

MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT

DEB BRANDT // FIG LANCASTER

“There’s nothing half so pleasant as coming home again,” once observed poet Margaret Elizabeth Sangster. Her words, spoken over a century ago, encapsulate Deb Brandt’s life rather well. Deb’s life follows the plotline of a story we’ve heard time and again, yet never grows old. Girl grows up in a small town, moves to the city that never sleeps, works in the big corporate skyscrapers; the lights one day lose their luster, and girl (older and wiser) returns to the home she left but that never left her. Fast forward another fifteen years, to 2015, and her home of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, would possess even greater vitality and flourish with entrepreneurs, shops, and businesses partly due to one enamored native—Deb Brandt.

In 2004, four years after her return to Lancaster, Deb began a small business with friend Tracy Cutler called Moxie House. The two desired to create impactful design work and give back to the community. One year later, as they observed the City was just beginning to come alive, Fig® was born as a direct mail piece with the mission of lifting up the best of the City of Lancaster. The scope of Fig®’s future impact was unbeknownst to them in those challenging early days.

Today, Deb runs Fig® as the sole owner and has hired a team of talented men and women to assist in the growth of the business. Fig®, much more than a publication, describes itself as “a hyper-local, super-social communications package that reflects the soul of a city.” The print, web, and social media work together to make a greater impact. In addition to Lancaster, Fig® now works with the cities and boroughs of West Chester, Kennett Square, Bethlehem, and Columbia, South Carolina.

We can thank Deb Brandt for the value she places on community. As a mother of three and wife to Matt, the company’s CFO, she has used her gifting to better the community for not only her family, but for thousands of families. Fig® reveals and adds value to whatever locales it touches and turns them into homes where one wishes to return.

“Figs are also sweet but they are not perfect and they are not always pretty. Just like a great City.”



Deb Brandt

Written by Karen McGrady
A production of Char Co

CAN YOU SHARE SOME BACKGROUND ON YOU/YOUR LIFE THUS FAR?

I am a Lancaster County native who moved off to The Big City and never thought I would look back. After seven amazing years in NYC, I moved back to Lancaster to use my talents in a more meaningful way—although I did not know what that was at the time. In 2000 I started my own business, mostly freelancing with my contacts in NYC. During that time, my husband and I had three wonderful children in those first five years. In 2004, I started another business with a friend, Tracy Cutler, and started to work with a few local clients. Moxie House was built on the mantra “design for good” with a focus on creating impactful work and giving back to the community. One year later, we started to notice the City [Lancaster] coming to life. That was when Fig® was born. The first three to five years were an uphill battle. After four years, I took over the business as the sole owner. During the following six years, the community has rallied around Fig® and helped it to grow and thrive. I am grateful to Tracy and to all of those businesses that took a chance on something new, stayed with it during the economic downturn when it was tempting to cut advertising, and continued to believe in the value of collaboration. I can’t believe it has been ten years.

WHAT GAVE YOU THE IDEA TO START FIG®? CAN YOU SHARE SOME HISTORY REGARDING ITS CREATION?

Fig® started from a desire to promote the handful of destination businesses in the City by pulling together their marketing budgets and creating something impactful. I saw the



potential for Lancaster to be more than it was in 2005. I believed that if we showed the best of what the City had to offer, more businesses of that caliber would rise up. It raised the bar to have all that goodness in one place. We wanted to be a positive voice for change. It started to work but it was not easy. We quickly realized that print could not stand alone effectively so we added web, social media, and digital marketing to the package. For the first five years, Tracy and I were a two-woman show. It was only in 2010 that I was able to hire a team.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD, SCHOOLING, AND LIFE EXPERIENCES PREPARE YOU FOR YOUR ROLE AS CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND OWNER OF MOXIE HOUSE?

My design training is from Kutztown University. They have an excellent Communication Design program. My training to run a business, lead people, and make significant change came from my corporate work in NYC (and is still a work in progress). It was so important for me to experience how all the parts of the business must interact and work together to create a product and fulfill a vision. Design and marketing is only as good as its use and only as effective as the vehicle that carries it.

HOW HAS FIG® GROWN OVER THE YEARS AND DID YOU EXPECT ITS IMPACT?

I honestly did not have any expectations and that is unusual since I am known for high expectations. I know that I have been on a journey that I am meant to walk (although I wish I could run). I prayed that I would find something to do with my talent that would make an impact, something meaningful. That is all I wanted.

WHAT WERE SOME SETBACKS YOU EXPERIENCED DURING YOUR EARLY YEARS BEGINNING FIG® AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

There are always bumps along the road. Fig® was a new concept. It was hard to get people to buy into collaborative advertising. It was hard to ask Lancasterians to change. It was a challenge to explain the vision. But, all good things are hard in some way. If it was easy, it would have already been done.

