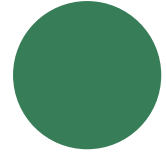


WRITING

PORTFOLIO

SHELBY CHAMBERS



Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Shelby, a writer, ghostwriter, and developmental editor helping you to bring your personal and professional stories to life.

I ghostwrite or consult on memoirs, management, self-help, thought leadership, and other non-fiction books. I have the unique ability to combine observations, details, and situations to creatively convey critical messages to audiences. My background in marketing strategy and management tends to lend structure and focus to my work; I balance creativity with business objectives in all that I do.

I'll work with you to develop a strategy for your book, then build an effective outline, conduct all necessary interviews, and finally write and edit. I know how to ask the right questions and conduct the required research to build the accompanying narrative for your audience to learn from, enjoy, and remember.

Having worked for many different publications, brands, clients, marketing and creative agencies, I'm at ease writing in different tones of voice or helping develop a voice recommendation when needed.

SERVICES INCLUDE

- Memoirs and non-fiction books, including business and thought leadership management, self-help, true crime, and beyond
- Developmental editing on new projects, or on existing works that need to be re-worked
- Editing and feedback on grammar, voice, and content

MY STORY

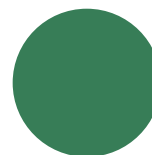
Prior to consulting, I worked in digital marketing for 13 years with a heavy focus on content strategy, editorial, editing, and campaign development. Most recently, I was Director of Social Media Marketing at Guthy|Renker and Senior Manager of Content Strategy at The Walt Disney Company, and I received my MBA from UCLA Anderson School of Management in 2019. I consulted on brand strategy for six years with clients ranging from Fortune 100 companies to solo-preneurs and start-ups who sought me out to shape their brand stories.

[Online Portfolio](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Substack](#)

RESUME



Brand Strategy Consultant + Freelance Writer July 2019 – Present

Provide brand and positioning strategies to guide the messaging, business activities, and creative for clients across all industries including B2B, B2C, CPG, agencies, tech startups, education, fashion, beauty, entertainment, wellness, finance, and more.

- Write business strategy, thought leadership books and memoirs
- Write brand strategy guidelines including voice and tone development and coaching
- Write or revise copy for websites, product descriptions, presentations, company LinkedIn pages, blogs and more
- Coach and mentor content teams on content strategy, operations, writing for different voices, developing social media and blog topics, and achieving KPIs
- Edit blog posts for content teams

Senior Manager of Content Strategy March 2014 – October 2018 **The Walt Disney Company**

Managed Oh My Disney, Disney Style, Disney Family, and Babble editorial brands including campaign planning, content strategy, and editorial planning across all blogs.

- Launched the Disney Style editorial brand, determining brand position/content/monetization strategies. Oversaw editorial calendar, copyediting, brand voice development, blog writing, editing, SEO, and publishing
- Rebranded DisneyFamily.com to modernize the brand, broaden its target audience, drive traffic and ad revenue. Edited and wrote all blog posts, social media posts, and scripts.
- Wrote hundreds of blog posts ranging from lifestyle, kids and family, humor, news, and more.

Senior Social Engagement Strategist April 2011 – February 2014 **Disney Interactive**

Managed social media for Disney, Pixar, and The Muppets including writing all social media posts.

Editor, Social Media January 2010 – April 2011 **DigiSynd**

Managed Disney's network of over 250 social media accounts including writing/editing editorial calendars, reporting, and development of social media strategy best practices for The Walt Disney Company.

Assistant Social Media Manager October 2009 – January 2010 **ONE/x LLC**

Managed all agency clients' social strategy, copywriting, editorial voice development, and reporting. Served as an account services coordinator, managing client requests and developing pitch materials for new business.

Content Developer March 2009 – September 2009 **In The Data LLC**

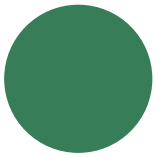
Contributed to experience/marketing development for a startup social network improving consumer engagement/experience.

Fact Checker + Contributor October 2008 – January 2009 **Los Angeles Magazine**

Conducted online and in-person research to fact-check the magazine's monthly publication. Contributed lifestyle articles to blog.

Education

UCLA Anderson School of Management – Masters of Business Administration (MBA)
UCLA – Bachelor of Arts, English Literature and Art History



GHOSTWRITING

Excerpt from a thought leadership book written on behalf of a corporate leader in the nonprofit space.

Tone is written to emulate the client's style of speech.

We've all been there. Leadership is spearheading a new idea, trying to build excitement for a process, tool, or initiative. It's new, it's innovative, it's "just what we need." And then...resistance. Or even worse, the idea is met with low adoption, then quickly forgotten.

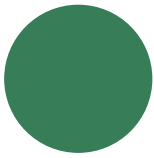
Maybe it's resistance from the team, which isn't sure how to integrate this new system into their current workflow. Maybe it's pushback from the board, who tend to be hesitant to venture into unfamiliar territory; too risky, especially for the old dogs. Or perhaps it's skepticism from a senior leader who doesn't like new ideas, usually because they didn't originate with him.

You know what happens next. All too often, the enthusiasm fades, and we quietly abandon the initiative/process/tool, moving on to the next shiny object that promises immediate success. Or worse: we go back to how things were before. The team is left unsettled and confused: Are we still using that new process? No, we're back to using the old spreadsheet, the old tool.

This constant cycle of introduction, then quiet abandonment, is what I call initiative whiplash, and it's exhausting our teams. It's bumming them out. Over time, it creates a culture of skepticism where employees hesitate to fully engage or commit to new ideas because history has taught them that nothing ever catches on, and they may as well stick to the old ways of doing things.

