

Surface Design

INDUSTRY SURVEY

2023 RESULTS



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 4th annual Surface Design Industry Survey!

My name is Shannon McNab; I'm an artist, educator, and founder of Sketch Design Repeat and I'm proud to present this year's survey to you! I started it in 2020 to provide in-depth details of artists' businesses and it's evolved to become the most comprehensive report about pricing and incomes in the industry.

ABOUT THIS YEAR'S REPORT

We had a total of 600 participants complete the survey in full this year — that's a little under 10% of 2022's participation numbers, but still enough to provide the in-depth information I offered in last year's report.





In fact, we expanded several sections of this report, so it's bigger and better than ever! A few new additions to this year's report include: adding fine art sales to the income streams, providing basic net profit analysis, showing the correlation between pricing and income, and asking about how artists feel about AI and its impact on the industry.

Finally, we included "intermediate designers" in the income and pricing analysis — in previous years, we only included new and veteran designers. We hope this provides further insight for artists who fall into that category. Here's how we define years of experience in this report:

- New Designer: 0-2 years of experience
- Intermediate Designer: 3–5 years of experience
- Veteran Designer: 6+ years of experience



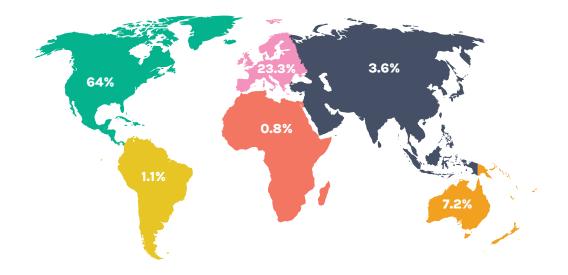
If you know anyone who could benefit from this report, please share $\underline{\text{this link}}$ with them, so they can join our email list and receive their own copy.

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WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

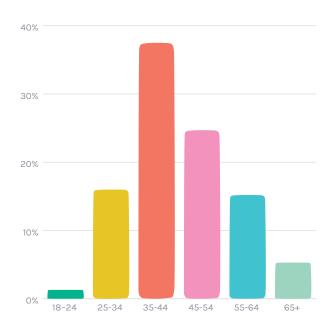


This year **53 countries** were represented in the survey, with several new ones including but not limited to Pakistan, El Salvador, Kenya, Cyprus, and Taiwan. However, the top 5 represented countries remain unchanged from last year: United States (58%), United Kingdom (7.8%), Canada (6.7%), Australia (6.2%), and Germany (2.7%).

WHAT AGE GROUP ARE YOU IN?

The average age in 2023 was 45, one year older than 2022's results. The increase is primarily due to fewer artists in the 25–34 range (-3.5%) and more in the 55–64 range (+1.7%).

Artists 55 or older made up over 20% of this year's participants — the most we've ever seen in this survey. They also represented 16.9% of artists who earned \$50k or more. So remember: you can have a flourishing art career at ANY age!



A NOTE ABOUT DIVERSITY

Here at Sketch Design Repeat, we continue to believe in celebrating our differences, advocating for underrepresented groups, and encouraging all artists to thrive no matter who they are. However, we understand the sensitive nature of demographic questions and that's why we always include a "prefer not to answer" option.

WHAT IS YOUR ETHNICITY/NATIONALITY OR CULTURE?

We asked this as a write-in question again this year to allow artists to self-identify. Most included standard terms like Caucasian or Hispanic/Latino, so we may revert back to a simple checkbox question we've included in the past. However, we still received unique responses and I've included a few of them below:

- Arab half European Muslim
- → Jewish Orthodox
- Kiwi
- Scandinavian/Viking
- ◆ Australian/Bangladeshi

- Indian American (east Indian)
- German Bavarian
- Indigenous Australian
- Japanese Canadian
- ◆ Afro-Caribbean

WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

As in previous years, most chose **Female** (98%), but we still saw participants who identified as Male (0.5%), **Non-binary** (0.4%), and 0.3% **Preferred to self-describe**.

ARE YOU LGBTQ+?

We saw a very slight decrease in those who identified as LGBTQ+, while more answered No, and fewer opted out.

7.2%

YES

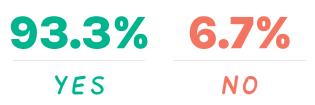
91.7%

1.2%

PREFER NOT TO SAY

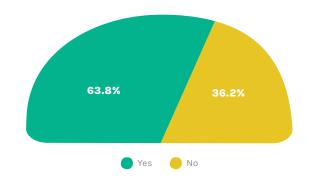
DID YOU STUDY AT A HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL?

Most received a college/university degree (+0.6% from 2022). Those who did were more likely to earn \$50k+, however, 18% of artists who earned \$100k+ answered **No** to this question. So higher education isn't the sole predictor of success.

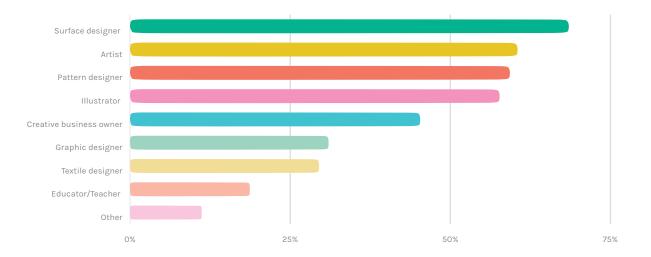


WAS IT IN A CREATIVE FIELD?

More respondents in this year's survey studied in a creative field (+3.3% from 2022). Studying art in school is a strong predictor of working in surface design, however, having an art degree isn't the only way to become a working artist.



HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO?



For the third year in a row the top 2 spots remained unchanged with **Surface designer** (68.5%) and **Artist** (60.5%). However, **Pattern designer** (59.3%) and **Illustrator** (57.5%) swapped places in the rankings this year.

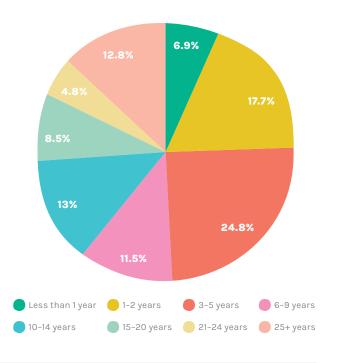
We also saw the same amount of respondents choosing **Other** (11.2%) as we did in 2022. A few of the responses we received were: fabric designer, lettering artist, author, product designer, painter, creative/art director, and my personal favorite — doodler.

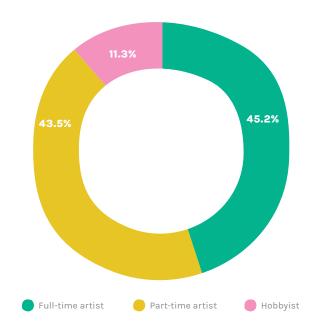
EXPERIENCE

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING AS AN ARTIST?

