

# Immensity, Intensity, and Intelligence

ZIBA AND THE SOUL OF A BRAND

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# Our Journey

By Sohrab Vossoughi

I often say that perfection is a journey and that design is iterative and continually evolving. The evolution of Ziba has indeed been amazing and incredibly gratifying. Over the past three decades, hundreds of designers, whom we affectionately refer to as Zibites, have been part of our journey, contributing to the culture and vibrancy of our work. Always questioning, always pushing, always reinventing—we are always looking for new ways to make our clients more beloved, more profitable, more valuable. That is, in fact, our value.

We exist to design beautiful experiences. We are rooted within a human-centric approach. It is the reason I rise every day, energized to come into the studio. It is why we are known for creating love between people and brands.

This publication features a profile of Ziba written by Julie Lasky, a respected voice in design journalism. We are most appreciative for her thoughtful and considered approach to defining her perspectives on Ziba. Our hope is to celebrate our clients, without whom we would not exist. Ziba has only one metric for success, and that is the success of our clients. We have much to be grateful for.

The journey continues.

# **Immensity, Intensity, and Intelligence: Ziba and the Soul of a Brand**

By Julie Lasky

## At Home in Portland

Portland, Oregon is a city with small, walkable blocks and unique, character-filled businesses. Nothing feels stamped from a mold. Locavores submerge themselves in the deep satisfactions of food, wine and nature. Even the donuts are so well made and authentically flavored they've attracted an international cult following.



But when Sohrab Vossoughi moved to the area in 1980 to practice industrial design and engineering, Portland was a backwater. Home of Nike and Columbia Sportswear, it was best known for outdoor gear and athletic apparel. Wieden+Kennedy, the local agency that would set a global standard for creative advertising with its campaigns for Nike, had yet to be founded.

Vossoughi saw nothing but opportunity in those parts. Born in Iran, he had moved to Northern California in 1971 at the age of 14 to attend high school. Later, he enrolled at San Jose State University, majoring in mechanical engineering. Passing a studio classroom one day, he noticed car drawings tacked to a wall. It was his introduction to industrial design. The next day he switched majors. “My dad thought I was crazy,” Vossoughi recalls. “He thought I was going to be an artist. He wouldn’t say anything, but I could see in his face, *Is he going to be one of these guys with paintings in a flea market?*”

For his senior thesis, Vossoughi designed a portable modular system for makeshift hospital rooms that included lights and oxygen tanks. His dream was to move to New York and start his own business. But practicality and enthusiastic recruiters led him instead to design printers and computers for Hewlett-Packard. He began at the company’s division in Boise, Idaho, and later transferred to Vancouver, Washington. He fell in love with nearby Portland. “Portland’s values of humanity, craft, lack of pretension and balance appeal to me,” he said later.

After juggling his day job and freelance projects, Vossoughi transitioned to independent consulting. He married his wife, Haleh, bought a piece of land in Vancouver and designed a small modern house, along with all the fittings and furnishings.

In 1984, he opened his own company in an office park in Beaverton, Oregon and named it Ziba after the Farsi word for beautiful. He wanted to embed a token of his birth culture in his business, but the name, unlike his own, had to be something anyone could pronounce. He tested an ad hoc focus group. “ZEE-bah,” they all said with ease.

As for “beautiful,” he defined it differently from the mainstream; beauty was not just visual but a mix of sensory experiences and ideas. It was efficiency, intelligence and integrity packaged into an object, where everything had a

purpose and was pleasant to look at, comfortable to use and long lasting. Or the beautiful thing wasn’t an object at all but a concept, a way of clarifying and enriching a client’s identity at every point of expression. It was a brand story, a logo, a retail experience, a digital environment, a user interface. It was a new understanding of a company’s audience—a tactical direction for meeting their needs.

Long before it became commonplace for industrial design consultancies to branch out to other areas, Ziba Design was building expertise in ethnographic research, brand experience, communications, packaging, digital design, environmental design, service design and more. Vossoughi believed that simply to accept a commission and hand over a product was to ignore the layered, emotional ways in which consumers engage with goods and brands.

