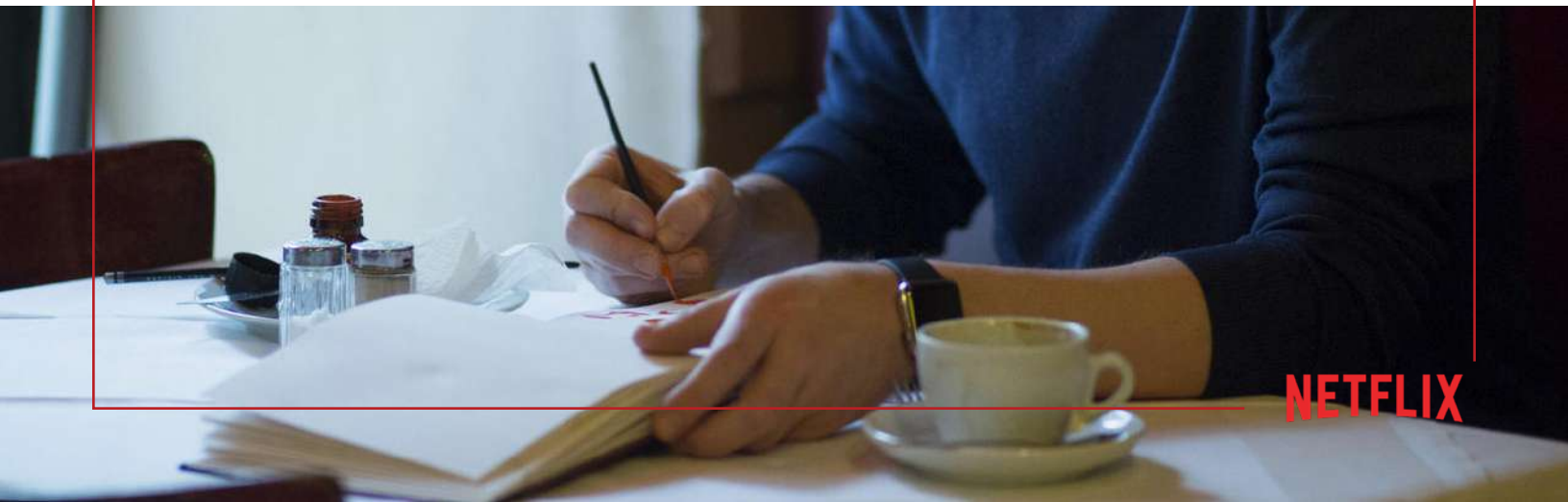
2 DESIGN

Re-watch minute seven in the episode, where Christoph describes the Abstract-o-meter.

- Think about an idea, place, or issue with which you feel a strong emotional connection.
- Create one or more abstractions that represent your idea. Share your images in pairs or small groups, asking your partner to describe what the symbol evokes for them. Discuss whether their response surprised you, or taught you something new about your idea.
- Iterate - try the abstraction again based on what you learned.

**IN THE HOME****1 ACTIVITY: FAMILY BRAINSTORM**

As a family, identify different places in your home, or different objects or foods that have meaning to you. Take a few minutes to brainstorm together different images, symbols, or creations that might communicate your special place or item to others (consider re-watching the Lego segment, minutes 18-20). Have each person create their own abstraction to represent the same idea and share them back with one another.



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 WATCH TRAILER

TINKER HATFIELD - FOOTWEAR

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 2, DIRECTED BY BRIAN OAKES

Tinker Hatfield's background in architecture and athletics sparked his game-changing shoe designs for Nike, including the iconic Air Jordan series.