This year we expanded options past 10+ years to better understand long-time artists' experience levels. Because of that, the most common response was 3–5 years (+3.6% from 2022), followed by 1–2 years (-8.9%), and 10-14 years.

This year also saw the largest increase in **veteran designers** at 50.6% (+7.1%). Conversely, the number of **new designers** declined 11.1% from last year's survey.





WHAT'S YOUR WORK SITUATION PRIMARILY BEEN IN 2023?

This year we saw **Full-time artist** recapture the top spot with 45.2% (+5.6% from 2022) followed closely by **Part-time artist** at 43.5% (-2.2%).

Hobbyists continue to trail in 3rd place. However, most still have plans to become a full-time artist (80.2%, down 4.3% from 2022).

NOTE: The increase in veterans and decrease in hobbyists adds validity to this year's findings as the majority of participants are more established than any other year we've run the survey. Let's hope this will continue in the years to come!

DO YOU HAVE A PART OR FULL-TIME JOB OUTSIDE OF YOUR ART BUSINESS?

The percentage of artists who have jobs outside of art declined by 5.4% this year.

If you're curious about whether having an outside job affected participants' overall income, we've included the incomes for those with and without outside jobs at the bottom of page 15.

32%
YES
68%
NO

WHAT OTHER FIELDS ARE YOU WORKING IN?

The answers to this question are proof that you can be an artist while also working in an unrelated field. Below is just a small sampling from the 192 participants who answered **Yes** to the previous question:

- Landscape design
- STEM Specialist
- Gift shop salesperson
- Technology consultant
- Electrical supply software
- Language school secretary
- Social media manager
- Event/conference management
- Physical therapist
- Corporate finance
- Commercial aviation
- Local government worker

- Picture framer
- Dentist
- University professor
- Yoga instructor
- Human resources
- Bartender
- ◆ End to end data analyst
- Coffee shop owner
- Clinical social work
- Homeschool mom
- Wedding photographer
- Language translator

WERE YOU REPRESENTED BY AN ART OR LITERARY AGENT IN 2023?

This year saw the largest percentage of artists represented by an agent (up 4.1% from 2022). Of those represented, 29.5% earned \$10,000 or less in art income (-6.2%), 50.1% earned between \$10,000-49,999 (+12%), and 19.7% earned \$50,000 or more (-6.5%).

While fewer artists with agents earned a significant income this year compared to 2022, their average art income was 32–36% higher than the total average income as shown on page 16. Like in past years, this shows that having an agent can be profitable, but is not the only path to success.

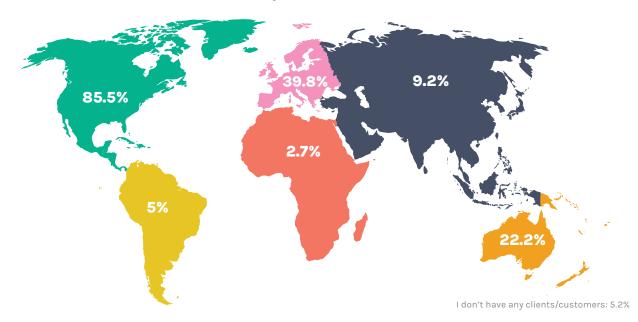
10.2%

YES

89.8%

NO

WHERE ARE YOUR CLIENTS AND/OR CUSTOMERS BASED?



This year's rankings are similar to previous years but with slightly different percentages — **North America** saw an increase of 6.4% over 2022 while **Europe** saw a 1.3% decrease. Only 5.2% said they didn't have any clients or customers yet (-1.8%).

IN WHAT MARKETS DID YOU LICENSE, SELL, OR WORK ON PROJECTS?

Below are the top 20 markets for 2023. **Home Decor** claimed the top spot for the 3rd year in a row while **Home Textiles** sailed into 2nd place (up from 5th in 2022) followed by **Greeting Cards** which fell into 3rd place this year (was 2nd in 2022).

A few categories increased in the rankings like **Wallpaper** at 5th place (was 7th in 2022), **Children's Books** at 19th place (it failed to make the top 20 last year), and **Kid's Decor** at 20th place which hadn't been in the top 20 since 2020.

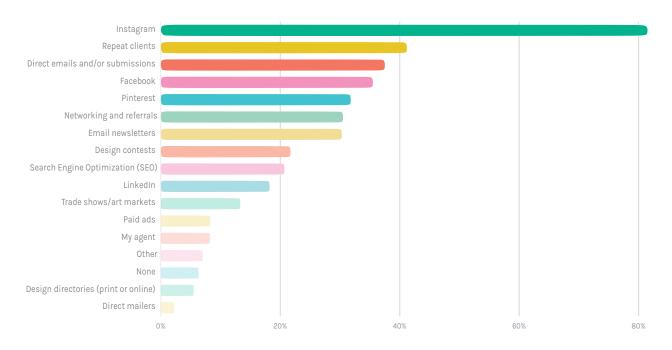
Some fell down the rankings like Stationery which slipped into 6th (was 3rd in 2022). **Gifts** and **Fashion** both moved down one spot to 9th and 11th respectively, while **Crafting**, **Editorial**, and **Tech Accessories** failed to make the top 20 this year.

- **1.** Home Decor (45.8%)
- **2.** Home Textiles (35.7%)
- **3.** Greeting Cards (34.7%)
- **4.** Textiles (33.2%)
- **5.** Wallpaper (31.5%)
- **6.** Stationery (31.3%)
- **7.** Wall Decor (26.3%)
- **8.** Bolt Fabric (23.5%)
- **9.** Gifts (22.7%)
- **10.** Kitchen & Tabletop (21.8%)

- **11.** Fashion (21%)
- **12.** Gift Wrap (19%)
- **13.** Kid's Apparel (15.5%)
- **14.** Baby Products (12.8%)
- **15.** Advertising & Marketing (11.7%)
- **16.** Branding (10.7%)
- **17.** Packaging (9.8%)
- **18.** Toys, Games, & Puzzles (9.3%)
- 19. Children's Books (9%)
- **20.** Kid's Decor (9%)

MARKETING

WHICH MARKETING METHODS DID YOU USE IN 2023?



As always, **Instagram** took the top spot (81.5%), followed by **Repeat Clients** (41.2%), **Direct emails and/or submissions** (37.5%), **Facebook** (35.5%), and **Pinterest** (31.8%), which made it to the top 5 methods for the first time. A few methods mentioned more than once in the **Other** category include Etsy, Print on Demand sites, Spoonflower, Patternfield App, and Upwork.

Artists used an average of 4 different marketing methods to promote their businesses, showing that using multiple methods can make your efforts more effective — when done strategically and with intention.