Part of the reason initiative whiplash occurs in the nonprofit world is that we're not clearly defining the success metrics that the new "thing" is trying to improve. Meanwhile, the for-profit world is very disciplined about seeking out the new "thing" that is going to improve efficiency or make reporting easier. Companies are constantly evaluating their processes and tools to ensure that they are achieving the results the bottom line requires. They also know that change takes time, implementation sprints, internal marketing to improve adoption, and patience to get things up and running. You know, all the things nonprofits don't have time or energy for. These evaluations and iterations are even built into the project management timelines. Just think, they have project management timelines!

If we're ever going to actually adopt a new system or way of working, nonprofits should foster a culture where innovation is supported by this kind of patience and systematic refinement. Changing the pattern requires a mindset shift at every level, especially at the leadership level. Remember, we're signaling the behaviors we want to see from our team. We have to show the enthusiasm, adoption, and willingness to learn and improve an imperfect system that we'd like to see our team showing.



GHOSTWRITING

Excerpt from a management book written on behalf of a female corporate leader proposing a new style of authentic, empathetic leadership.

Tone is written to emulate the client's style of speech.

A New Definition of Leadership

I'm sure you can tell from the examples I've given that I don't believe there is an easy way to solve this crisis of bias and perception based on the established rules and definitions of leadership. That's why I think we need to throw them out and redefine what it means to be a good leader.

We tend to simplify successful leaders, flatten them as people who automatically have all the right answers, who make a decision, and miraculously are able to get everyone to fall in line with it. People whose word is final and never up for debate. People who command total fidelity, no matter what. They push their team hard in a misguided attempt to get the result their company needs. This type of leader stays late, works on weekends, and inspires their team to do the same (or forces them to). They never take leave because they're so impervious to the realities of their personal life that they're able to power through health and personal strife.

It doesn't matter if it's possible for this type of leader to even exist; what matters is that we all think that they can. Even if we don't consciously believe this type of individual is real, we believe that each of these characteristics is attainable because we expect them of ourselves and others, and see weakness anytime we fall short. I believe that this type of leader is a myth, and that if they did exist, they'd only be blocking their team from building so many essential skill sets.

Moving forward, I want to position leadership as a way to guide people and pave the way for their strengths. Leadership isn't barking an order and expecting everyone to follow it. Instead, it's about listening, incorporating, collaborating, showing, and then giving space to people to shine. Leadership isn't about how clever you are; it's about how you are able to put to use the cleverness and skillset of your team to achieve a business objective. Leadership isn't about you saying, "I'm so great," but instead, "we're so great, look what we were able to achieve together."

This may sound obvious, but leading in this way isn't as intuitive as you may think. By stepping back, replacing micromanaging with space, cutting stress in favor of psychological safety, you still must know how to continue to maintain control. Just because you're not going to yell at your team, doesn't mean you're not still responsible for their outcomes. That's what you're here to learn: how to lead, guided by EQ, your own personal experiences, and your gut, to achieve better outcomes than if you were forcing yourself into a corporate mold that you don't quite fit into. And I promise, the results you and your team will be able to achieve will be much better, more sustainable, and you will all probably feel better every step of the way.

PERSONAL ESSAY

Don't Go Skiing With Your Boyfriend

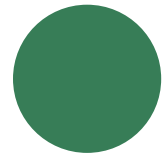
Why I annually cry on the
side of a mountain.

Long before I was crying upside down on the side of a mountain in the Alps, I was crying upside down on the side of a mountain in Utah, legs forming an obtuse angle, one ski on and one ski several yards uphill, my boyfriend standing over me not to console but to say "I thought you said you could ski."

I'm mad that in my moment of weakness he is mad. He's mad that in his moment of ski I am not ski. I ask how he can say something so mean at such a time. He asks how I could lie about my skiing ability. I tell him I clearly can ski, just not well. He says if I can't ski well, I can't ski.

Now, if I had a shred of self esteem back then I would have told him where he could shove his skis, jumped back on a plane, and never skied again. But I didn't, so I sob-explained to him that I DID know how to ski, I skied growing up, I could do intermediate runs, I wasn't afraid, I could actually stop. Between the ages of 11 and 31 I stopped skiing and my body forgot the skill. Boyfriend said I must have never had the skill. Regardless of who was right, here I was pretzeled on the side of a mountain, ice in my pants, fighting about skiing with my French boyfriend. And it wouldn't be the last time. There was the trip to Colorado, Tahoe, and eventually the Alps ahead of us where we'd have the same "disagreement."

DON'T GO SKIING WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND



I thought skiing was just a very unhealthy pocket in our otherwise mellow relationship. Fine, we can't ski without fighting, no couple is perfect. But, eventually I learned that I am not the only one who has such tempestuous ski-related interactions with a French signif. In fact, it's a Franco-American phenomenon. Almost every American I know has had a crying-on-the-side-of-the-mountain-while-French-boyfriend-criticizes-their-skiing moment. Okay, maybe not every American, but I can think of four off the top of my head, and four is statistically significant when you speak in generalities. I've also heard of this happening in French/French couples, but I can't speak with authority on their dynamic so we'll save them for another day.

After hearing story after story and dissecting argument after argument each time my husband and I ski anew, I believe I've learned the source of the issue, and it's not that we're all bad at skiing or that all French boyfriends are insensitive assholes. I mean, I'm bad at skiing and he's not very nice about it, but there's clearly another dynamic at play. If you're not new here, you already know what the culprit is going to be: misaligned expectations.

