



IDEAS

TAPPING INTO FEARLESS CREATIVITY: STORIES FROM THE ADIDAS MAKERLAB

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From IT to materials and design, a multitude of departments across adidas are challenging themselves in dedicated creative spaces.

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S tudies show that around 75% of adults think that they're not living up to their creative potential. What's holding us back? And what can we do to ignite our creative fire?

In our youth, we're fearless, curious, unabashed and always open to the power of imagination and make-believe. Somewhere along the way however, we succumb to the "you are either creative or you aren't" mentality. We learn "you can either paint or you can't". "You've got the artist's eye or you don't." Or quite possibly, time goes by and we simply underestimate our creative potency as we get sucked into life's routine demands and responsibilities.

But wait...



The MakerLab has its roots set in the "hacker space" concept, where ALL employees are given free rein to explore those out-of-the-box ideas.

We're all born creative, and full of curiosity. Every one of us! [🐦](#) We come into this world with an innate ability to express ourselves without hesitation. It's in our blood to test, experiment and seek. And the key point I want you to walk away with – we can always re-connect to this.

As the Director of the MakerLab Network, I come to work each day with this philosophy. Further, I'm proud to be part of a company that not only celebrates, but invests heavily in the potential of its employees so they can create with greatness. We believe we are all creators, makers and doers with a free pass to explore.

The MakerLab Network - Get your hands dirty and make your mark

After holding various roles in product design I received the opportunity to build three spaces which are the backbone of our MakerLab Network. Thanks to collaboration with countless colleagues, they are developing into key hubs where our employees can connect again with that curiosity and wonder which drives us to explore.

Across the globe, these three spots offer everything needed to play and experiment towards new horizons: one sits at our HQ campus in Herzogenaurach, Germany, one on the Portland campus in Oregon, and a third one in the Brooklyn Farm Studio in New York. All three are distinctive enclaves packed with tools, workbenches, ongoing workshop schedules and a welcoming staff empowering people to deconstruct their preconceptions and inhibitions.






Herzogenaurach's MakerLab - A 385 square-meter incubator providing everything needed to play and experiment towards new horizons

The 'network' aspect first and foremost comes to life when two people connect in the MakerLab, collaborate, learn from each other and then pass their experience on to another person. That's the magic spark. From there, it's a ripple effect until a whole community of creators, artists and thinkers are igniting new dialogues and perspectives. This is the key to innovation.

The meaning of the network continues through external partnerships developed with ateliers, studios, universities, artists, crafters and design experts. The result of this connected web is that a project can start in Germany, move for a while to the US and then end up in a creative direction exhibition which showcases the top inspirations for future seasons.

Our manifesto and value promise

We are people who believe in people. The community is the most important asset the company has.

“By connecting, sharing, learning from each other, personal motivation grows. Motivated employees deliver better results.” 



More than anything, we are makers in the deepest sense of the word. Our goal is to help those illusive ideas become projects, which means they are one step closer to becoming real. Acquiring craftsmanship is a priority over perfecting known techniques. Creative usage of space trumps direct commercial impact.

Most of the staff come from either a product design or engineering background, with a relentless dedication to service. We are ready to help with an honest smile. We know that unexpected situations are part of creating something new so we'll work with people side by side to find solutions. It's a joy to discover that look of satisfaction on our colleagues' faces after they overcome a new challenge.

We all share the same values when it comes to respecting our environment. By recycling leftover materials from within the company, we not only create a smaller environmental footprint but we also save costs on materials.

Lastly, we don't claim ownership. We are not the goal scorers but the ones passing the ball so our colleagues can create their own piece of magic.

MakerLab comes to life one experience at a time

We opened the MakerLab at adidas HQ in Germany in October 2016. Since then, there have been many aha! moments, lots of light bulbs turned on, so much knowledge-sharing. It's been extremely inspiring to see it all unfold, knowing that it empowers the company in many ways. [🐦](#) I'd like to share a few stories from my colleagues so you can experience what the MakerLab is like through their lenses.

A melting pot full of ideas and imagination

Federica Tedeschi - Senior Material Designer, Brand Creative Direction



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Federica regularly visits the MakerLab to experiment with materials, colors and textures.

“When I first came into the MakerLab, I fell in love! It felt so open and colorful, it was wonderful having a space full of materials and machines ready for everyone to use, it immediately felt like a creative space. But of course the MakerLab is much more than just the space itself. What makes it truly special is the people.

I’ve always considered myself a maker. As a material designer, making is an incredibly important part of how I ideate. Unlocking the magic for me can really only happen once I allow myself to make mistakes and feel free to experiment, without hanging on too tightly to a precious result.

The MakerLab’s importance in my work has grown considerably. Initially I was just excited to have a place to work with my hands, have access to machines and hopefully create something tangible to push my work forward. But I’ve gotten so much more out of it.