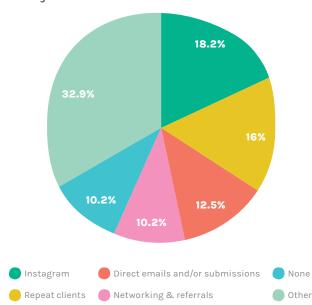


FURTHER READING

5 Marketing Tips for Surface Designers
Ways to Market Your Surface Pattern Designs Beyond Instagram
LinkedIn for Surface Designers and Illustrators

WHICH METHOD WAS MOST HELPFUL FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Instagram was still the top spot, followed by Repeat Clients and Direct emails — both of which improved in the rankings this year.



IF YOU CHOSE NONE, WHY DID YOU FEEL NONE OF YOUR MARKETING METHODS WERE HELPFUL?

We wanted to understand why 10.2% of artists felt their marketing efforts weren't effective.

The three most frequent responses we received were:

- Results/sales were low when compared to their efforts
- Marketing efforts were too inconsistent
- Decided not to market their art at all

DID YOUR INSTAGRAM WEEKLY USE CHANGE THIS YEAR COMPARED TO 2022?

We added this question due to Instagram's decreasing helpfulness among participants — the results are almost a 3-way split, however, fewer **Used it more in 2023**.

35.4%

34.2%

USED IT LESS ABOUT THE SAME

30.5%

USED IT MORE



FURTHER READING

<u>How to Grow Your Instagram with Purpose</u> <u>An Artist's Tips for Scheduling Social Media Posts</u>

INCOME

WHAT STREAMS OF INCOME DID YOU FOCUS ON AS AN ARTIST IN 2023?

For the 4th straight year, **Print on Demand** was the most popular income stream. However, **Licensing** and **Selling physical products** swapped places as did **Graphic Design** with **Illustration**, and **Teaching art** with **Selling digital goods**. Participants had an average of 2.5 streams of income, which is near even with 2022.

Most Popular Income Streams in 2023

- **1.** Print on Demand (53.7%)
- 2. Licensing (37.7%)
- **3.** Selling physical products (32.5%)
- **4.** Freelance surface design (24.3%)
- **5.** Illustration (20.7%)
- **6.** Graphic design (17.5%)
- **7.** Teaching art (13.2%)
- **8.** Selling digital products (12.2%)
- **9.** Buyouts (11.8%)
- **10.** Fine art sales (10.8%)

Most Profitable Income Streams in 2023

- **1.** Teaching art: \$18,600
- **2.** Graphic design: \$16,200
- **3.** Illustration: \$13,800
- **4.** Freelance surface design: \$12,200
- **5.** Buyouts: \$10,500
- **6.** Licensing: \$10,100
- **7.** Selling physical products: \$8,900
- **8.** Selling digital products: \$7,800
- 9. Print on Demand: \$4,500
- **10.** Fine art sales: \$4.000

Above are the top 10 income streams ranked in popularity and profitability. The biggest takeaway is that 6 out of 10 had a \$10k+ average income (2 more than in 2022).

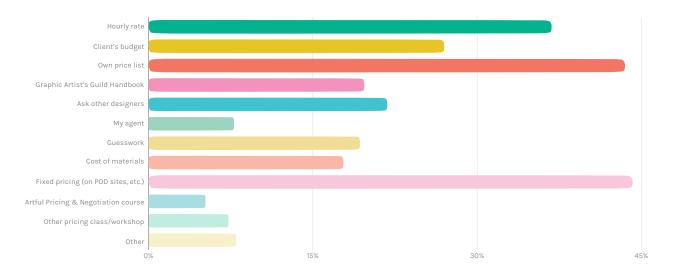
Also, most income stream averages increased this year, except for **Print on Demand** (-\$200) and **Teaching art** (-\$5,900). Despite the large decrease, teaching was still the most profitable income stream for artists in 2023.



FURTHER READING

The Downsides of Multiple Streams of Income as an Artist

HOW DO YOU CALCULATE YOUR PRICES?



The top three pricing methods remained the same this year with **Fixed pricing** (44.2%), **Own price list** (43.5%), and **Hourly rate** (36.8%). On average, participants used an average of 2.5 methods to calculate their prices this year.

One note is that **Cost of materials**, which was 4th in 2022, fell to 8th place this year at 17.8%. We continued to hear that artists' cost of goods increased again this year, so it's interesting that fewer artists used it to calculate their pricing.

DID YOU SEE A DIFFERENCE IN INCOME THIS YEAR COMPARED TO 2022?

This year, **Increase in income** dipped below 50% (-3.2% from 2022). Conversely, **Decrease in income** saw a significant increase this year (+8.2%). Given the responses on page 45 about what affected artists' businesses, this isn't a surprise. However, I'm optimistic that we'll see an increase in income for more artists again next year.

49.7%

INCREASE IN 2023

15%

NO CHANGE

35.3%

DECREASE IN 2023



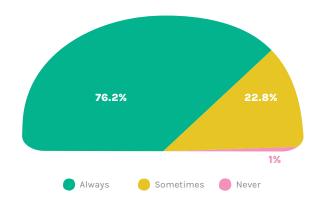
FURTHER RESOURCES

Free Workshop: <u>Increase Your Design Income</u>

Article: Pricing Advice from Surface Designers from Around the World

HOW OFTEN WERE YOU PAID ON TIME?

This year there was a slight decrease in **Always** paid on time and an increase in **Sometimes**. However, only 1% were **Never** paid on time — the lowest we've seen in the survey!



WERE YOU EVENTUALLY PAID?

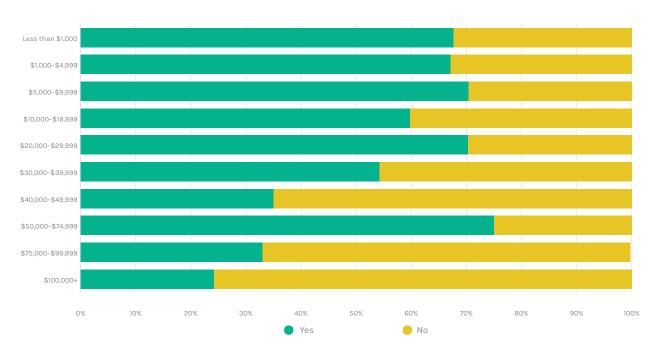
Of those who weren't always paid on time, most of them were eventually paid by their clients.

However, we were sad to see that 7% said they were never paid at all (+4% from 2022). It's a shame that some companies aren't valuing artists and paying them for the services they agreed upon.

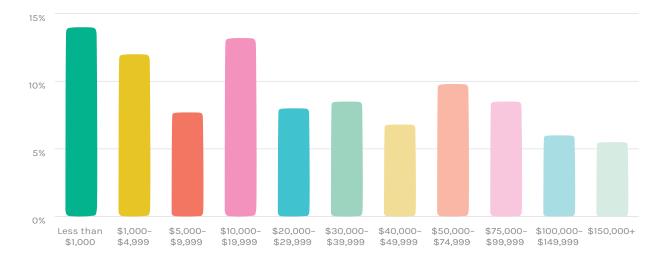


ARE YOU SUPPORTED FINANCIALLY BY A SPOUSE, FAMILY MEMBER, OR FRIEND?