Today, Portland is a cultural capital and Ziba is at the international forefront of design and strategy. Together they have grown not just in size but also complexity, while promoting the values that have always made them attractive. Both are determinedly authentic, restlessly creative, socially oriented and attuned to the future.

ZEE-bah

## Office as Metaphor

Vossoughi, 60, is an energetic man.

He radiates bonhomie with a slight edge of impatience. Describing Ziba Design in three words, he boils it all down to immensity, intensity and intelligence. “We look at the big picture, over the long term,” he says. “We like to think big and act small.”

Intensity is about “rigor and a sense of urgency, where the work is everything and yet not the only thing.” People tell him that he himself is intense, “but intensity is not this,” he says, shaking his arms spasmodically, as if possessed by a triple espresso. “It’s the relentless pursuit of truth.” Intelligence is “thinking smart,” finding a conceptual shortcut that leads to solving a problem in record time with great results. Hard work is important, too, Vossoughi says, but at Ziba Design that’s a given.

All three values resonate in the company’s 53,000-square-foot headquarters in Portland’s Pearl District. Custom built in 2010 with white walls, cement floors and pale wood accents, the building pays homage to modernist clarity. Visitors ascend from a shadowy street-level hall to a capacious lobby filled with light. The experience is like one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous transitions, the movement from compression and uncertainty to exhilaration.

In the lobby, under glass, products from Ziba Design’s three-plus decades represent much longer journeys culminating in bright spots. There is an electrical Woodzig Pruner, the first such tool designed for aging consumers (1991); colorful M-Systems USB flash drives, radical conveniences when they were invented (2000); and a group of satellite radios for Sirius that were so successful they positioned that company to merge with its competitor XM (2006). Standing like a guardian, calling attention to the double-height ceiling, is a 16-foot tall polystyrene foam robot—a Styrobot—by Michael Salter, a local artist.

The LEED Gold building also has an assortment of neutrally furnished conference rooms and an auditorium used for internal events or public programs hosted with the Portland design community. (Ziba designed the aircraft-inspired chairs—called JumpSeats—that fold neatly into four-inch-deep panels resting flush against the cement tiers.) These areas compose the company’s public face. Behind the scenes are cubicle warrens for the approximately 100 Portland-based staffers (about 20 more work in Ziba’s Tokyo office); project rooms papered with printouts or scrawled over with sketches; a workshop with a virtual reality studio and 21st century machines exhaling electrical smells; a library stocked with design magazines and materials. This is where the intensity and intelligence live.

**THINK  
BIG  
ACT SMALL**

## **Beauty is Universal**

For Vossoughi beauty is universal.

People know it when they see it/feel it/hear it/sit on it/manipulate it. It is the reassuring snap of a Clorox ReadyMop that has been speedily assembled from four separate parts. Or the blissful quiet that comes from deactivating a Coleman smoke or carbon monoxide detector after a false alarm.

On learning that 60% of deaths in home fires had occurred after consumers removed the batteries from smoke detectors, Ziba introduced a distinct button on the devices that could be safely depressed with a broom handle to turn off the alarm.

Ziba has also brought conventional beauty to unlikely products. One of Vossoughi's early clients was ProForm, an exercise company later acquired by Nike. "We took exercise equipment, which was all black and chrome, out of the gym and made it into furniture," he recalls. "You could leave it out and be proud of it. Ziba was the first to put color in the category."

Nor was an external hard drive treated as a thing of loveliness until Ziba began working in the 1980s with LaCie on drives that were compatible with Apple computers. Its 1986 Cirrus model, with patterned ventilation holes and colorful, button-like feet, was the first external hard drive to win an industrial design award.

Nor did a glass-cleaning tool find a home in the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum before the Clerét bathroom squeegee came along. Ziba eliminated the handle and introduced an elegant, ergonomic form and aqua-and-gray palette with curved blades alluding to waves. *The New York Times* called it "a comely, if lowly, household accessory." *Business Week* named it the best consumer product of 1989.