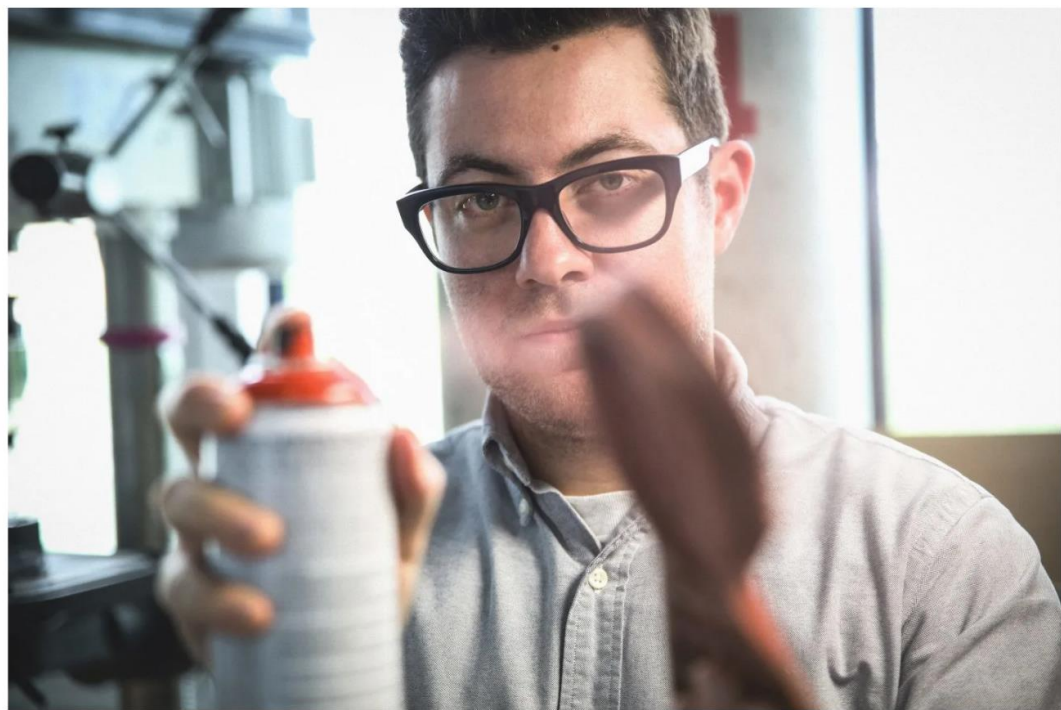
One moment in particular has stuck with me. In a nutshell, it inspired me to trust more in the ad-hoc collaboration that often comes to life in the MakerLab. Here I was working with someone who had a totally different background and thus brought a fresh pair of eyes to the project. Immediately, she discovered a new way to approach the concept I was working on. The most knowledgeable person doesn’t necessarily have all the right answers!

“MakerLab is a unique and potent melting pot of ideas and creativity.” 

The best part about spending time there has been the cross-pollination of knowledge and skills. This just happens organically when you work there. MakerLab brings together people from all areas and disciplines; you never know who will be working next to you and how your ideas will meld together. It’s a unique and potent melting pot of ideas and creativity.”

The power of crafting with your hands

Jean Khalife - Concept Creator, adidas Brooklyn Farm



“Before beginning my role in the Brooklyn Farm, I was a footwear designer with the Originals team for three years. A lot of my concepts were born out of 2D sketches. Coming into the MakerLab for the first time was an eye-opener. I had a trial-by-error experience as I transitioned from illustrations to working with my hands to express my concepts. I slowly got the hang of all the different machines, and having the MakerLab team around me to teach and support me was the key.

A physical item always speaks louder than just 2D sketches. In the MakerLab, it's easier to push product concepts further and clearly visualize which direction you want to go. In this sense, designing directly in 3D is pure luxury! Updating the design of a concrete sample is also more effective.

I had a really special moment in the MakerLab. I have an old pair of Gazelles that I have been wearing for the past 10 years. I'm a bit sentimental about them as I wore them at my graduation ceremony. They were really worn out, so I decided to take off the sole unit and reconstruct the shoe by hand. I didn't go the normal route of sketching something first, it was from the get-go a very tangible experience. It was such a refreshing way for me to create something new and unexpected out of these beloved old kicks, in that space between renovating and integrating new elements!”

A sea of opportunity

Maria Fernandez - Senior Project Manager Strategy, IT



“When I first stepped into the MakerLab, I felt the same thing I feel like when I’m at the beach, standing in front of the ocean: it’s beautiful and full of so much potential, just as it is. But I know that if I dive in I’ll discover a whole other world, one in which I could spend my life exploring. And still every time I’m there, I get this feeling. I’m ready to be amazed.

“When I saw the inspiring variety of machines, threads and fabrics, I was like a kid in a candy store.”



I’ve been designing and making my own clothes as a hobby for years. I’m pretty much self-taught and when I saw the inspiring variety of machines, threads and fabrics, I was like a kid in a candy store. On a personal level it was clear: this would be a place where I could feel free to ask questions, make mistakes and explore the art of designing in a playful and fun way.



On a team level, I had another inspiring moment during an IT department workshop. That's when I realized the MakerLab is important for everyone, no matter their background or expertise. As my team comes from a mainly digital-based background, I saw some hesitation from colleagues as we approached the tools, materials and workbenches. The goal was to work in a new and possibly uncomfortable way. We held a contest and the team was divided into groups and everyone went to work on the challenge of creating mini shoes with limited materials, tools and time.

It was great to see the wheels spinning in their heads as they dived in, testing the materials and tools and beginning to solve the problems. And that was my aha! moment: maybe this team of technologists is not used to creating product directly with their hands under certain time pressure, but they are absolutely ready to explore the challenge, work together and develop solutions. The MakerLab space brought out the best problem-solver and maker characteristics in all of them. It was so inspiring to witness their resourcefulness.”

There are many other stories like these and each one brings new meaning to MakerLab... stay tuned for more from our journey. In the end, the MakerLab Network is all about cashing in on that special ticket we all have to create. How it blossoms, by what path and how each person surprises him or herself along the way... well that's the fun part!

What spaces or environments bring out your highest level of creativity? Share your experience with us in the comments below.