START THE CONVERSATION

Use these as writing or discussion prompts in a virtual class, or as a source for inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- Tinker Hatfield says, "My job is to think about how to make these very capable natural instruments (our feet) perform even better." What influences in his life led him to this work? What are the passions and interests that drive you?
- Tinker believes that, "art is the ultimate self-expression from a creative individual," but that, "the end goal of design is to solve a problem for someone else. And hopefully, it looks great to someone else." What is your response to that distinction between art and design?
- He says, "In a lot of ways design is about predicting the needs of the future." What individuals, cultural signals, and other data points does Tinker Hatfield use to predict those needs? With regard to the EARL (Electro Adaptive Reactive Lacing) project, what need(s) do they anticipate? How and what influenced the project to change over time?
- Tinker describes a tension as an innovator, where "people struggle with stuff they don't understand.. And yet what generates excitement is the disruptive nature of 'whoa, that's a big idea!'" At what points in the arc of his career is that tension visible? Can you think of any other examples of that dichotomy in the world? What is your personal response to big new ideas?

NETFLIX

**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

- Tinker Hatfield says, “A good design is always functional, but a great one will also say something.” Discuss the relationship between function and form. If a design is functional, why does it matter how it looks?
- Describe the relationship between Tinker Hatfield and Michael Jordan. How did their partnership work? In what ways did they influence one another? How did their collaboration change the way we think about athletic shoes?
Shoes are an excellent example of an everyday item that is necessary, and that also has significant cultural meanings.
- Describe an example either from this episode, or from elsewhere in culture, where shoes reveal something important about the person wearing them, including both the function and the form of the shoe.

2 DESIGN

Design a new pair of shoes that meets a need that you have, or that you believe others have. Make sure the form of the shoe tells a story, either about you or the person you anticipate wearing them.

**IN THE HOME****1 ACTIVITY: SHOE SURVEY**

Have every member of the family bring out a pair of shoes and prepare to analyze them for the rest of the family, answering the following questions:

- What were these shoes designed to do? Do they accomplish their purpose?
- How would you change or enhance them to better meet that need?
- What story do you think this shoe tells about you?



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ES DEVLIN - STAGE DESIGN

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 3, DIRECTED BY BRIAN OAKES

Stage designer Es Devlin crafts sets for concerts, operas, plays and runway shows using light, film, sculpture - and even rain.



START THE CONVERSATION

Use these as writing or discussion prompts in a virtual class, or as a source for inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- Es Devlin opens the episode saying, “Over the last two decades of working, one of the things I’ve discovered is that often, things are made to fill voids. The impetus to fill that void with art, to me is fundamental.” What do you think she means? Is the notion of making things to fill voids familiar to you? What do you do to fill those voids?
- Es says that the question of “why” is central to every aspect of her design. Thinking back to the examples in the episode, talk about one that stood out to you as a particularly powerful example of the ‘why’ behind her work.
- The model of the town of Rye where she grew up was a major influence. She says, “I started to associate storytelling with models.” Is there a particular image, idea, or place that has stuck with you over time? What is it, and how has it influenced you?
- All of Es’ work is ephemeral, because performances have a clear beginning, middle, and end. She says, “In the end, everything will only exist in the memories of people.” What do you think it means to create art that will only exist as a memory?

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**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

- Think back to the last time you saw a live performance (or a recording of a live performance). What, if anything, do you remember about the set, or the stage? How did it influence the way you perceived the performance?
- Es describes five 'ingredients' to her work. Choose one of the examples of her work from the episode and describe how she used it to achieve the final design.
 - Space
 - Light
 - Darkness
 - Patterns
 - Time
- Es Devlin's work happens in partnership with other creators - playwrights, musicians, designers - whose work she designs to showcase. Describe the qualities of the partnership that is required to, as she says, "align our paths of inquiry"? Do you have experience working in partnership with someone for a creative endeavor? What do you like about it? What challenges come up?

2 DESIGN

Choose a piece of music, performance, or fashion that sparks your interest. Research the creator to deepen your understanding of the intention of their work. Using Es Devlin's five ingredients as guidelines, design a stage or set that you believe will support that creator's work.

**IN THE HOME****1 ACTIVITY: SET DESIGN SCAVENGER HUNT**

Use the internet or your television to find recordings of live performances of any kind. Watch them together for a few moments and notice what you can about the set they are using.

- Did watching this episode change what you noticed about the performance?
- In what ways did the set enhance or detract from the performance?
- What might you have done differently to bring depth and meaning to it?