In 2000, Ziba was represented in "Design Culture Now," the first Cooper Hewitt design triennial, with a series of fully operational computers commissioned by Intel. As noted by Steven Skov Holt, one of the exhibition's curators, the computers, named Simple PC, illustrated "just what can be achieved when designers and engineers commit to changing paradigms." Unlike the traditional PC, which had the scaled-down form of a supercomputer, the collection was "approachable, sculptural and colorful." One computer, called Aztec, wasn't a box or slab but a stylized pyramid. Another, called Koi, looked like a fish with a disk-drive mouth. "By eliminating cumbersome user manuals and elaborate set-up rituals," Holt added, "the Simple PCs aim to create an environment that minimizes hassle. Ziba's work foretells a future where a playful approach to storing, processing and sharing information is the norm."

## **You Can't Just Make Something Look Nice**

There is nothing superficial about Vossoughi's idea of beauty. If a design successfully mediates between a client's identity and intentions and a consumer's needs and desires—if it offers utility and ease and communicates clearly—it will be beautiful by default. Beauty derives from harmony and logic in the design process.

It is not just a manifestation of good design but the system that underlies it.

In 1998, FedEx's brand identity group invited Ziba Design to review plans for improving the company's retail sites. There was a disconnect between FedEx's streamlined identity—revamped by Landor Associates in 1994, at the time the company shortened its name from “Federal Express”—and everyday operations. Of particular concern were the often-chaotic World Service Centers (WSCs), where customers dropped off packages to be shipped. Ziba was asked to evaluate a new WSC prototype to ensure that it adhered to FedEx's brand language and guidelines.

Ziba staked out far more ambitious territory. “You can't make something look nice,” Vossoughi said later. Finding efficiency but little humanism in FedEx's services, Ziba recommended redesigning everything that customers encountered in the course of sending or receiving packages, from WSCs to street boxes (made white so they would be more visible at nighttime) to the electronic devices that FedEx couriers used to collect signatures (brought visually closer to the brand language, with improved ergonomics and functionality).

The three-phase FedEx WSC project, which was heavily driven by user research, represented Ziba's first venture into environmental and service design—what Vossoughi describes as “three-dimensional branding.”

In a case study published in *Design Issues*, Maggie Breslin explored how FedEx represented a sea change for Ziba, and vice versa.

Ziba critiqued the interaction component of the WSC project, and research became a necessary and vital component of the redesign. They argued that interaction and appearance were valuable missing elements from the FedEx product development process, and the shift in perspective made the customer present in the retail environment and the courier an extension of the brand.

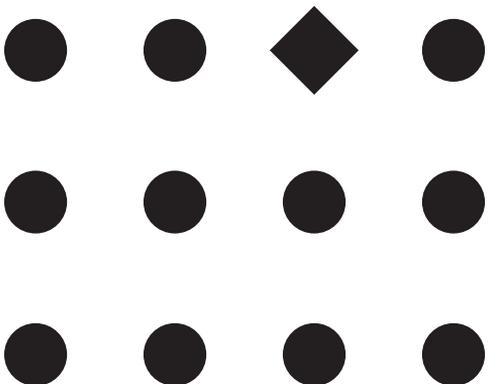
In each instance, the change to Ziba's practice was influenced by a new way of thinking that then was translated into a new way of working.

## Easy to be Different, Hard to be Right

It was Vossoughi's early insight that the love between brand and consumer is more important than the brand's relationship with its competitors.

Consumers have a nose for insincerity.

Copying the superficial formulas of a crowd-pleasing company like Apple, or heaping on features to stand out from a competitive field, he believes, are hollow strategies that often end up alienating the market.



In *Authenticity Is Now*, Ziba's self-published book from 2007 (its subtitle is *A Working Definition of the Fluid State of Being As It Applies to Business and Design*), Vossoughi notes that 21st century brands "have become adept at being 'new,' 'unique' or 'feature-rich' and telling seductive stories to make themselves more alluring than the next brand." But something is missing amidst the cacophony. We seem to have forgotten that consumers are people too and that behind brands there are people. We have forgotten to genuinely relate to each other. We have forgotten that meaningful relationships are the bedrock of business.