Financially supported artists saw the lowest percentage ever (62.5%), down 3.2% from 2022. Given that the average income rose this year, it's not surprising fewer had financial support. Still, all income levels received some level of support.



WHAT IS YOUR TOTAL GROSS INCOME FOR 2023, INCLUDING ALL YOUR JOBS AND/OR BUSINESSES (ART AND NON-CREATIVE)?



The largest income category was Less than \$1,000 (14%), but it was closely followed by \$10,000-\$19,999 (13.2%), and \$1,000-\$4,999 (12%). On the flip side, the lowest income category was \$150,000+ (5.5%), however, it increased by 2.3% from 2022.

The most exciting statistic is those who earned **\$50,000** or more increased to 29.8% (+3.4% over 2022). Because of that, the **total average income in 2023 was \$41,400**, a \$6,900 increase over last year.

DID HAVING A JOB OUTSIDE OF ART AFFECT AN ARTIST'S INCOME?

Artists can feel a lot of pressure to make art their sole focus, so we wanted to know if having an outside job affected participating artists' overall income. Turns out, it does!

The average total income range for **Artists with other jobs** is ~48% higher than **Artists with art as their only job**.

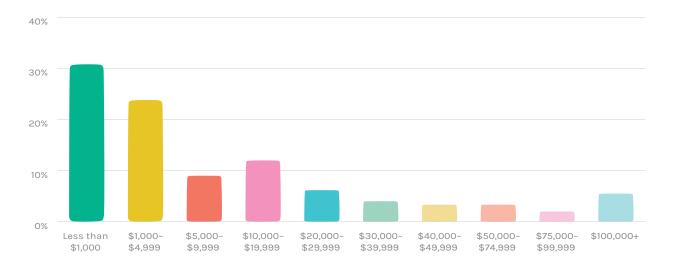
\$44,000-\$62,000

ART + OTHER JOB

\$29,600-\$42,200

ART AS ONLY JOB

WHAT IS YOUR TOTAL GROSS INCOME FOR JUST YOUR ART IN 2023?



In 2023, the average art income increased to \$23,500 (+\$8,100 from 2022). The most common income category was still Less than \$1,000 at 30.8%, but it decreased by 7.4% from 2022. By contrast, artists who earned \$50,000 or more from their art increased this year to 10.8% (+1.8% over 2022). It's important to note that most who earned at that level were full-time veteran artists as implied in the chart below.

	Hobbyist	Part-Time	Full-Time
< 1 year	\$70-\$1,300	\$300-\$1,700	\$140-\$1,600
1–2 years	\$300-\$1,900	\$3,100-\$6,700	\$5,500-\$9,300
3-5 years	\$1,900-\$5,400	\$5,180-\$9,970	\$15,690-\$25,300
6-9 years	N/A	\$9,200-\$15,300	\$45,800-\$67,300
10-14 years	N/A	\$5,300-\$9,800	\$40,200-\$60,000
15-20 years	N/A	\$4,900-\$9,600	\$28,600-\$42,300
21-24 years	N/A	\$5,100-\$11,000	\$27,000-\$40,700
25+ years	N/A	\$6,000-\$11,300	\$27,000-\$40,700

Similar to last year, the more experienced and full-time artists were, the higher their income was. However, we saw a dip in income starting at 10–14 years for part-time designers and 15–20 years for full-time designers. Although we could speculate, we cannot provide definitive reasons for why this occurred.

Note: We didn't have enough data for hobbyists beyond 3–5 years of experience.

TOTAL ART INCOME BASED ON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



89.1% of **New Designers earned \$5,000 or less** making their income fairly similar to 2022's numbers, while 83.9% of **Intermediate Designers earned \$20,000 or less**.

The statistics for **Veteran Designers** were slightly more evenly split and they accounted for 83.1% of all participating artists who earned \$50,000 or more in 2023. Because of this, veterans saw a significant increase in average art income (+45.5% over 2022). Here are the average income ranges for each:

• New Designer: \$3,000-\$4,200

◆ Intermediate Designer: \$10,600-\$13,200

◆ Veteran Designer: \$31,300-\$46,500

TOTAL ART INCOME BASED ON WORK SITUATION



70.6% of **Hobbyists earned less than \$1,000** for their art, so their average income is fairly similar to what we saw in 2022, however, the lower end increased. 89.7% of **Part-Time Designers earned \$20,000** or less. And while the lower end of their average income increased, the top end decreased.

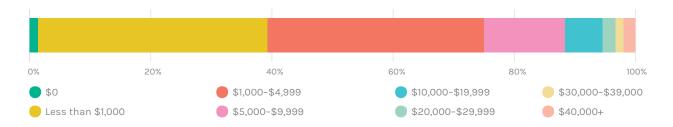
Much like veteran artists, **Full-Time Designers** were fairly evenly split across the income ranges and made up 96.9% of artists who earned \$50,000 or more. Again, this meant they saw a significant increase in their income average (+14.8% over 2022). Here are the average income ranges for all three:

→ Hobbyist: \$1,600-\$2,000

→ Part-Time Designer: \$6,200-\$7,500

→ Full-Time Designer: \$36,200-\$54,000

WHAT WERE YOUR TOTAL EXPENSES FOR JUST YOUR ART IN 2023?



The average expenses for participants in 2023 was \$5,200 (+\$600 over 2022) with 75% spending less than \$5,000, so most participants made a profit in 2023. Here are the average expenses and net profit for each level of income:

Income	Avg. Expenses	Avg. Net Profit
< \$1,000	\$700-\$3,000	-\$2,001-\$299
\$1,000-\$4,999	\$1,000-\$3,500	\$0-\$3,999
\$5,000-\$9,999	\$1,400-\$5,000	\$0-\$8,599
\$10,000-\$19,999	\$2,000-\$5,500	\$4,500-\$17,999
\$20,000-\$49,999	\$6,600-\$11,100	\$8,900-\$43,399
\$50,000-\$99,999	\$9,000-\$15,600	\$34,400-\$90,999
\$100,000+	\$22,500-\$31,400	\$68,600+

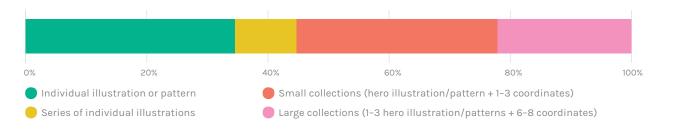
The profit column of the chart above is an oversimplification, but I felt it was important to include it as net profit is an integral part of any conversation around business income. Because while gross income is fun to talk about, what your art business's profit is for the year is the most important number of all.

A NOTE ABOUT THE REMAINING INCOME DATA

The remaining income and pricing questions (on pages 20–41) were only answered by participants who selected the corresponding stream of income from the question on page 12 and we've noted, whenever relevant, how many of the 600 participants answered each.