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 WATCH TRAILER

BJARKE INGELS - ARCHITECTURE

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 4, DIRECTED BY MORGAN NEVILLE

Architect Bjarke Engels unites function, fantasy and sustainability in “pragmatic utopian” designs like a clean power plant topped with a ski slope.



START THE CONVERSATION

Use these writing or discussion prompts in a virtual class, or as a source for inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- Bjarke Ingels opens the episode comparing his work to the film Inception, saying “When architecture is at its best, you’re coming up with something that is pure fiction, and then after all the hard work and all the permits and all the budgeting and all the construction, it now becomes concrete reality.” Have you ever seen a work of architecture that feels like fiction? What was it, and how did it make you feel?
- In discussing how his work integrates sustainability with architecture, Bjarke uses the phrase, “hedonistic sustainability.” What images or ideas does that phrase evoke for you? How is it different from other ways you’ve heard or seen sustainability talked about?
- In discussing the controversy his work has sparked, Bjarke says of people’s reactions, “If you go beyond indifferent, you will awaken response at both extremes.” Have you ever faced harsh criticism and high praise for something you have thought, said or created? How did you respond to the conflicting points of view? What qualities does it take to move through that kind of feedback?
- Bjarke says he wants his projects to become a beacon of how clean tech can present “utopian possibilities.” Is that what you see when you look at examples of his work? Why or why not?
- Bjarke’s work incorporates architecture, art, and environmental sustainability. What is the value of integrating different fields and perspectives? What are the challenges?

NETFLIX

**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

- Architecture is permanent. As Bjarke says, "Architecture is a way to manifest your dreams in the real world - like a shaman with brick and mortar." How do you think the relative permanence of his work is related to the strong emotions it evokes?
- Bjarke remarked that the most typical negative response to architecture is that "it doesn't fit in," but then points out how the most recognizable aspects of Copenhagen's skyline are the spires that don't fit in with the rest. Discuss how change in aesthetic ideas occurs - is it a rapid shift, or slow over time? How do you feel about buildings in your community that just "don't fit in?"
- Write a reflection on the Copenhill project - the ski slope Bjarke Ingels built on top of a clean power plant in Copenhagen. Conduct some internet research to assess the global praise and critiques of the project, and state your own opinion about it.
- The episode closes with Bjarke's statement, "I am longing to discover the things I haven't even thought about." Has there been a moment of discovery in your life that changed how you saw the world? Discuss what that moment was, and how it has influenced your thinking over time.

2 DESIGN

Research a recent development in one or more elements of infrastructure, such as a bridge retrofit, highway project, or power plant construction in your community, or in a large community nearby. What prompted the need for it? Was there resistance to the change? Who were the stakeholders, and what were their concerns?

Build a model of the project, or create your own infrastructure project, in a way that Bjarke Ingels might have, with the intention of "inclusive architecture" where all the needs and concerns might be addressed, and with sustainability in mind.

**IN THE HOME****1 ACTIVITY: ARCHITECTURE SURVEY**

Conduct an architecture survey in your community by walking or driving, or if those are not allowed, using Google Earth or other online tour or images - and notice the structures most common in your community.

2 DISCUSS

- How would you describe the architecture of your community over all?
- What values does it convey?
- If there are unique and different looking structures, how do you feel about them?
- What kinds of structures would you like to see?

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RALPH GILLES - AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 5, DIRECTED BY E. CHAI VASARHELYI

Ralph Gilles is Global Head of Design for Fiat Chrysler. His award-winning designs have steered the brand into the future with a sleek new sports cars and a self-driving electric van. Originally from Canada, Gilles joined Chrysler in 1992 and was promoted to his current role in 2015.