A gold standard of this philosophy is Umpqua Bank. In 2003, Ray Davis, Umpqua's chief executive, approached Ziba to build out his idea for a branch in Portland that had none of the impersonality of ATMs and drive-throughs. The institution had been founded in 1953 in Oregon's Umpqua Valley to meet the basic banking needs of loggers. But it had grown to more than 65 branches throughout the state at the cost of its relationships with customers. Davis's idea was to graft hospitality design onto banking so that the clients were welcomed into a comfortable room, offered coffee and invited to linger among the financial products without sales pressure. He asked Ziba to execute a model precisely because the consultancy's only environmental design project at that point was FedEx. The last thing he wanted was orthodoxy.

Ziba returned with a flagship Umpqua branch, or "store," in the Pearl District that mixed the ideas of boutique hotel, retail space and cafe. It was an exercise in cultivating brand loyalty that Ziba called "slow banking." The first week the store was open it generated a million dollars in deposits. Within nine months, it had secured \$50 million—more than three times what Davis had guaranteed to his board—and the concept had been replicated in all of Umpqua's branches. Ziba went on to develop an environmental group.

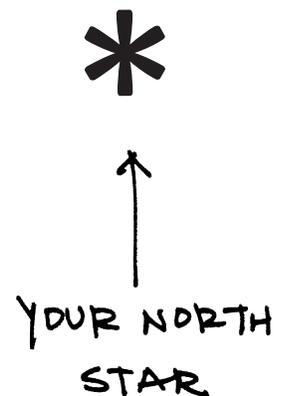
As Vossoughi once said in an interview for *Ad Age* magazine, "It's easy to be different; it is very hard to be right—right for your brand, right for your target customer."



## Here's Your North Star

“We still get bank calls all the time,” states Chelsea Vandiver, Ziba’s executive managing director of creative. “They say, ‘We want you to do Umpqua for us.’ I tell them, ‘Nobody can do Umpqua but Umpqua. Let’s go figure out what your brand is.’”

Discerning the essence of a brand and how to communicate it is at the core of Ziba’s practice. Ziba was one of the first design consultancies to hire anthropologists and marketing strategists and it maintains a robust design insight and trends discipline.



There are many metaphors for revealing the soul of a brand. Ziba's staffers describe themselves variously as archaeologists who sift through a company's history and assemble a comprehensive and clarifying model of accomplishment. Or as psychologists who extract the emotional meaning of a brand by listening carefully to its creators and consumers. "Sometimes we're like a cartographer," Vandiver says. "A company's lost its way, its North Star. We say, 'Here's your North Star, here's the road map.' They pick it up and go on their way."



**Daimler:  
It's About Real-Time Tracking and Sharing**

Concerned with optimizing the efficiency of its trucks, Daimler Trucks North America went to Ziba for assistance with a web-based portal that could access and share information about a truck's location, health, fuel efficiency and driver performance. The design team interviewed fleet owners, drivers and technicians to nail down the features of this portal, and set up multiple prototyping sessions with real-world scenarios the client could see live. The resulting software gathers data, analyzes it and within minutes translates it into easy-to-read graphics. It diagnoses maintenance issues and indicates when a truck needs immediate servicing or can safely complete its route. The next set of features will include a digital key that gives fleet owners remote access to vehicles so that if a truck is stolen, it can be safely shut down. A mobile platform is also being developed.



**REI:  
It's About Discovering the Outdoors**

Ziba projects commonly follow a centrifugal pattern, extending from a core of insight to a wider circle of design and strategy. At the heart is a distillation of a brand's character, the cherished and distinctive aspects that make it competitive. Ziba offers an around-the-corner perspective not easily obtained by companies focused on short-term quarterly earnings. Which is why, in addition to generating physical and digital products, it often serves as an innovation catalyst for corporations like Procter & Gamble and Philips Design that have their own heavily populated design teams. Whether Ziba signs off from a project at this stage or continues collaborating, the job of asserting brand character at every physical and digital touchpoint radiates from that center.