Let's cut to the Alps for a moment so I can tell you how I figured this out. Many years after Utah we take a trip to the Alps with friends. I have a lot to learn about raclette, about the importance of skiing to French friendships, and about how to actually ski, according to my (now) husband. Fearing another debate about the difference between intermediate and beginner ski levels, I beg him to leave me alone and go ski with his friends so I can work on my turns in peace. This resort has no green runs, several tricky blues, blacks and reds all the way home to the chalet (I take the bus). I know that I know how to ski better than my body is skiing, but I can't unlock the ability. If I just keep practicing, I'll eventually get better, but I don't want to do it alongside three talented French skiers who have been jumping out of helicopters onto black diamonds since they were toddlers.

Can there be love where there is no ski? Maybe. But there can definitely be ski where there is no love. I spend the week absolutely white knuckling the skiing task. Every run is slow, scary torture. I squeeze every muscle in my body on the way down and eek out the smallest bit of progress over the first five days. There are fun moments where I'm cruising through trees, gliding left to right down gentle hills. Other moments I'm clenching even my teeth to not lose control over a steep incline. Why do I even keep trying? Pride, mostly. I don't like being bad at things, and skiing is a very common pastime here that will likely be in my life as long as I'm French-adjacent. Mostly, I don't want my son to eventually see me fall down the slopes like a talentless sack of American spuds, so I need to get adequate enough to save face. So I persist.

Seeing my struggle and sporadic tears, my husband offers to sign me up for a private lesson. I reject him for days, then finally concede—maybe the instructor will at least be hot.

When he goes to sign me up, the lady at the front desk asks my husband what his wife's skiing ability is.

He says I'm a "debutante."

"Can she make "s" turns?"

"Yes."

"Can she stop and control her speed?"

"Yes."

"Can she ski in parallel?"

"Pretty much."

"What level runs is she skiing?"

"Blues."

"Sir, your wife is an intermediate skier."

"No she's not."

I know this conversation happened because he told me about it, not to say that he'd been wrong all along about my ski ability, but to tell me that the silly woman at the ski school thought for some reason I was intermediate.

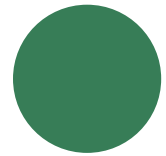
Maybe I am intermediate, based on her scale" I offer, beginning to arrive at an epiphany.

"But you still can't ski" my husband counters with finality, crystalizing my epiphany.

You see, we're clearly not measuring skiing with the same stick. Whereas I, an American woman, see the verb "to ski" as covering a range of abilities including falling down the mountain to confidently flying down it, my French male life mate believes that to ski is to only do so expertly. Anything short of that is approaching skiing, but not achieving it.

We also have different goals when skiing. My goal is to have a fun time, to enjoy nature, to feel scared no more than 40% of the time, to not get hurt. My husband's goals are to constantly be pushing himself, constantly riding the line between control and death, ignoring the pain of the injuries he is certain to incur, taking breaks for selfies with his lifelong friends at the top of the mountain, but never to eat, pee, or check his texts.

DON'T GO SKIING WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND



We're talking about two entirely different things. And that's why I keep ending up laying upside-down, crying, on the side of a snow covered mountain, and he keeps asking me why I can't ski.

Now, my husband isn't an actual jerk, he just plays one in my stories for dramatic effect, or when it comes to talking to me about skiing. He's usually very accommodating, comforting, calm, and has a high threshold for my BS. But take a slide in his ski boots for a sec. He only knows people who have skied their entire lives, people who can do the little hip side-to-side thing down a red without screaming or wiping out. His experience with the sport is expansive, making his perspective on it limited. He can't imagine a person who stopped skiing at 12 because she didn't like walking to the bathroom in the clunky boots. He can't imagine her, but he married her.

If we were talking about swimming, he'd be in the right. There is no kinda swimming; you either can swim or you're drowning. Same with riding a bike: you can either ride a bike or you're crashing. But skiing is like bowling or dancing or parenting or cooking: if you're doing it poorly, it doesn't mean you're not doing it. Ugly to look at, but just because you're verbing bad, doesn't mean you're not verbing. (I admit all of the above logic is extremely debatable but I never promised anything more than vibes.)

Unlike learning to accept the [French Airbnb check-in experience](#) or [learning to compromise](#), for once it wasn't MY misaligned expectations causing the friction; it was my husband's turn to concede. And I know this because my ski instructor—the one he hired for me—did me the honor of confirming my reality and rejecting that of my husband. The old reverse gaslight.

I was looking forward to a hot young ski instructor to flirt with for two hours, but instead he was a ridiculously tall, old dude; probably for the best because old equals wise, and I needed some of that ski wisdom. We start going down a hill and he immediately exclaims "Oh, you're not a debutante, they said you were just starting out." I explain to him that I've skied many times but that I'm stuck and always terrified and I just want to feel confident.

Despite his advice and coaching I continue to fall and panic stop and say "sorry!" From the heights of his ski instructor wisdom, he calmly proclaims "Yes, you're definitely an intermediate skier. Your problem is your head."

"Brother, you have no idea how right you are."

He also tells me I need to only be doing runs I feel confident on, that pushing myself was just messing with my head more. Who paid this man to say so many true things? Oh, it was my husband, who in his benevolence just lost the ski battle and war.

Having your reality confirmed is a wonderful feeling akin to a curse being broken. I returned to the piste the next day knowing it wasn't my body that was the problem, just my nervous brain. I had only to calm down, pop half a lorazepam, and I'd be able to breakthrough to intermediate. Easier said than done, of course, but at least I knew I had intermediate in me somewhere.