START THE CONVERSATION

Revisit these ideas from Ralph Gilles after watching the ABSTRACT episode on his philosophy and approach to automotive design. These ideas can be helpful discussion or writing prompts for a virtual class, or as a source of inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- *"I like to sketch the front of the car first. The eyes are very important to me. The vehicle can have a happy face or a mask. It has to impart a soul. While am I looking at this car, it is looking back at me. It stirs something in me. People say, 'I fell in love with my car. It projects my personality so perfectly.' That connection with the vehicle is extremely powerful."*
- *"Tastemaking takes time. I believe as designers we create taste. Sometimes we are ahead of it, sometimes not."*
- *"We try and create design to respond to problems-this is the white space in which to create design."*
- *"The romantic car lover in me wonders if one day, if everything is automated, do people care about the car anymore. Is it just another device? There's still this solid base of people that just love the freedom and making their own decisions. I just hope we always have that choice versus it being mandated to us whether we're supposed to drive or not drive."*
- *"No matter how tough times are, don't compromise the product."*

NETFLIX

**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

What inspires Ralph Gilles as an automotive designer? Choose one quote from the Start the Conversation section that reflects your understanding of his inspiration and share the quote.

Ralph Gilles loves everything to do with cars - from design, to racing. He shares, "I feel in love with my car. It reflects my personality. A car can have a happy face or a mask. It has a soul."

- How would you describe the personality of a car?
- What car would you choose to reflect your personality?

Cars can mean different things to different people. Think about one fond memory you have with a car. It can be one you rode in, owned, or admired from afar. Share this story and any details you recall. What did you feel? How old were you? Where was it? Why do you think this is a significant memory?

- Think about one fond memory you have with a car. It can be one you rode in, owned, or admired from afar. Share this moment with a classmate and describe the moment in detail - what did you feel, how old were you, where was it, etc. - and why is this a significant memory

Ralph Gilles said in ABSTRACT, "Competition drives design."

- Explore this idea of competition in how you learn and create. What about competition is helpful in pushing your creativity? What can be a hindrance?

2 DESIGN

Design a car, any car, that reflects your personality or is just a dream car for you. Make sure to have fun with every aspect of this design from color, to interior, to function. Feel free to do this online or on paper.

**IN THE HOME****1 DISCUSS**

Ralph started sketching car designs at a young age. In 1987, at age of 17, he sent his designs to the legendary CEO at Chrysler, Lee Iacocca. He received a letter back encouraging Ralph to pursue his talent and interest. While his father wanted him to pursue a career in Engineering, his older brother was pivotal in pushing Ralph to pursue his love and talent for car design.

- Who are the people in your life that encourage you to follow your dreams?

2 DESIGN

Create a design, and/or write a letter to someone you admire in your life about a passion you have and want to pursue in life. What would you share?

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PAULA SCHER - GRAPHIC DESIGN

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 6, DIRECTED BY RICHARD PRESS

Paula Scher paints with words as an American graphic designer, artist, and educator. For more than three decades she has been at the forefront of graphic design and developed identities for esteemed institutions such as The Public Theater in NY, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Target, Bloomberg, and Microsoft. She joined the firm of Pentagram in 1991 as its first female principal and continues to develop iconic brands and institutions



START THE CONVERSATION

Revisit these ideas from Paula Scher after watching this episode on her philosophy and approach to graphic design. These ideas can be helpful discussion or writing prompts for a virtual class, or as a source for inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- *"I walk outside and I see typography everywhere. New York City is a city of signs. Sometimes things written by hands, mismatched, hung up in a peculiar way... All messages are different. They are everywhere. Typography is painting with words. It is my biggest high."*
- *"Mostly what I design are identity systems - they have to exist in lots and lots of ways. I generally want to push something as far as I can push. For me that is the fun."*
- *"Typography can create power. You are working with things that create character... If a font is heavy and bold it can give a feeling of immediacy. If a font is thin, has a Serif form, it may feel classical. So that before you even read you have a sensibility and spirit. If you can combine it - then that's spectacular. "*
- *"I am driven by the hope that I haven't made my best work yet."*
- *"Making stuff is the heart of everything. That drive never goes away. What can I make next?"*

NETFLIX

**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

What inspires Paula Scher as a graphic designer? Choose one quote from the Start the Conversation Section that reflects your understanding of her inspiration and share the quote.