Income: Licensing

HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY PACKAGE YOUR ART FOR LICENSING?



Of the 225 participants who licensed their art, Individual illustrations and patterns was the most common answer for the 4th year in a row (34.5%), but only just barely as it was closely followed by Small collections (33.2%), and Large Collections (22.1%), with Series of individual illustrations in last place (10.2%).

WHICH METHOD OF PAYMENT DO YOU PREFER FOR LICENSING?

Similar to 2022's results, Both was the most common answer, but its percentage decreased slightly this year (-2.5%). Royalties and Flat fees were almost even. One interesting note is the slow increase in the popularity of flat fees — it grew by 1.5% over 2022 and 4.6% over 2021's percentage.

18.1%

19.5%

ROYALTIES FLAT FEES **62.4%**

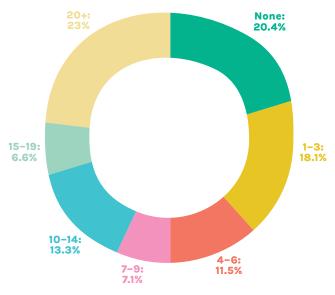
BOTH

FURTHER READING

How Narrowing Your Focus Can Lead to Art Licensing Success Licensing Contract Terms that Affect the Price You Charge Fine Art Licensing: Painting for Surface Design

HOW MANY PORTFOLIO DESIGNS DID YOU LICENSE IN 2023?

20+ designs recaptured the top spot again this year, followed closely by 0 designs, and 1–3 designs. While it's a bit sad to see a big increase in those who focused on licensing but didn't license any art in 2023, the average number of licensed designs only slightly decreased to 9.3 compared to 9.7 in 2022.



DO YOU FIND THAT NON-US COMPANIES' BUDGETS ARE DIFFERENT FROM US-BASED COMPANIES?

Of the 225 participants who focused on licensing this year, 128 of them worked with both US-based and non-US companies. Of those, more than half said non-US companies had lower budgets, although that percentage is 2.5% lower than 2022.

Also, the percentage of those who said non-US companies had higher budgets increased this year by 2.9%, while those who said non-US companies have similar budgets remained the same as last year.

57.8%

LOWER

35.2%

SAME

7%

HIGHER



FURTHER RESOURCES

Free Mini Course: <u>Portfolio Advice You Don't Have to Follow</u>
Article: <u>Evaluating Your Artwork</u>: <u>When is it Ready to Pitch</u>

HOW MUCH ON AVERAGE DO YOU RECEIVE WHEN LICENSING A DESIGN?



We modified the pricing brackets into \$200 increments this year to make our pricing statistics more accurate. From that change, the top pricing bracket was **\$200–\$399** (28.3%), followed by **\$400–\$599** (18.6%), and **Less than \$100** (15.9%).

The most exciting result is the 3.4% increase in those who charged \$1,000+ (11.9%). That is likely what contributed to this year's average licensing price of \$450 (+\$19 over 2022). This increase should be celebrated, however, we should strive for it to be even higher next year. Remember: your art and experience provides a lot of value to your clients!

When looking at how years of experience affected how designers priced their art, new designers saw a slight decrease in pricing while veterans saw an increase, especially on the low end of the pricing range:

♦ New Designer: \$170-\$320

◆ Intermediate Designer: \$310-\$480

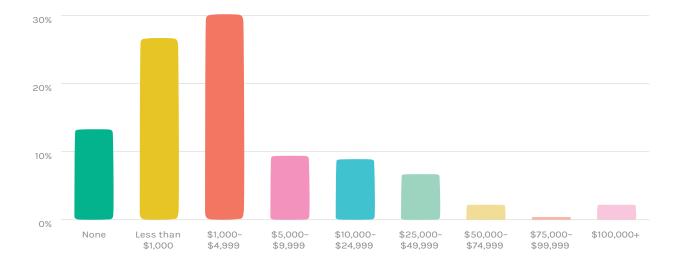
Veteran Designer: \$450-\$630

As for work situation, we didn't have enough data for hobbyists as there were only 9 of them who focused on licensing this year. However, part-time designers saw a moderate increase in their price range. For full-time designers, there was a slight increase in the low end and a slight decrease in the top end of the pricing range from 2022:

◆ Part-Time Designer: \$290-\$460

Full-Time Designer: \$420-\$600

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM LICENSING IN 2023?



In past years, we've combined licensing and buyout income for this question, however, this year we opted to ask about them separately, so it's not possible to compare these numbers to last year's.

The average licensing income was \$10,100. The most common answer was \$1,000-\$4,999 (30.2%), followed closely by less than \$1,000 (26.7%) and None in a distant 3rd place (13.3%). For years of experience, there was a significant increase in income at each level:

• New Designer: \$1,200-\$3,400

Intermediate Designer: \$3,000-\$7,600

• Veteran Designer: \$10,800-\$18,800

We saw a similar increase when comparing work situation, although hobbyists are omitted below because we didn't have enough data:

Part-Time Designer: \$2,300-\$6,300

→ Full-Time Designer: \$10,200-\$17,900

LICENSING INCOME BASED ON AVERAGE LICENSING PRICE



This is a new addition to this year's survey results as we wanted to see if there was a correlation between how an artist priced their artwork and how much income they generated. Here are the average licensing incomes artists earned at different licensing prices per design:

< \$200 prices: \$600-\$2,300

\$200 - \$599 prices: \$6,300-\$12,500

\$600+ prices: \$14,200-\$24,700

The results above make things clear: the higher your licensing prices, the higher your licensing income will be. I can't think of a better reason to raise your prices!

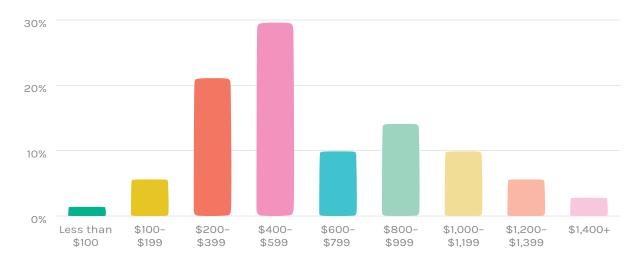


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Income: Buyouts

HOW MUCH DO YOU RECEIVE WHEN SELLING A DESIGN AS A BUYOUT?



We modified the pricing brackets and expanded prices past the \$1000+ mark this year to make these statistics more accurate. Of the 71 participants who offered buyouts, 29.6% received \$400-\$599 for a design, followed by \$200-\$399 (21.1%) and \$800-\$999 (14.1%). The average buyout price was \$640, a \$24 increase over 2022. This was due to a 5.4% increase in those who charged rates above \$1,000.