REI, the recreational equipment retailer, for example, hired Ziba to help it develop a fitness section. Ziba quickly returned with the conviction that though fitness was implicit in products like mountain climbing gear it should not constitute a separate category. REI's real theme, Ziba concluded, was inspiring people to discover the outdoors. Ziba summed up this idea in a manifesto, after which it received a call from REI's new chief marketing officer asking it to extend the message. Ziba also developed the Evrgrn brand, creating products for a younger generation. The entire inventory sold out in two weeks, even before the line was introduced at the retail locations nationally.



**TDK:**

### **It's About Music as Commerce**

After having pioneered magnetic storage for audio and building a solid reputation with cassette tapes, TDK, which had licensed its brand to Imation, was forced to face down the arrival of CDs and DVDs. It began making commodity products, like USB drives, earbuds and alarm clocks. Its once powerful brand recognition was compromised. How to restore it? Paul O'Connor, then Ziba's executive creative director, had the revelation that TDK wasn't about storage as much as sharing music and making connections. He recalled a youth spent trading homemade mix tapes with friends and plugging them into tape decks on road trips. "What we did with those tapes was cherish them," he says. "We made a cassette tape for our girlfriend. If she broke up with us, we made the sad cassette tape."

For O'Connor, the ultimate tape-based music sharing took the form of boomboxes blasting hip hop at a time when rappers didn't have access to the airwaves. Given millennials' reawakened interest in turntables and vinyl, Ziba urged TDK not to abandon its link to the past. They suggested: "Let's create a line of heritage audio products that re-announce TDK as a brand from the physical/analog era that is now going to make a new statement in the digital era."

The jewel in Ziba's "digilog" collection for TDK was in fact a big boombox. It had three speakers (one more than strictly necessary), two knobs and a handle—a streamlined and luxurious version of the behemoths that rattled New York subway cars in the 1980s. "The Europeans in the office took offense at the massive American scale," O'Connor recalls, but if the box wasn't portable, it was at least luggable. It found its audience without hiccup. Not only did Snoop Dogg order a custom version painted with Pittsburgh Steelers colors, but the Beastie Boys used one to introduce their 2011 album "Hot Sauce Committee Part Two." They made a video showing a lone TDK boombox blasting music to the farthest reaches of Madison Square Garden.



**New Seasons Market:**

### **It's About Giving Ingredients Personality**

Another example of projects radiating from a redefined core is Ziba's involvement with the regional grocery chain New Seasons Market. After Endeavour Capital, an investment capital firm, bought a large stake in 2009 and installed a new CEO, New Seasons had aspirations to go national. Ziba was brought in to provide guidelines. "We were the team to find what they stood for so as they expanded there was a consistent brand experience," Vossoughi says. The new owners "see us as a vehicle to reduce the risk of their investment. They focus on growth."

New Seasons, which sells both mass market Froot Loops and rarefied bee pollen, is progressive. It partners with nearby farmers and suppliers to guarantee superior ingredients and boost the local economy. Ziba convinced New Seasons to redesign its private brand so that it communicated the company's liberal, lighthearted nature. Ingredients became characters. Literally. The peanut butter jar now shows an illustrated peanut remarking "Bread completes me." The label also prominently refers in front to "a hint of Jacobsen Sea Salt." Peanut butter sales alone increased 45 percent with the new package, and the private label overall has seen double-digit sales growth. Ziba is now working on the interior design of the stores.



### **Heinz Ketchup: It's About Taste**

Heinz ketchup is another Ziba story of how a beloved historic brand reclaimed its heritage. The company had the conundrum of supporting a product line with six different bottles, each with its own cap. The packages cost more than their contents and yet none of the silhouettes were protected from copycats. Ziba was asked to unify the products and find a way to trim costs.