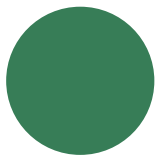
Armed with slightly less nervousness as I slowly plowed down a blue, I got a bit entranced watching a particularly graceful man skiing ahead of me. I noticed that he wasn't painstakingly carving an "s" at the safest spots, but rather he was swaying back and forth to a steady rhythm regardless of the terrain, and leaving his hips and feet to deal with what may come. I realized the rhythm was a waltz: left bum bum, right bum bum—HOLY SHIT SKIING IS DANCING.

Sure I gave up skiing at 12, but I never quit dancing. If I could turn skiing into dance, then it was possible for me. I began to hum a waltz ("Waltz #2" from Elliott Smith's XO to be precise), et voila, I could ski. It literally happened that fast. I relaxed, stopped analyzing each texture change in the snow, and just kept on-rhythm down the damn mountain.

"Where did that come from?!" my husband asked when he saw me calmly and quickly navigate a steep portion of a run. I explained my revelation. I don't think he understands what Elliott Smith (RIP, btw) has to do with my ability to ski, he's just happy I'm not crying anymore. The ski level debate is mostly settled; the sage ski instructor sided with me, and I also could ski better. Mediocre skiing is still skiing, and I have the right to mediocre-ly cruise down the mountain if I want to.

In fact, we just went skiing in the Pyrenees last weekend, and I was nervous as hell ahead of the first run. Did pregnancy and child birth force my body to forget the epiphany I had in the Alps? Were my husband and I going to argue again about whether or not I could ski? Was I going to cry? Luckily for everyone involved, I started humming Elliott Smith songs and made it down the hill not looking like a total noob. No tears, no crying.

When I asked my husband at the end of the trip if I'd finally earned the designation of being an intermediate skier, he took a very pregnant pause and begrudgingly said: "Sure."



FOOD WRITING

Do Good Mexican Restaurants Even Exist in Paris?

Shelby Chambers of "Franchement" embarked on a quest find out-- and shares her verdict on some of the best

Originally appeared on [Paris Unlocked](#), February 2025

It had long been the case that there wasn't much happening in the world of Mexican food here in Paris. I say "not much" because there were a few decent places, but not nearly enough. And that's perfectly understandable: Paris has a rich enough food scene going on. Why would it also need to be good at tacos, tortillas, chilis and refried beans?

But for those of us who have long longed for the familiar flavors of beloved Mexican dishes, a few years has made all the difference on the Parisian taco scene. And to appreciate how far we've come, you first need to understand where we've been.

When I arrived in France during the fall of 2019, I was perfectly happy to dine on nothing but magret de canard, blanquette de veau, and of course a jambon-beurre sandwich with cornichons every day for lunch. Then after about three months of non-stop French food, my spoiled palette became a bit homesick for my favorite LA flavors.

Back then, I didn't immediately realize that Paris was all but a Mexican-food wasteland; it took some trial and error to discover that. I recall searching for Mexican restaurants in the city, and thankfully I found [Candelaria](#), and a big, festive-looking restaurant in the 18th arrondissement that never appeared to be open.

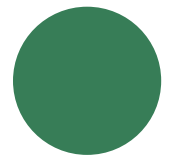
There were also a few specialty markets at the far corners of town selling imported food items from Mexico, Central and South America, which were godsend-- but still didn't have every ingredient I needed, especially in the beans department. Again, I knew I shouldn't be expecting Mexican cuisine in Paris, but coming from a diverse and bustling metropolis like Los Angeles, it was odd to have my search yield, well, not much.

Memories of LA and my grandma's stove

When I discuss my Mexican food cravings, I need to specify that it's not just the dishes or flavors that I miss.



DO GOOD MEXICAN RESTAURANTS EVEN EXIST IN PARIS?



It's also the overall experience, specific to my lifetime spent in Los Angeles, a place that offers a range of Mexican cuisines and experiences, from authentic to fusion to LA-ified to whatever my grandma made. It's eating a chorizo breakfast burrito at the corner spot in Highland Park, lardy refried beans gushing out of the yellow wrapper. It's a plate full of asada and al pastor tacos from the truck on the corner of La Brea and Olympic after a concert.

It's the kitschy decor and houseplants decorating my favorite Mexican spot in my old neighborhood, with table-side guacamole and lethal margaritas. It's the smell of roast green chilis simmering on my grandma's stove. I don't only miss a taco or a stretchy tortilla: I miss the smells and sounds and ambience of Mexican cuisine in Los Angeles.

Gluttons for tacos as well as punishment, my husband and I would try the odd Mexican spot that would pop up around town in Paris, mostly with uninspiring results. I don't want to name some of the early spots we tried, because they simply weren't good.

Sometimes the decor would be okay: bright colors, cans of peppers displayed to signal authenticity. But the salsa would be flavorless or the burrito would be packed with lettuce or the beans would be odd. One time we were served a puree of red beans instead of pinto beans, politely confined in a small ramekin instead of spreading across the plate as they typically do.

In my desperation, I was open to trying them nonetheless; maybe this would prove a novel solution to the "bean problem" I mentioned earlier. But it turns out red beans ain't the solution.

That was the day I knew I was facing a Mexican food crisis in Paris. It would last a few years, until I learned to acquire the ingredients I needed to make all the recipes my heart desired, and until Paris would step up its Mexican food game.

