



## Fortune Tellers, Pictures, and Patterns

Our field reporter finds out what psychics can tell us about design.

by Angie Heile

I often used to drive by a pink neon “Palm Reader” sign on El Camino Real and resolve to stop there sometime. Why live by logic when magic might improve my life faster and with more panache? So when *AMBIDEXTROUS* asked me to investigate psychics, I decided to give the supernatural a sporting chance.

I began my psychic adventures with Debra Katz, a very friendly clairvoyance instructor and author of *You Are Psychic*. I met her cat and the neighbor’s pot-bellied pig; a rooster crowed throughout my session. She sat in front of me and closed her eyes to enter a

light trance. I was to say my full name a few times and ask about any concerns. Once I did, she kept up a steady patter, describing visions or phrases she was receiving and how these answered my questions.

I first asked her about relationship issues, and through imagery she correctly identified some of my concerns and gave me the same advice I had received from close friends. I then asked her whether I would change from my web design “career.” In the present, she saw clients tugging at me. In the future, she saw books and studying, energy coming through my hands, and

me typing. Twice there was something about Santa Monica, which surprised her. Then, an image of her ex-boyfriend, who had apparently quit an office job to teach himself filmmaking and become an animator; she suggested that this might represent a job in the arts for me. She saw me collaborating with my mother on a project.

In fact I had just talked with my mom about possibly starting a fashion business together, but the image of her own ex-boyfriend was more intriguing to me. It seemed to suggest a knack for extremely vivid free-association. In her reading, she provided symbols that she

and I could interpret collaboratively, guiding the resolution of my life issues without directly stating answers. I immediately recognized what some symbols might mean and pondered with her the possible meanings of others. Because of the latitude for interpretation, I can't describe her accuracy as uncanny, but her visions seemed relevant and helpful, which usually is the point of the exercise.

Next stop was the palm and tarot reader, a pretty Greek woman with a penchant for kitschy statues. The cards discovered that I was in school, involved in the restaurant industry, possibly waitressing, and with someone now but not the one I would marry ("maaaybe, but probably not") because he's not ready for commitment. In two years I would meet someone new, who would soon marry me and father two kids—"after the marriage, of course!"

I must have been looking great that day because I think the tarot cards misgauged my age. I've been out of school for ten years, married for five, and work restaurant-free. Not only did this woman make obvious statements based on superficial profiling, but she sought hints too: "I see you studying. What are you studying?" I felt cheated.

After that, I googled the number of that palmistry place on El Camino, but upon seeing a review of it on Yelp that described an erroneous prediction given ten years ago involving a late marriage and two children, I could not bring myself to call.

Seeing the future could be great. I could advance technology, game the stock market, join the fashion avant-

garde. Copying future trends might not quite be "creative," but it would certainly be entertaining. But in Katz's book, she suggests that some psychic visions of the future are only possible, not definite. This would still afford myriad advantages. Consider the time and money saved on prototyping and user testing if flaws in early designs could be found by a psychic. "A psychic can tell you when you're on the wrong track. If someone was trying to create something but they had problems, or didn't know how to market it, a psychic could help," Katz explains. "A psychic can also see what people in other places are developing, but that gets into psychic espionage."

Let's not go there. Instead, we'll turn to the skeptical premise that professional psychics' reports consist of babbling more or less at random, relying on the human propensity to perceive patterns when confronted with randomness. This view is actually the more interesting scenario for a person interested in creativity, because pattern creation is the very ability we use when we begin to design and invent. Solving problems by forging totally new connections between existing elements is the mark of the ingenious thinker. The trick is to produce in oneself a mental state that enhances that capacity for innovation—to become a lightning rod for that flash of insight. A good psychic has studied how to achieve this state—and how to inspire it in others.

Will honing your psychic skills make you a better designer? There's only one way to find out. Try them—then look into the future. 🖐️

## Three Ways to See the Future

**1** Practice meditating. Every day, try to teach your mind the habit of being relaxed and receptive. Ideally get to somewhere quiet and close your eyes, but if not, try soft-focusing: rest your eyes on a plain, neutral surface, staying aware of everything in your environment without paying particular attention to anything. If you're on a team project, make a point every once in a while to let your mind detach and drift away from the way your team is thinking. This will help you return to a receptive mindset.

**2** Develop your picture-thinking skills. Albert Einstein, Richard Feynman, and Nikola Tesla were all said to be picture thinkers. To improve your visual thinking, start with visualizing a symbol or a color. Put yourself in a meditative state and observe what images float into your mind, even irrelevant ones. Notice details. The goal is to allow your conscious mind to be receptive to your subconscious mind, which makes creative connections constantly. The pictures won't likely be usable solutions, but they could be stepping-stones that point to a new idea, as dreams sometimes do.

**3** Get someone to help you interpret your ideas—especially if the images don't make sense. You may be failing to see a connection that would be clear to someone else. You'll need a relationship with someone who will be enthused about helping and not just laugh at you. Kids may be good candidates for this job.