Buyouts can be a lucrative way to earn more income, but they aren't very popular amongst artists as only 11.8% of our participants offered buyouts. That means we don't have enough data to share price ranges for new designers or hobbyists, but here are the price ranges for years of experience:

◆ Intermediate Designer: \$410-\$590

Veteran Designer: \$600-\$700

While the price range for veterans decreased at the top end of the range this year, when you look at work situation, full-time designers have the highest prices:

Part-Time Designer: \$440-\$630

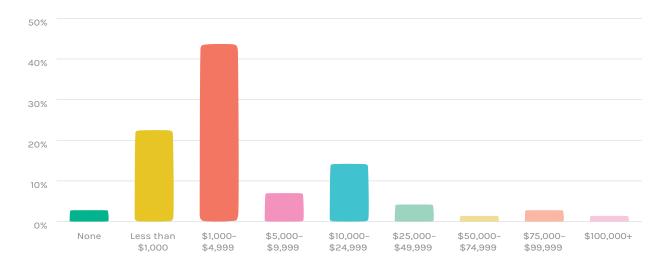
◆ Full-Time Designer: \$610-\$810



FURTHER READING

5 Reasons You Should Sell Your Art Outright

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM BUYOUTS IN 2023?



For the first time, we've asked about buyout income on its own, and while that means we're not able to compare these numbers to anything, we're eager to do so next year.

The most common answer was \$1,000–\$4,999 (43.7%), followed by less than \$1,000 (22.5%) and \$10,200–\$24,999 (14.1%). The average buyout income was \$10,500, which is \$400 more than this year's average licensing income.

Years of experience was the best indicator of higher income, however, we didn't have enough data from new designers to include them this year:

◆ Intermediate Designer: \$3,500-\$7,900

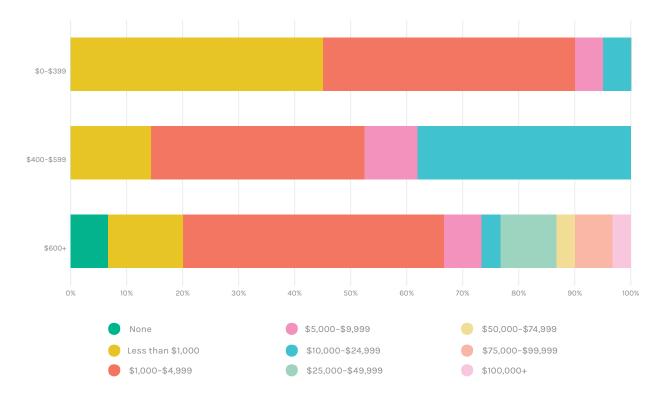
Veteran Designer: \$8,200-\$19,600

When comparing work situations, full-time designers earned 3 to 4.5 times more than part-time designers:

◆ Part-Time Designer: \$2,000-\$6,100

• Full-Time Designer: \$8,900-\$20,300

BUYOUT INCOME BASED ON AVERAGE BUYOUT PRICE



Much like with licensing, we wanted to see if there was a connection between pricing and how much artists generated from buyouts in 2023. Here are the average buyout incomes artists earned at different buyout prices per design:

< \$400 prices: \$1,200-\$4,500

\$400-\$599 prices: \$4,700-\$12,500

\$600+ prices: \$13,600-\$22,300

Just like with the licensing results, the higher your buyout prices, the higher your income will be. Again, if you need a reason to raise your prices, here you go!



NEED HELP WITH CHARGING MORE FOR BUYOUTS?

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Income: Freelance Surface Design Projects

WHAT'S YOUR AVERAGE FREELANCE RATE IN 2023?



We expanded the hourly rate brackets this year. Of the 146 participants who freelanced in 2023, the most common answer was \$50–59 per hour (18.5%), followed by \$40–49 per hour (15.1%) and \$20–29 per hour (13%).

The good news is that 30.1% of freelancing surface designers charged \$70/hr or more this year, which is a big reason why the **average freelance hourly rate increased to \$57**, a \$6/hr increase over last year.

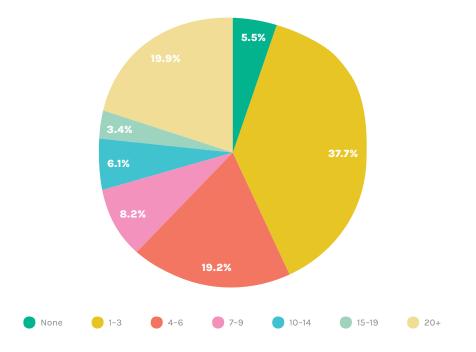
When looking at how years of experience affected a designer's hourly rate, new designers saw an increase in rates while veterans' rates were only slightly different from 2022:

- ◆ New Designer: \$37-\$47 per hour
- ◆ Intermediate Designer: \$50-\$60 per hour
- Veteran Designer: \$55-\$66 per hour

As for work situation, we didn't have enough data to calculate a price range for hobbyists. However, both part-time and full-time designers saw a slight increase, especially on the low end of the ranges:

- Part-Time Designer: \$48-\$58 per hour
- Full-Time Designer: \$56-\$66 per hour

HOW MANY FREELANCE PROJECTS DID YOU COMPLETE IN 2023?



Just like we've seen for the past 4 years, **1-3 projects** topped the list at 37.7%. The next most common answers were **20+ projects** (19.9%), **4-6 projects** (19.2%), and **7-9 projects** (8.2%). Fortunately, the percentage of freelancers who had **No projects** decreased significantly from 2022.

Because of the promising statistics above, the average number of freelance projects increased to 8.1 compared to 7.1 in 2022. This increase likely contributed to the higher average income for freelancing this year (see pages 30-31).

One question we're considering for next year is asking freelance surface designers what their clients' average budget was for each project to give us a more comprehensive understanding of pricing for freelance projects in this industry beyond hourly rates.

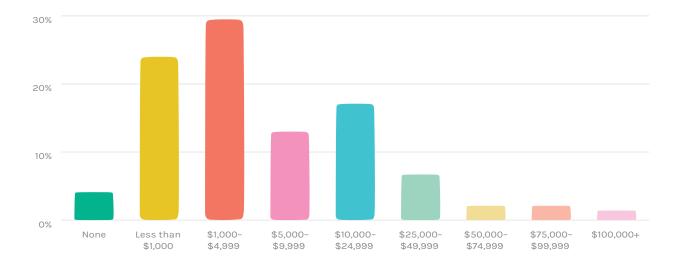


FURTHER READING

Freelance Project Basics for Surface Designers

3 Tips for Negotiating Higher Freelance Rates
Finding Freelance Design Jobs with Smaller Companies

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM FREELANCE SURFACE DESIGN PROJECTS IN 2023?



Of the 146 participants who generated surface design freelance income, the top answer was \$1,000–\$4,999 (29.5%), followed by less than \$1,000 (24.0%), and \$10,000–\$24,999 (17.1%). For the first time, those who made \$25,000 or more accounted for more than 10% of participating artists (12.3% this year compared to 9.7% in 2022).