The present day: From "French tacos" to actual Mexican food

Burned a few too many times by bad experiences, I declared to anyone who asked that there was (almost) no Mexican food in Paris. It was easier to give up hope than to be let down again. I'd invariably be asked "why?" and also, why then was there something called "French Tacos"? I'd always direct them to Lauren Collins' illuminating New Yorker article on French tacos, which explains what these actually are (a story as loaded as the tacos themselves), and of course what they are not: actual tacos.

My humble assessment is that there just isn't enough awareness of actual Mexican food in the Hexagon.

There hasn't been a great migration of these sumptuous recipes from Mexico to France (or vice versa) as other cuisines have been transported and translated.

But while most of the folks living in Paris won't miss what they've never had, I'm grateful that some folks here missed Mexican food enough to make it (finally) happen. I started to notice a change in 2023, when a friend asked me if I'd tried the new taco spot in town. I thought she meant Furia, but she meant Taco Mesa. I'd also recently had an exceptional experience at El Cartel del Taco. Add that to the few places that had been around for a while, the aforementioned Candelaria and Red House: that's four decent taquerias in the capital, enough to deem it a movement. And there have been so many more to crop up since then.

You'd think I ran out and immediately tried them all: I didn't. I was too scared to taste another near-miss and have my heart broken. Finally when a friend of mine who actually hails from Mexico said I had to stop sleeping on Furia, I decided to take the risk and open my heart to Mexican food in France again.

And I have not regretted my choice.

Unlike in 2019, where the absence of decent ingredients and the temptation to imitate was yielding disappointing results, now there's a handful of restaurants innovating and making it work. Some are delivering on the exact vibes and flavors I miss so much from LA. Even better, many are offering inspired translations of tacos with much more delicious menus than my wary heart ever deigned to expect.

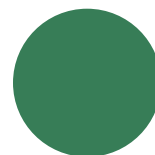
Instead of riffing on Mexican food stereotypes, this new crop of restaurants is putting in the work to honor the critical flavors and textures of the taco, figuring out how to make delicious tortillas way over here in France, and adding a bit of French influence to keep things interesting.

I haven't had the opportunity to try every new spot in Paris—I still have a hard time trying anywhere that uses those squiggly taco holders—but these are the places that are successfully satisfying my various cravings for Mexican food in one way or another. Whether it be spice, crunch, or ambience, there's a lot of good things happening in the Parisian taco scene. Here are some of the highlights I've had the pleasure of enjoying.

For crispy carnitas and decent margs: Candelaria

It should be noted that Candelaria has been on the scene since 2011 and has been reliably serving up delicious tacos, chips, guac, margs, and mezcal ever since. The tightly packed, no-frills, casual restaurant up front is exactly the setting you want to enjoy your tostada or 10

DO GOOD MEXICAN RESTAURANTS EVEN EXIST IN PARIS?



carnitas taco, with the pork first roasted, then fried to yield a crispiness that isn't always present in a Parisian carnitas taco.

After confirming the preparation of the carnitas, our server also assured us that the restaurant was a constant mix of French, Spanish, and English-speakers, locals and tourists alike. After your tacos, sneak to the much larger bar in the back for mezcal and cocktails, or to enjoy what I deem to be the most stylish WC in Paris.

- Address: 52 Rue de Saintonge, 75003 Paris
- Metro: Filles du Calvaire

For creative tacos done right: Furia

If someone was earnestly trying to create a French taco, I think the result would be the delicious beauties that Furia has produced (pictured above). Furia isn't a pantomime of a Mexican spot; it is authentically itself, which sets it up for success. The menu, wine list, and even the space all achieve the perfect balance of being honest about being a Parisian restaurant, while infusing all that is good about tacos and tostadas.

I loved every bite I had of the mushroom and birria tacos, but the one I often see in my dreams is the seared tuna. Furia is also open on Mondays, so it's perfect for those moments when you need a scenic, sit-down dinner spot but every other restaurant is closed.

- Address: 2 Rue Lacharrière, 75011 Paris
- Metro : Saint-Ambroise

For street taco vibes: El Cartel del Taco

El Cartel del Taco's stated mission is to serve up authentic Mexican flavors in the heart of Paris, and they're doing just that. It's a bright and tiny space near Gare de l'Est and the Canal St-Martin, with room for just a few people on tall wooden tables. One look at the white onion/cilantro topping of each tiny taco, slice of lime on the side, and I knew I was in love.

They have all the classic cuts you're looking for like birria, barbacoa, al pastor, carnitas, and even lengua (beef tongue) and nopales (cactus), as well as traditional tamales— all with a preparation and presentation that sent me right back to a roadside taco stand in LA (in the best way possible). Bonus points for margaritas, guacamole, and some extremely hot homemade salsas.

- Address: 227 Rue La Fayette, 75010 Paris
- Metro: Jaures or Louis-Blanc

For the softest tortillas: Tarantula

Tarantula just took over the old Petit Keller space on Rue Keller in the 11th, and they're bringing "Northern Mexican roots to Paris" according to Head Chef Emmanuel Pena. The first thing I noted was the homemade tortillas that exceeded the stretchy and soft requirements—a sure sign that dinner was going to be good.

Also notable was the wild mushroom taco, so delicious that the friend I was dining with ordered a second taco while still in the midst of her first bite. My favorite was the beef taco, which featured succulent and juicy beef atop an entire roasted green chili: offering a moment of spice I rarely get to enjoy in Paris. The balance of beef and chili in every bite has haunted me ever since.