As defined by Heinz, the virtue of the existing bottles was that they fit into a refrigerator door shelf. Ziba saw little competitive advantage—or storytelling value—in this feature, but found a great deal of interest in the company's past. Heinz patented its ketchup bottle in 1882, and the number 57 that was embossed in the glass—an imprecise allusion to the company's extensive 19th century product line—was said to be the secret to extracting the contents. If you tapped on it, the urban legend went, the ketchup would come out faster. In the 1970s, Heinz based an advertising campaign on the idea of thick and rich ketchup so irresistible it was worth waiting for. In one TV spot, ketchup slowly poured from a bottle to the tune of Carly Simon's "Anticipation."

Ziba's research showed that consumers were deeply attached to the taste of Heinz ketchup. The company needed to reclaim the company's original equity in "thick and rich" with a bottle that communicated those values. The necks were made much thicker in profile, and the six caps were reduced to two, saving more than \$10 million a year in packaging costs. Facets, a trademark of Heinz's original glass bottles, were added to the plastic containers to make them more squeezable. The original keystone label—one of the most familiar in product history—remained exactly as it was, and Ziba furnished Heinz with legal arguments for securing a design patent for the new containers. The iconic design was restored.



### **Li-Ning: It's About Parsing a Powerful Youth Market**

Ziba's expertise in mining a client's history and making it relevant to existing and future consumers was put to an extreme test with Li-Ning, China's largest manufacturer of athletic footwear and apparel. In 2008, the 18-year-old company found itself losing ground both to international brands like Nike and Reebok and Chinese knockoffs. It had a loyal following among people who admired its founder Li-Ning's six gymnastics medals in the 1984 Summer Olympics, but what would happen as those memories receded and a younger generation dominated the market? Ziba assigned 23 researchers in four teams to spend 352 person-days in 10 Chinese cities. They spoke to 136 young people and cultural experts to arrive at a new understanding of the youth market. This led in turn to a complete renovation of the company's branding, retail and product lines.

Originally a much simpler commission to design youth-oriented sportswear, the project expanded after Ziba's initial research revealed a vast void and opportunity. Not only was Li-Ning failing to reach 340 million Chinese consumers between the ages of 14 and 25, so was its competition. Ziba's research teams biked, dined, played sports and shopped with representatives of this vast market, ultimately dividing them into three groups—Strivers, Builders and Stylers—with different attitudes about athletics and apparel and how they fit into their expectations for the future. Every aspect of Li-Ning was overhauled with consideration for these profiles, from the company's logo and visual identity system to its product categories and their contents to the organization and displays of its 7,400 retail stores throughout China. Li-Ning's revenue increased from \$418 million before Ziba's involvement to \$1.44 billion in 2010.

## Looking to the Fringes

Ziba was one of the first global design consultancies to use research to inform their design process, with a methodology that now engages many forms, across many sectors. Sam Crompton, Ziba's former director of Consumer Insights and Trends, is only in his early thirties. But that's ancient compared with his intern Eli Goldberg. When Crompton was producing a video for a client, it was 18-year-old Eli who whipped up seven original music tracks to go with it. And when Crompton was overseeing Ziba's "2016 Gen Z Report," an analysis of the values and habits of kids born between 1997 and 2010, Eli was an invaluable source.



Previous generations stuck to a single identity and path, Crompton says. “These guys, they’ll have three or four different careers by the age of 30. Not even jobs. Careers.” Ask Eli to define himself, and he’ll say he’s a magician and artist who’s into filmmaking and politics.

“I always think of Minecraft when I think of this generation,” Crompton says. “What they expect from the world is to be able to create within it, move blocks around and create something for themselves.” He calls it the Builder Generation and believes it is misunderstood. These kids are obsessed with their screens but also crave tangible objects and emotional connections. They have the confidence that comes from being authorities on subjects that mystify their parents and hone their skepticism of authority and hard sells early. The report recommends supplying them with open-ended platforms like Snapchat, neutralizing (to the extent possible) brand identity and gender in merchandise, making supply chains transparent and packaging minimal, and grafting humanity onto technology.