I KNOW YOU'VE EXPLAINED IT MANY TIMES BEFORE, BUT COULD YOU ENLIGHTEN US ON THE ORIGIN/MEANING OF THE NAME "FIG®"?

Fig the fruit is a historical and biblical fruit. The seeds in the fig mean unity and prosperity. We wanted a name that would reflect the type of City that is built on a strong historical foundation and wants to work together for the greater good. Figs are also sweet but they are not perfect and they are not always pretty. Just like a great City.



• THIRD •
DRAWER
• DOWN •
© 1997
Carmela Bergman



AFTER WORKING IN NEW YORK CITY FOR COMPANIES SUCH AS RALPH LAUREN FRAGRANCES AND PARFUM GIVENCHY, WHAT IGNITED IN YOU A DESIRE TO RETURN TO YOUR HOMETOWN? DO YOU EVER MISS NYC?

I never regret a decision or shy away from change so no, I never regretted it. I had a life-changing issue that prompted the decision when I was 28. I wanted to build a life in a place other than NYC.

WHY DO YOU HAVE SUCH A LOVE FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES AND HOW DO YOU FIND YOURSELF BEING ABLE TO BEST HELP THEM SUCCEED?

I understand what small businesses need to deal with. As a business owner, you need to do everything and be everything. Fig® can take some of that marketing burden off the shoulders of a small business owner or our branding services can help a business get off the ground. We work with a lot of small businesses but we also enjoy our branding and marketing projects for larger regional businesses. Design work is a very large part of our business and is growing steadily with regional and national work.

WHAT ARE FIVE HIDDEN GEMS IN LANCASTER?

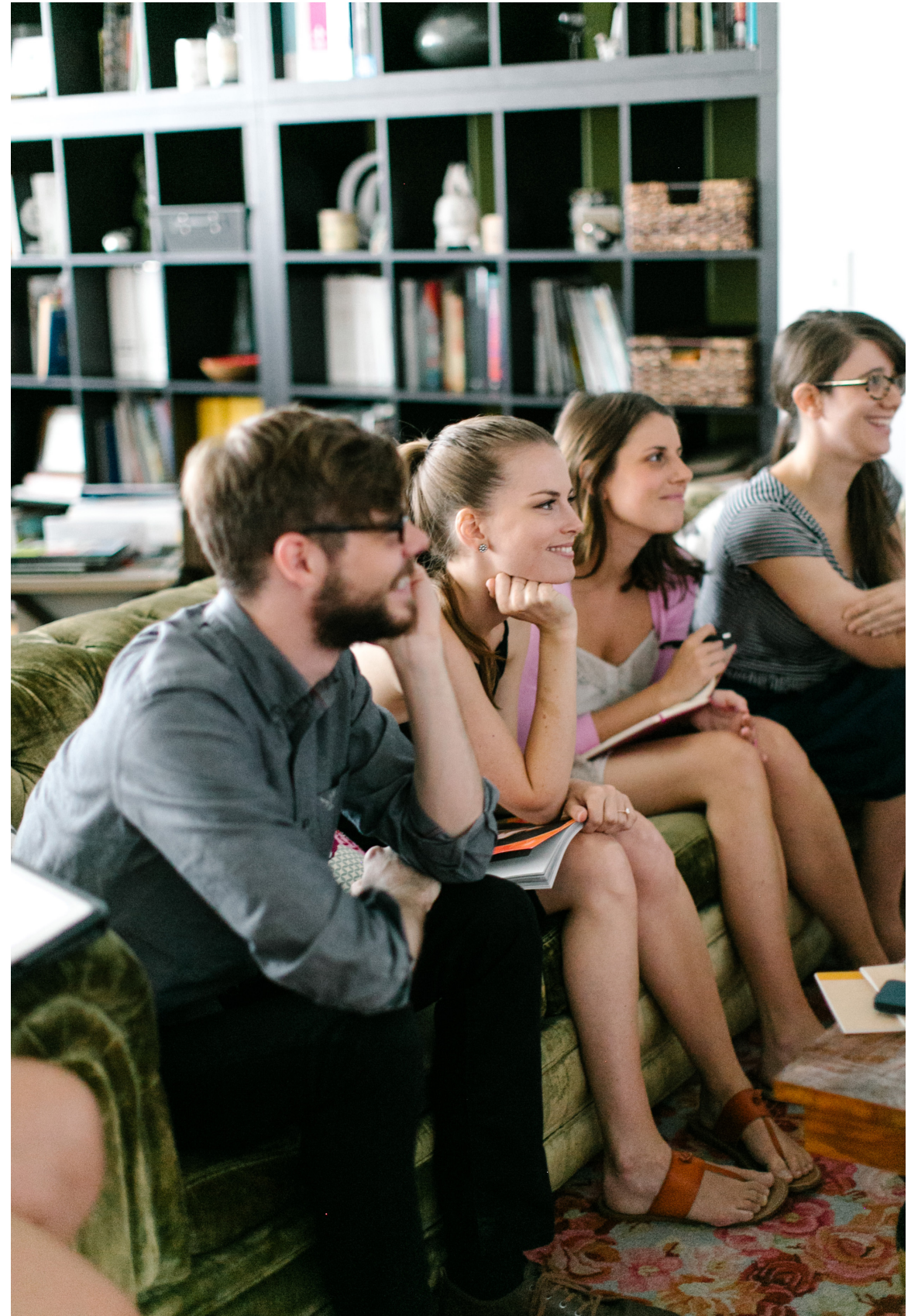
Flora's
Himalayan Curry and Grill
Mise En Place Kitchen Store
Friendship Heart Gallery
The outside patio at On Orange