- Address: 13 bis Rue Keller, 75011 Paris
- Metro: Breguet-Sabin or Bastille

For a quick taco lunch: El Comal

El Comal is the little lunch spot you need in your taco repertoire. I walked in and immediately was greeted with the mariachi tunes and decor of my favorite LA taco or pupusa spots. When I lunched with an LA friend who was visiting, he entered and immediately commented "the music is right" as the familiar sounds hit his ears. El Comal has a great lunch menu of three tacos and an agua fresca that made me feel at home. I overserved myself on salsa without tasting it and was sent into a painful moment of overspice, which is a good thing.

- Address: 55 Rue Saint-Maur, 75011 Paris
- Metro: Rue Saint-Maur

For a decadent Taco Tuesday: Red House

Red House is lesser known on the taco circuit because it's actually a bar that just happens to have delicious tacos: ones that have been my lifeline more than a few times. It's been around well over a decade, specializing in things you may miss from North America like wings, crab boils, Bloody Marys and Micheladas. Red House has the greasy, cheesy, spicy birria tacos that your heart needs, accompanied by a delicious jus for dipping.

There's an option to add loaded nachos—a little bit gringo, but no less satisfying. They offer special tacos of the week like a California Fish Taco or mole taco, to keep things interesting. They also air major North American mainstays like the Superbowl and the US election on their screens, so if you want to stay up late, enjoy tacos and see what's going on overseas, this is a place to do just that.

- Address: 1 bis Rue de la Forge Royale, 75011 Paris
- Metro : Ledru-Rollin or Faiderbe-Chaligny

On a concluding note, while the taco scene in particular has respectably evolved in Paris, I find I'm still missing certain flavors and juxtapositions native to Mexican cuisine that I haven't managed to find yet. For example, if I'm craving tamales, enchiladas with homemade red sauce, pozole with plump hominy, or a legit chili verde, I'm probably going to have to try to whip them up myself.

But I'm beginning to be at peace with this. I'm grateful for the well-executed Mexican (or Mexican/French fusion) dishes that we do have. We are in Paris, after all....

ENTERTAINMENT WRITING

The Story Behind the Story of Monsters University

Originally appeared in Disney Insider, 2013



The school year officially kicks-off at Monsters University June 21. Long before acceptance letters were even mailed out, the filmmakers up at Pixar Animation Studios were already hard at work.

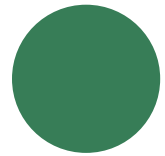
Even before animators begin to perfect Sulley's blue fur or create what seems like a never-ending assortment of colorful scales for a University of diverse monsters, the story team was already busy creating the blueprint for the film. :

"We've been in story for about three or four years on 'Monsters University'," Popular recounts story supervisor Kelsey Mann. Mann oversees a team of storyboard artists whose role it is to visually mock-up drawings of exactly what is happening in a film as the story begins to take shape. Mann describes it as "shadowing" director Dan Scanlon's idea of what he wants for the film, ultimately creating an almost comic book-form of what the finished product will look like.

To get all those details about the look and feel of the film's location and what stories might be found there, the story team starts their research as early as possible. "Half of our job is what we do before we get the script. The other half is executing the storyboarding of that script," Mann describes of the process. Some productions take Pixar writers to the Scottish Highlands, others to the sewers of Paris, others under the sea. This time, Mann and team found themselves back in school. If Monsters University looks or feels at all like your alma mater, that's exactly what they were going for: "We took a lot of trips to different universities and different colleges just to come up with ideas and try to capture the feeling of a place."

Beyond being able to physically build Monsters University from the ground up and establish its appearance, the team's research and personal memories helped inform the emotional experience of the monsters who would be just beginning their first year at scare school. "A lot of what we do is external research, and then we do a lot of internal research where we are just thinking about our own experiences when we went to college. We're talking a lot in the story room about what we went through—how did we feel at that time and what did we think, and we try to bring those true life elements to the script."

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY OF MONSTERS UNIVERSITY



That “internal” research helped the story team identify what might be going on in the heads of two young monsters just arriving to a new place filled with (literally) scary new classmates. Not-so-spoiler alert: Mike Wazowski and James P. Sullivan weren’t always top scarers at Monsters, Inc., and they got their less-than-smooth start at MU. Though the duo come from a very different, monster-filled world, Mann and team took a decidedly human route with the emotions the two freshman scare students might have felt. “It was great to go back to these characters and see them and be able to imagine them at a younger age. Where did they start from, where did they come from?”

In addition to defining what actually happens in the film—moments, looks, the personalities and arcs of the characters—the story team’s thousands of sketches establish every shot of “Monsters University.” “We did a total of 227,246 drawings, which is a lot,” Mann describes proudly—more than any other Pixar film to date. These drawings are then assembled into a rough draft of the final animated film: “We edit them together and add temp sound effects, temp music, and temp audio and put it up on the big screen and see how the movie is playing.”

Pixar vets like “Monsters, Inc.” director Pete Docter and Chief Creative Officer John Lasseter give feedback in monthly meetings to make sure the story of Mike and Sulley’s start is coming together just right. That means a lot of revising, rewriting, and redrawing. “When you are in story you can’t get married to any drawing because you are just doing them over and over again trying to find the right drawing,” Mann says of the process. But it’s not always back to the drawing board; sometimes the Look of a very early storyboard will get a moment exactly right: “There is a scene where Mike is doing these very specific scares, and I remember [director Dan Scanlon] always referring back to the boards and trying to get the feeling of what the boards captured.”