The average freelance income in 2023 was \$12,200 which is \$3,300 more than in 2022 (\$8,900). This is due to a combination of more projects and higher hourly rates that we saw on pages 28-29.

Given the increase in average income, it's not surprising that all levels of experience saw an increase this year:

◆ New Designer: \$1,400-\$4,300

Intermediate Designer: \$4,400-\$11,100

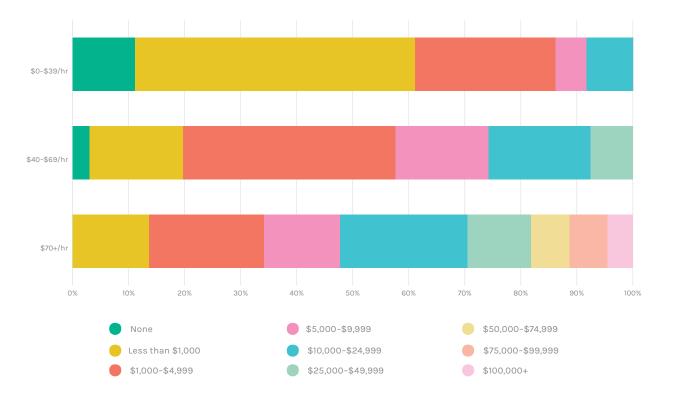
Veteran Designer: \$11,300-\$20,400

The same was true for work situation with full-time designers seeing the largest increase in freelance income in 2023:

◆ Part-Time Designer: \$2,700-\$7,500

Full-Time Designer: \$11,600-\$21,200

FREELANCE INCOME BASED ON AVERAGE HOURLY RATES



We also wanted to see if there was a relationship between hourly rates and how much surface designers generated from freelancing in 2023. Here are the average freelance incomes artists earned at different hourly rate levels:

< \$40 per hour: \$1,400-\$4,400
</p>

\$40-\$69 per hour: \$4,900-\$12,100

\$70+ per hour: \$19,100-\$31,500

Once again the results are obvious: **the higher your hourly rate, the higher your freelance income will be.** This was especially true for those who charged \$70 or more per hour as on average they earned double all other hourly rates.

So go ahead, add \$5–10 to your hourly rate right now!

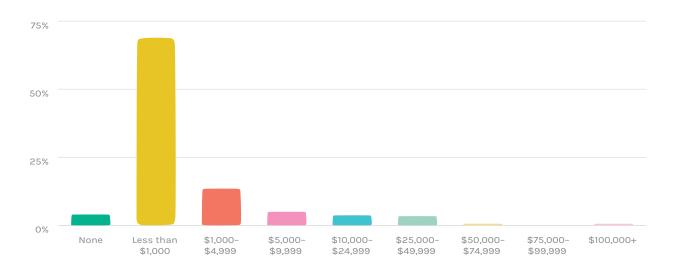


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Income: Other Sources

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM PRINT ON DEMAND (POD) SITES IN 2023?



Of the 322 participants who focused on POD sites as a source of income in 2023, the most common answer was **less than \$1,000** (68.9%), followed by **\$1,000-\$4,999** (13.5%), and **\$5,000-\$9,999** (5%).

The average POD income decreased slightly this year to \$4,500 (-\$200 from 2022). This result isn't surprising after reading artists' answers to the question on page 45 as many were frustrated with the change in policies of many platforms this year. It's also why POD came down to 9th place in our profitability rankings on page 12.

For years of experience, the income gap was significant between each level, although the ranges are fairly similar to what we saw last year. Here are the ranges for 2023:

• New Designer: \$300-\$1,700

◆ Intermediate Designer: \$1,900-\$5,200

Veteran Designer: \$5,100-\$9,700

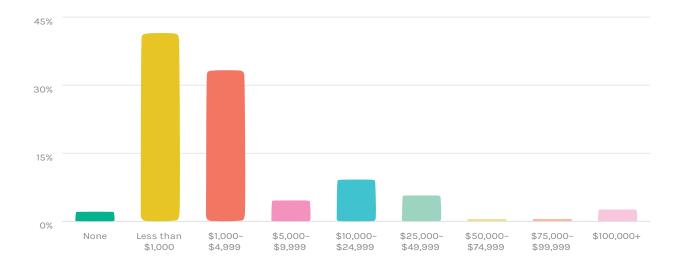
For work situation, being a full-time designer was the best predictor for earning more in print on demand. Also, POD was the only income stream that had enough hobbyists to provide data. Here are the ranges for 2023:

→ Hobbyist: \$600-\$2,200

Part-Time Designer: \$1,100-\$3,500

• Full-Time Designer: \$5,500-\$10,100

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM SELLING PHYSICAL PRODUCTS IN 2023?



Of the 195 artists selling physical products in 2023, the most common income was less than \$1,000 (41.5%), followed by \$1,000–\$4,999 (33.3%), and \$10,000–\$24,999 (9.2%). Also, those who earned \$25,000 or more increased by 2.5%. This likely contributed to the average physical product income increasing this year to \$8,900 (+\$2,100 over 2022).

For years of experience, there was a large income gap between new, intermediate, and veteran artists. However, the range for new designers increased significantly over 2022's range. Here are the ranges for 2023:

• New Designer: \$3,700-\$7,200

Intermediate Designer: \$4,500-\$9,500

• Veteran Designer: \$7,700-\$14,600

For work situation, full-time designers saw the largest increase in income over last year. Here are the ranges for 2023:

Part-Time Designer: \$2,500-\$5,900

• Full-Time Designer: \$10,100-\$18,300



FURTHER READING

Your First Surface Design Product Line Series: <u>Part 1</u>, <u>Part 2</u>, & <u>Part 3</u> <u>Developing a Product Line & How it Helps for Art Licensing</u>

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM ILLUSTRATION IN 2023?



Of the 124 participants who focused on illustration jobs as a source of income in 2023, the top income bracket was **less than \$1,000** (31.5%), followed by **\$1,000-\$4,999** (21.8%), and **\$10,000-\$24,999** (17.7%). The **average illustration income was \$13,800**, which is a \$2,400 increase over 2022.

For years of experience, the disparity between them was one of the most significant we saw among the income sources (second only to teaching). Comparing these incomes to last year, new designer's income decreased while veterans increased in 2023:

→ New Designer: \$1,100-\$3,900

Intermediate Designer: \$6,400-\$14,500

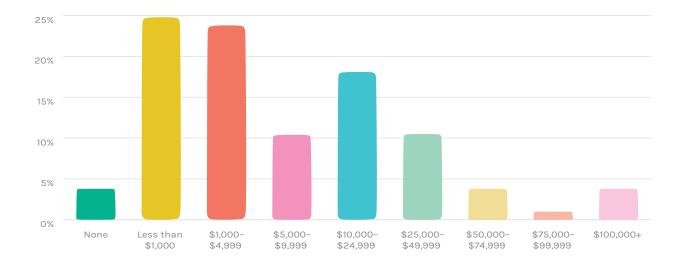
• Veteran Designer: \$12,200-\$22,000

However, for work situation both part-time and full-time designers saw an increase in average illustration income over last year. Here are the ranges for 2023:

→ Part-Time Designer: \$5,800-\$13,400

• Full-Time Designer: \$12,000-\$21,400

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM GRAPHIC DESIGN IN 2023?