IN WHAT WAYS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE CITY OF LANCASTER CONTINUE TO IMPROVE?

We need more of all of the current assets. The more we have, the more people we will draw. We also need more diverse and affordable housing for young people to move back to the area. Lastly, we need to remember to support our local businesses and understand the value of keeping our money in our community. Also, bike lanes would be nice.

AS A MOM TO THREE CHILDREN, HOW DO YOU HANDLE THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE?

My husband Matt and I work together to make it work. He is truly amazing. He has been my rock and my support for as long as I can remember. He also has a crazy good brain for finance so he keeps all the numbers in line. He is our CFO.





“...we need to remember to support our local businesses and understand the value of keeping our money in our community.”





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JOIE
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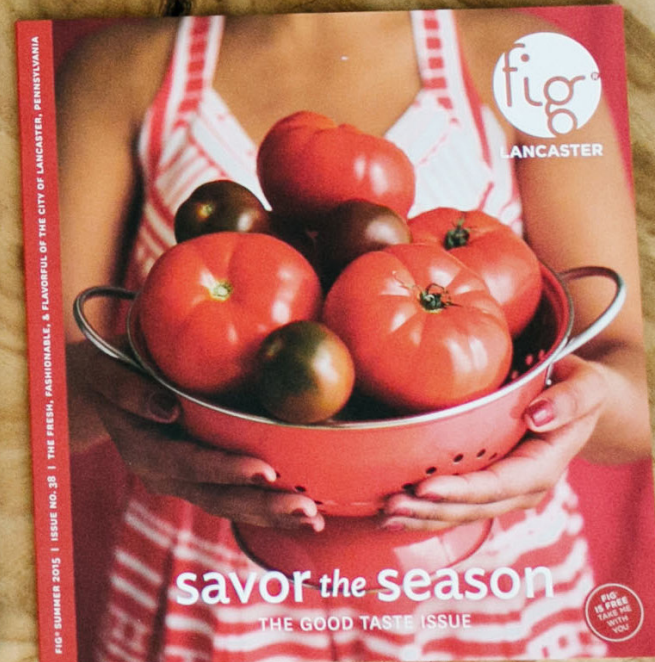
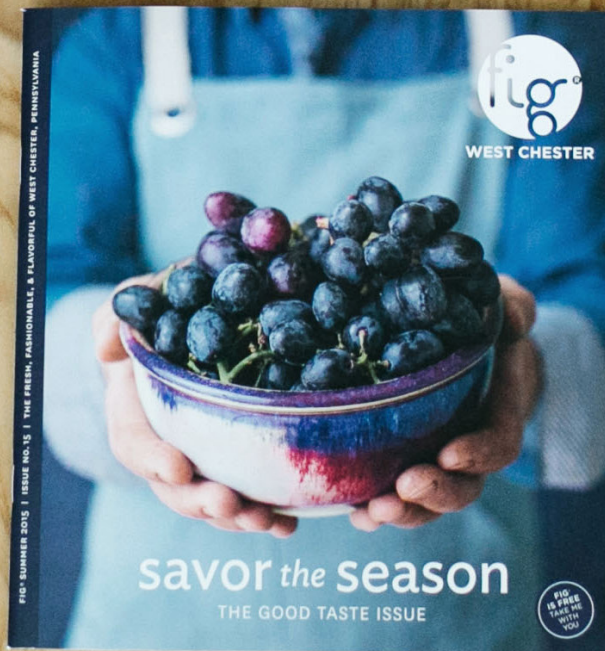
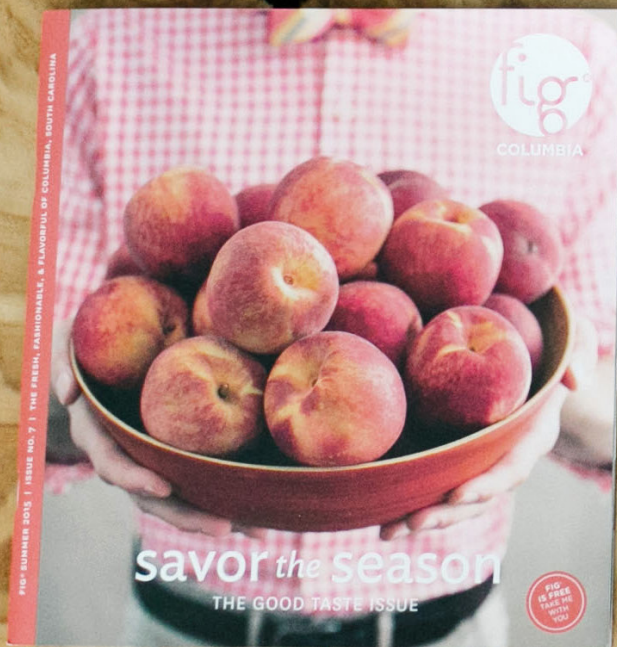
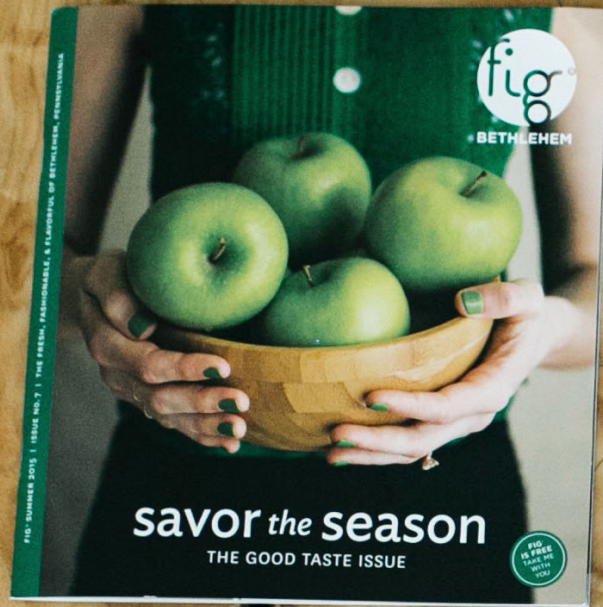
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DO YOUR HUSBAND AND/OR CHILDREN INFLUENCE YOU IN YOUR WORK WITH MOXIE HOUSE?