Even the stern Dean Hardscrabble (voiced by Helen Mirren) wasn’t easily pinned down. Writers had to play with different ideas to arrive at what would make a dean of scare-ing... scary. “Dean Hardscrabble was originally a male, and he just came in and did a lot of yelling and screaming and it didn’t really intimidate you. It’s a kind of quiet reserved judgement that really sends the chills up your spine,” Mann says of one of his favorite MU characters.

Years after they first start throwing around ideas, a few story artists are still onboard for the production as filmmakers fine-tune what they want from each character. The ultimate goal, though, is to have crafted a solid plan—that blueprint for the film in feeling, look, and especially heart—to provide the backbone for the finished product. “If we bring a little something of ourselves to it then I think other people can see that and can notice that and they can identify with it more themselves.”

Don’t miss Monsters University when it comes to theaters June 21st!

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Copy from brand strategy guidelines for a lifestyle home goods brand, LXS



Positioning Statement: "LXS seeks to transport, inspire, calm, and energize customers and audiences with our curated assortment of lifestyle, food, and home goods. Our brand embodies and shares the grounded yet uplifting beauty of Lemnos."

Vision Statement: LXS is dedicated to offering a unique and eclectic product assortment that captures and shares the spirit, beauty, and capabilities of the island of Lemnos. It will expand into additional lifestyle categories for customers to enjoy, while always remaining faithful to the island and culture from which it draws inspiration.

Brand Story: Sitting on the Aegean Sea helps us to lose track of time, of ourselves, grounds us but also fills us with energy--a certain zest for life. LXS is a portal to those shores with an assortment that celebrates the artisans of Lemnos, the joys of a beautiful summer day, the inclusion of a delicious family meal.

That's the spirit behind LXS, a lifestyle brand that seeks to transport our customers to the beaches and tables of Lemnos, to a life that is simple, adventurous, beautiful, and free. We celebrate products that evoke a trip to somewhere completely unknown yet familiar, wild yet welcoming. We hope to see you there.

Founder Story: To LXS founder Natasha Catrakilis, arriving to Lemnos each summer was like coming home. She felt welcome, at ease, simultaneously calmed and invigorated by her family's island of origin--all feelings she hopes to create with each product created by LXS.

HUMOR/LIST ARTICLE

Things I Refuse To Get Over

I've adjusted, acclimated, even accepted. But I draw the line at small water glasses.

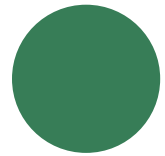
I should probably feel badly about how I behaved at Decathlon last weekend. We went to Decathlon to browse rain gear for biking, just like everyone else in Paris. And because it was crowded at France's favorite sporting good store, the crowd's sense of how to behave as humans in society went out the window.

People squeezed past me without even a mutter of a "pardon." Children ran around at speeds unfit for a place of commerce. Parents screamed at them with levels of irritation they usually save for the privacy of their own homes. While there, we saw our old upstairs neighbors, the ones who liked to drag wooden chairs across their apartment for sport. They pretended not to see us, so we did the same from two yards away. See you never, voisins.

After a fourth group of shoppers walked at, then through me, I began to go full American Karen in France. "Tu peux dire 'pardon'" I'd say, reminding them they are fully capable of at least saying excuse me as they assaulted my personal space. Then I went on a tirade at my husband about how when crowds reach a certain saturation point, his countrymen forget the "fraternité" part of France's motto and instead go completely feral. He didn't disagree but neither he nor the Decathlon checkout line were in the mood to hear my speech about it.



THINGS I REFUSE TO GET OVER



Afterwards, I did a little self assessment I've been trying to do to help me be less frustrated in France. I ask myself if the problem was me. Was I unfamiliar with an aspect of the culture, or was I totally justified in being pissed off? Sometimes all the situation requires is an adjustment of perspective, as with slow Airbnb check-ins, or the constant need to compromise to achieve anything here. But I concluded that line and crowd etiquette are just common sense, kindness even, and I was not going to get over how it seems everyone devolves to their rudest selves in crowd situations in France, mostly Paris. So I stayed pissed off.

There are many things I've acclimated to while living in France. I barely even bristle at a slow checkout line anymore. I can make it through a four hour dinner without falling asleep (usually). I eat cheese after, not before a meal. I'm used to taking my clothes off and putting them back on in front of the doctor. I've even begun to lean into the bise. That said, there are some (admittedly trivial) things I refuse to be chill about.

No Smiling At Strangers

When I first moved here I felt like every man was flirting with me. I soon realized it was because they thought I was flirting with them. I was giving them the American "Hi human, we're both humans in the same general space, here's a half smile of acknowledgement" smile. Apparently that's way too friendly and it either suggests you're DTF or batshit crazy. I stopped for a while to fit in, then realized it's very unnatural to constantly withhold smiling. I went back to smiling whenever I felt like it, even if it makes strangers recoil in confusion. Sometimes I'll even make small talk with strangers if I am in the mood to really ruin their day.

People Walking Up My Ass

Everyone is always walking at, then into my ass and I'm never going to be okay with it. I never experienced this before moving to France, maybe because if I was walking in LA there was no one else around. But I hate when people catch up to you on the sidewalk and don't just go around or say "excuse me." They just tailgate you until your paths eventually diverge. Well I won't stand for it. No, after enough of this I began to performatively stop in the middle of the road and let them pass, always saying "hey if you want to live INSIDE my ass, I'm going to have to charge you rent." No one ever replies.

Men Constantly Trying To Kill Me

Men in white vans almost run me over several times a week. I understand that they're working guys trying to get either to or from a job, but they still need to yield when I'm already well into a crosswalk. I've been biking a

lot since we took up residence in the deep 12th arrondissement, so now I'm dealing with men on bikes and cars who turn in front of me when I have the green, forcing me to give my right of way to them or crash into them.