"Ideas come all kinds of ways. I get my best ideas in taxi cabs... I am allowing my subconscious to take over so I can free associate. You have to be in a state of play to design. If you are not in a state of play you can't make anything"

- Paula Scher, ABSTRACT

- In your own words, what does it mean to be in a state of play?
- Where do you discover your best ideas?
- What do you like to create?

2 DESIGN

Paula Scher talks about her early years as an album cover designer at CBS Records in the 1970s. She said "She had the best job in NYC" meeting famous musicians and creating covers to reflect their desires.

- Choose one of your favorite artists and design an album cover that expresses your love for and experience with their music.
- Explore the graphic design work and art of Paula Scher. Choose one of her pieces that you absolutely love. Discuss its appeal or reflect your choice in writing.
- Choose a store, cultural institution such as a theater, or a company that you like, and graphically design a new brand. Be able to share how you came to make the choices that you did in your design and how it reflects the institution.

**IN THE HOME****1 DISCUSS**

Design can play a significant role on how we experience and engage in the world outside of culture. "Design exists beyond screens. It has an impact in real life," she shares and then tells the consequential story of the Palm Beach ballot of 2001. She says convincingly of the mistake in design, "Absolutely, graphic design threw an election."

- Take a moment to consider how and where design affects our lives in different ways from how we vote to what we buy. What is one example of how design guides an action or decision in your life?

2 DESIGN

Choose two examples of something graphically designed - one you like and one that you do not like. These examples can be in your home, from television, in your community, or even something hanging on your wall. Choosing either example, redesign it and share how and why you made these decisions.

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WATCH TRAILER

PLATON - PHOTOGRAPHY

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 7, DIRECTED BY RICHARD PRESS

Platon's fearless portraits capture the soul of world leaders and ordinary people. A shoot with General Colin Powell provides a window into his process.



START THE CONVERSATION

Revisit these ideas from Platon after watching the ABSTRACT episode on his philosophy and approach to photography. These ideas can be helpful discussion or writing prompts for a virtual class, or as a source of inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- *"I am not really a photographer at all. The camera is nothing more than just a tool. Communication. Simplicity. Shapes on a page. What is important is the story, the message, the feeling, the connection. How do you make this reach people? It's a combination of graphic simplicity and the power of spirit and soul. It's design"*
- *"If I can harness the experience of what happened to me, I now know what it means to hurt. That is a door to something that you never had before, and that is empathy."*
- *"The only thing you can focus on is compassion, dignity, and humility. It's a very powerful connection, and that is what photography feels like."*
- *"I realized from now on the hero is the person who inspires us to think again about our own moral compass and our own responsibility as global citizens."*
- *"All the things I have learned about right and wrong, I have learned through my job, and I can pass these on. It is a good thing."*
- *"You are looking for a moment when you are as close to the soul as possible. That's what great design is."*

NETFLIX



FOR SCHOOLS

1 DISCUSS

What inspires Platon as a photographer? Choose one quote from the Start the Conversation section that reflects your understanding of his inspiration and share the quote.

Platon believes he is the bridge builder and says, "We are nothing as human beings if we don't experience that connection." With this idea in mind he founded [The People's Portfolio](#) to help tell these important stories.

- **Explore The Portfolio.** Choose one or two photographs that caught your attention and discuss what about this image was compelling. What story does it tell or how does it touch you emotionally?

2 DESIGN

Select a series of photographs (ie 3-5) from [Platon's studio](#) or from The People's Portfolio that touches you emotionally and/or are intriguing. Print and or create slideshow online with these photographs and create a title that reflects your exhibit. Share your exhibit online or take a picture of it to share at a later date.



IN THE HOME

1 DISCUSS

"You can look at a Platon portrait and you know it is a by Platon portrait." Kira Pollack, Director of Photography, TIME magazine shares. "He has photographed the most important people in the world from the last two decades. A Platon portrait is about lighting, its about the person's eyes, its about the graphic nature of how he positions the person...it is about getting the soul."

A Platon portrait is also very simple which really make them stand out on covers of magazines. This style is really made out of his flaws - that he can't cope with complication because of his severe dyslexia. For him a very complex world has to be simplified, and a design is a way for him out of this confusion. Great design simplifies a very complicated world.