Yes. I am always making decisions based on how they will affect my family. I hope that I am a good role model for my children, especially my girls. I want them to see a strong female role model and know that they have the responsibility to use their gifts to make a difference. All three of my children are so unique and so special.

BESIDES LANCASTER, PA, WHAT ARE THREE OTHER URBAN AREAS YOU LOVE TO VISIT?

My other Fig® cities and boroughs come first! West Chester, Kennett Square, Bethlehem, and Columbia, South Carolina. After that, I love Philadelphia and NYC.

DO YOU EVER HAVE A DISCOURAGING DAY? IF SO, WHY?

Yes, everyone does. I am an external processor so I go home and talk it out with my husband—until he gets tired of hearing about it. Then, I get up, brush it off, and move forward.

HOW DO YOU STAY ENERGIZED AND MOTIVATED AT WORK?

My team! I have an amazing team. Truly inspiring every day. We brainstorm a lot so we are always staying fresh. Plus, Angus, our studio dog, keeps us on our toes.

COULD YOU SHARE ANY LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNED FOR MANAGING A TEAM WITH VAST PERSONALITIES, INTERESTS, AND ABILITIES?

I believe that talent and creativity only come to people who are unique and are willing to embrace their differences. I hire people who can bring something special to the team. I then try to make sure that those talents are being embraced and cultivated.

YOUR JOB SEEMS TO REQUIRE INTENSE ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS. WHAT ARE SOME TRIED AND TRUE ORGANIZATIONAL TIPS FOR WORK AND/OR LIFE?

I am good at compartmentalizing my day and my projects, but honestly, I just managed to hire people who are more organized than I am. I believe in hiring those who complement your skills and offset your weaknesses. No one can be good at everything.

WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR THE FUTURE OF FIG®?

Right now we are investing in improved processes for a better client experience, key



collaborations, and increased reach. Cities are constantly changing so our job is to keep up with the needs of the community. With an eye on constant improvement in existing Fig® destinations, I am looking to expand to other locations but will be very selective. I have learned a lot over the past ten years about the correct mix for a successful Fig® location. The package is not right for every City.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOUR FUTURE INCLUDES?

Happiness to me is contributing to something and making an impact. I believe that one big idea can change everything. I have been incredibly blessed to come back to this community to raise my family and build this company. I love to come into work every day. I don't know where the future will lead, but I trust that it will be an interesting journey.



“Happiness to me is contributing to something and making an impact.”