What shocks me more than the constant near-accidents is that no other walkers or riders bat an eye about this. No one is ever screaming or gesticulating at the offenders, they just swerve and carry on. I refuse to be chill when a car almost hits me, it's too dangerous and even worse, rude. I scream the few French profanities I know at the drivers, sometimes some of the Spanish profanities I remember sneak in there too, then I flip them off which immediately lets them know I'm American. I've been known to chase them down then suggest "learn to drive, monsieur" if their car window happens to be open. I do this for the catharsis, but also to educate these vehicular manslaughter attempters: maybe the next time they're about to accelerate toward a woman, they'll remember the crazy American lady screaming mean things about their mom in French and Spanish, and give the breaks a little courtesy tap.

Metro/Elevator Crowders

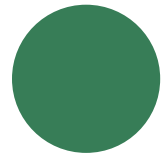
The only math I was ever good at was geometry, and I think it's because I have good spatial awareness. Sorry to flex so hard but it's just true. And maybe that's why I have such a superior comprehension of volumes, and that the people exiting a space—say the Paris Metro—have to get out before there's room for new people to go in. I naively assumed this was common knowledge, but maybe it's not as intuitive for everyone as it is for me, a shapes and spaces genius.

But yeah, I'll never get over people trying to get onto the metro as people are exiting. These narcissists are both beaver and dam, gumming up the metro riding ops so hard with their dumb, traffic-flow blocking dumb dumb bodies. And of course I tell them so, sometimes gently with a mellow "Madame, I have to exit before you can enter" for the older Parisian ladies, notorious for cutting lines. Sometimes I'm a little more brash with a "get out of the way ass hat" to a young man who assumed I'd get out of his way as he mounted the car.

Poop Everywhere

Self explanatory. It also doesn't have to be this way. I saw nary a street shit during the Olympics, meaning Parisians and their dogs were capable of holding it in or cleaning it up. One month post-Olympics I'm seeing more literal shit piles than ever before and I refuse to accept that this is just how life is.

THINGS I REFUSE TO GET OVER



Pee Everywhere

I have seen, heard, and smelled so many men peeing in the streets in Paris, and it still outrages me every time the tell-tale hiss of piss is within earshot. Sometimes they at least find a sequestered tree or nook. Other times they'll settle for a very public, not-so-hidden tree to water. I hate this because it's gross, but also because I can't do it.

No One Drinks Water

There's an ongoing joke amongst Americans in France that isn't actually a joke because it's true, and it has to do with the fact that our French friends don't drink any water. The glasses we're given at meals are but thimbles to the American thirst, and it feels silly to refill them eight times each sitting or to be constantly requesting another carafe, then another. Elderly French folks famously have never drank water a day in their lives, only allowing wine and coffee to pass their lips. The joke is also on us Americans though, because you can spot us coming a mile away with our Nalgene and Hydroflasks and unchapped lips.

I won't get into the whole ice thing because to be totally honest, I think I'm actually over it. I'm over ice. What a sad realization.

Bad Jeans

Men in thin, tight, stretchy jeans are plaguing France, not just Paris, and my eyeballs are tired of having to witness them. I don't know how this niche denim trend that had a worldwide moment over a decade ago has become the standard for jeans for men across ages and income brackets here in France. I say this even as a person who hasn't had a taught stomach a day in my life and would enjoy a bit of stretch: denim is 100% cotton or nothing at all. This should especially be true for men who have no hips or curves or monthly bloating that requires elastane in the first place. Denim fabric has its origins in France—it's de Nîmes—so I think we can all embrace its legacy and kick the crappy, stretchy, whiskered jean habit. And if you think I'm being mean and nitpicky with this one, I'll invite you to wear yoga pants out of the house to discover that the French themselves are the original pants shamers, it's just that their ire is focused on the wrong fabric.

Complacency

The "c'est pas possible" outlook was at first confusing, then kind of funny, now just normal, but I can't abide. Every time someone at the post office or a restaurant or a store say something isn't possible, it always ends up being quite possible after applying a tiny dose of effort.

But I think this outlook has a creeping effect on Parisians, eventually making them extremely complacent and accepting of shit situations—situations. My barely researched hypothesis is that after enough "pas possibles," one's idea of what is possible gets muddled, and they just accept the situations more and more.

Our current apartment came with a few odd situations that the owners clearly decided to live with. Creaking furniture, a toilet paper holder that fell down every time you looked at it, hard to reach dust. They saw these problems and said "well, I guess this is my life now." Then I showed up and fixed it all because I won't let myself become complacent. Which might have something to do with why I won't put up with all of the above.

"If You Don't Like It, Then Why Don't You Leave"

If you talk about such stuff on social media you get hit with this question a lot, which is a thinly veiled way of saying "go back to where you're from." But I would venture that none of the above critiques are against cherished components of the French culture, just trifling bad habits that we could all live without. I'm not criticizing the very things that make the French French, their intrinsic characteristics and traditions. I'll adapt to important cultural things like the bise, saying goodbye twelve times, and not looking at someone else's plate at a restaurant. I just want people to like, be more polite and not piss in the street anymore.

And as all Americans living abroad know: when we have a little laugh about the slow service or small water glasses of France, it's with full awareness that our own GMO-covered, gun-toting, loud-talking country is so much worse. It's almost as though we're allowed to joke about these things because we're doomed forever to be punching up.

THANK YOU