2 DESIGN

With your mobile phone or another camera, take a portrait of someone. Think about how Platon frames an image, talks to who he is photographing, adjusts light, asks questions - to get the right moment and expression while keeping it very simple.



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ILSE CRAWFORD - INTERIOR DESIGN

SEASON ONE: EPISODE 8, DIRECTED BY SARINA ROMA

Interior designer Ilse Crawford creates spaces and objects that engage the sense and promote well-being, from high-end hotels to IKEA furniture. As founder of Studioilse, she brings her philosophy to life, along with her multidisciplinary team, by designing furniture and products that support and enhance human behavior and actions in everyday life.



START THE CONVERSATION

Revisit these ideas from Ilse Crawford after watching the ABSTRACT episode on her philosophy and approach to interior design. These ideas can be helpful discussion or writing prompts for a virtual class, or as a source of inspiration for students and families to discuss.

- *"We spend 87% of our lives in buildings, how they are designed really affects how we feel and how we behave. Design is not just a visual thing. It is a thought process. It's a skill. Ultimately design is a tool to enhance our humanity. It is a frame for life."*
- *"In our process, we interrogate the place, the client and then empathize - empathy is the cornerstone of design. From that process of interrogation and empathy-that's when the imaginative process kicks in. Interiors, which for ages have often been seen as a silly aside of design, is now being taken seriously."*
- *"As a kid, I was interested how people behaved differently in different spaces. That fascinated me."*
- *"When our team first approaches a project, we always hold off on our opinion. We watch. We ask questions. We listen. I always say to my team, we have two eyes, two ears, and one mouth and we should use them in this proportion."*
- *"It's a pretty simple mission, we do it one space at a time, one piece of design at a time. When you prioritize the human needs within a space, design can have a profound impact. I hope that we can add to the sum of human happiness and leave the world a better place."*

NETFLIX

**FOR SCHOOLS****1 DISCUSS**

What inspires Ilse Crawford as an Interior Designer? Choose one quote from the Start the Conversation section that reflects your understanding of her inspiration and share the quote.

Crawford shares with her students in Eindhoven that to be a designer focusing on wellbeing you have to focus on how things are made. Being part of the school allows her to be part of the magical process of creation - seeing something go from nothing to creation.

- Think about a time that you created something from scratch - be it something big or small you built, something you designed, or something that you cooked. What do you remember? What parts of your body, mind, and emotions did you tap into and feel to create and design? How did it feel, look, or even taste when you were finished?

In ABSTRACT, Ilse Crawford lists several concepts as essential elements in her process of design including Imagination - Empathy - The Tools - Sense of Place - and Wellbeing.

- What role do you believe each hold in relation to the work of design?
- What does a sense of well being have to do with design?
- Do you use imagination, empathy, tools, sense of place and well being in your everyday life? How?

2 DESIGN

You have an unlimited budget to design a space of your dreams using what you have learned about Ilse Crawford's approach thus far. This can be one room, a business, or any type of space (eg. a new restaurant). **(1)** Choose the space, **(2)** label the parts accordingly, and **(3)** make a list of materials you will use with a brief explanation of why you made the specific choices in your dream space.

**IN THE HOME****1 DISCUSS**

In writing her first book, *Sensual Home*, Ilse Crawford had a big "aha" moment - design needs to be experienced through all the five senses. "We are our bodies," she says.

- When you think of your five senses and how you experience space, what senses do you rely on the most? How does each sense help you to discover the world?
- What materials and spaces give you a sense of well being? Why?

Think about all the places you spend time. If you were to redesign the interiors of one of these places - where you live, work, go to school, gather to worship, etc. - which one would you choose? Why?

2 DESIGN

Choose one everyday object in your home that you use on a daily basis.

- First, choose entirely different materials to make the object. Then, redesign its function using a new form, or shape. Finally, combine these two changes together and draw the object using these new colors and form and explain your rationale for making these changes.
- Ask your friends and/or family members to engage in the same exercise and share your drawings and explanations with one another.