The Gen Z Report is one of many research projects undertaken by Ziba’s Consumer Insight and Trends group; others relate to food, transportation, education, finance and health. But its themes hold a special resonance. If your job is seeing around corners, who better to study than young consumers molded by radical change?

A revolution in the digital service economy has led Ziba to look further afield for answers. “We’re not just learning from the people who might use a thing or experience a service,” Crompton says. “We also learn from the fringes, the analogous categories.” He explains that expectations cross boundaries. “What I expect an airline to be like is now based on my expectation from Alexa or ReachNow or Postmates. Companies come to us and say, ‘Our competitors are these and we need to know how to eat some ground from them.’ We say, ‘Your competitors are everywhere. Somebody’s coming into a cheese company and expecting the service to be like Amazon Prime.’”

The erasure of boundaries may even apply to the way we segment populations by age, he says. “One thing that came across from the Gen Z project was the question: ‘Why do you guys think of generations?’ I think we may be seeing the end of them.”

## **Ziba Labs**

For a firm with a solid record of boosting other people's commercial success, at some point it becomes inevitable: the entrepreneurial bug bites. Ziba Design has occasionally exchanged services for a stake in a client's business, but Vossoughi found the upfront investment too great and the rewards too uncertain. "If you take equity, you have a much less clear line of sight to cash," he says.

Instead he founded Ziba Labs in 2010. This branch of Ziba Design, which he leads and for whose services he takes an equity stake, assists startups in everything from polishing business plans to securing financing to finding partners who can supply materials, components or technical know-how. Then Ziba Design steps in to execute the design and strategy work as it would for any other client.

Ziba Labs helped to incubate a communications tool for Exitus Technologies that helps people manage crisis situations like school shootings; among its contributions was bringing Intel into the project. The company was the first to use Intel's Curie Module, introduced to the multinational technology giant by Ziba.

In the case of Citifyd, there was an opportunity to utilize technology, both software and hardware (IoT), to create a digital solution to make commuting easier and less expensive in urban areas. The brainchild of Vossoughi, this app connects multiple stakeholders and financial avenues for all types of parking. The company charges the driver a convenience fee and takes a cut from the seller's revenue. It also alerts drivers to retail sites and restaurants where a small validation fee is charged for parking when goods or services are purchased.

## Wrapping Up

On an overcast February day in Portland (is there any other kind?) the atmosphere at Ziba Design's headquarters is far from frenetic, but there's a distinct hum. As Chelsea Vandiver notes, clients are always looking over their shoulders at competitors, and expectations for fast delivery have shot through the roof. Projects that used to take 12 to 16 months are now taking three to four months. "We're running in parallel with our clients," she says.

Vossoughi introduces Henry Chin, who has worked at Ziba since 1987 and is currently group managing director. “Henry is such a connector, a socializer,” he says. “I’m an introvert.”

It is hard not to look skeptical. Chin rushes to explain: “Sohrab does really well with small groups, one on one, not with a big group in a party.”

“It goes back to one of the things my mom used to say,” Vossoughi goes on. “One of those Persian proverbs: ‘You know a flower smells good by just going by it.’ If you’re sure of yourself you don’t have to call attention to yourself.”

“We hear a lot of proverbs around here,” Chin says.



## About Julie Lasky

Julie Lasky is a journalist, editor and critic best known for her writings on design and popular culture. A former deputy editor of *The New York Times's* weekly Home section, she was also editor of *Change Observer*, a Rockefeller Foundation-funded channel of the critically acclaimed website *Design Observer* and the editor-in-chief of *I.D.* and *Interiors* magazines.

## About Sohrab Vossoughi

Sohrab Vossoughi is the founder and CEO of Ziba, founder and president of Ziba Labs and co-founder and CEO of Citifyd. With over 40 patents, and a design included within the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Vossoughi is the only industrial designer to have been elected a “Global Leader of Tomorrow” by the World Economic Forum, was named “Entrepreneur of the Year” and one of five “innovation gurus” by *Business Week*, as well as one of the 40 most influential designers in the US by *I.D.* magazine. His passion for business-driven design has always shaped Ziba’s growth and evolution.