Of the 105 participants who focused on graphic design, the largest percentage was less than \$1,000 (24.8%), but was followed closely by \$1,000–\$4,999, (23.8%), and then a little further behind was \$10,000–\$24,999 (18.1%). The average graphic design income in 2023 was \$16,200, which is a \$3,200 increase over 2022.

For years of experience, veterans earned twice as much as intermediate designers. However, new designers earned more than anyone else — see the note at the bottom of this page for an explanation. Here are the ranges for 2023:

• New Designer: \$17,800-\$23,500*

Intermediate Designer: \$5,300-\$12,600

Veteran Designer: \$11,800-\$22,400

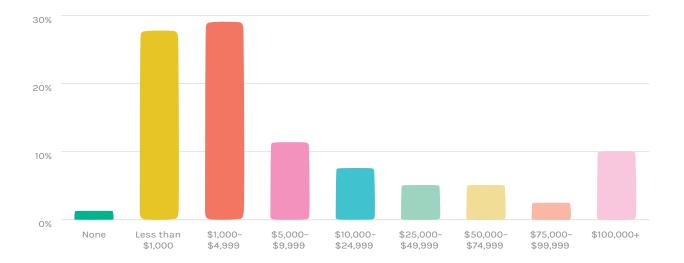
With work experience, part-time and full-time designers earned about the same this year:

Part-Time Designer: \$10,600-\$19,700*

Full-Time Designer: \$12,200-\$22,200

*There were 3 participating new designers (2 were part-time) who made a graphic design income of \$100k+, so that's why those figures are high. When removing the high earners from the statistics, the average income drops to \$200–\$1,800 for new designers and \$6,000–\$14,300 for part-time designers.

HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN FROM TEACHING ART IN 2023?



Of the 79 participants who taught art (online or in-person), the most common income bracket was \$1,000-\$4,999 (29.1%), followed by less than \$1,000 (27.9%), and \$5,000-\$9,999 (11.4%). The average income from teaching decreased significantly to \$18,600 (-\$5,900 from 2022). This was the largest decrease of all the income streams in this report. Despite that, teaching was still the most profitable stream of income for artists.

For years of experience, the drop in income was most significant among new designers who had a two-thirds percentage decrease from last year. Conversely, veterans earned much more on average than they did in 2022. Here are the ranges for 2023:

• New Designer: \$400-\$2,600

Intermediate Designer: \$1,900-\$5,900

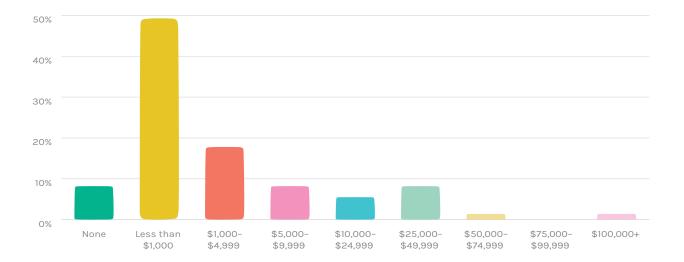
Veteran Designer: \$25,700-\$37,300

For work situation, part-time designers earned about twice as much as they did in 2022 while full-time designers saw a wider income range — the bottom end is lower and the top end is higher than last year. Here are the ranges:

Part-Time Designer: \$6,300-\$13,200

• Full-Time Designer: \$10,000-\$39,200

HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU MAKE FROM SELLING DIGITAL PRODUCTS IN 2023?



Fewer artists sold digital products in 2023, however, of the 73 who did, the largest percentage made less than \$1,000 (49.3%), followed by \$1,000-\$4,999 (17.8%). Then there was a 3-way split for third place at 8.2% between None, \$5,000-\$9,999, and \$25,000-\$49,999.

Because of those last two brackets, the **average digital products income increased to \$7,800**, which is \$4,000 higher than 2022's average. It's also surpassed POD income in this year's income stream rankings on page 12.

On average, veterans earned twice as much as new designers when looking at years of experience, while intermediate designers earned the least. When comparing to last year's results, both new and veteran designers earned double this year:

♦ New Designer: \$3,400-\$7,500

Intermediate Designer: \$2,500-\$6,200

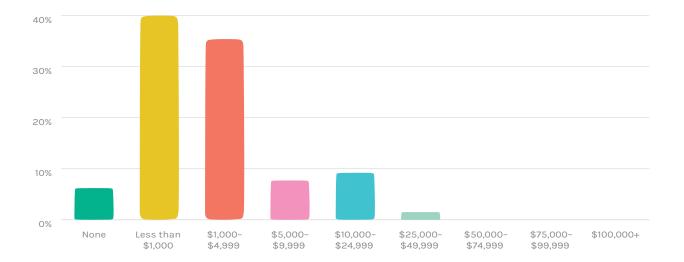
Veteran Designer: \$6,900-\$13,000

There is still a significant difference between income ranges for part-time and full-time designers, however, both earned significantly more than they did last year. Here are the ranges for 2023:

• Part-Time Designer: \$1,600-\$4,700

• Full-Time Designer: \$9,000-\$16,600

HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU MAKE FROM FINE ART SALES IN 2023?



This is a new income stream for us to track this year and of the 65 participants who focused on fine art sales in 2023, the top income bracket was **less than \$1,000** (40%), followed by **\$1,000-\$4,999** (35,4%), and **\$10,000-\$24,999** trailing in 3rd place (9.2%). The **average fine art sale income was \$4,000**, which was the lowest average of the streams of income of this year's survey.

For years of experience, veterans earned significantly more than new designers and about twice as much as intermediate designers in 2023:

• New Designer: \$100-\$1,400

Intermediate Designer: \$1,800-\$5,400

Veteran Designer: \$2,500-\$7,100

Interestingly, there was no difference in work situation as both part-time and full-time designers earned almost the same amount this year:

Part-Time Designer: \$2,200-\$6,400

Full-Time Designer: \$2,200-\$6,500

Income: Other Sources

On the next few pages, we've included charts that rank the 10 streams of income in this report for each experience level and work experience (except for hobbyists). It's interesting to see how the rankings shift with each type as well as the average incomes when you compare them to the survey averages on page 12.

Feel free to use these charts as a rough guide when setting income goals for the year depending on your experience level, work situation, or income streams. However, please be mindful that just because you're a veteran, it doesn't guarantee you'll earn more. Likewise, just because you're new or part-time, that doesn't mean you'll only earn a little. It's all about the focused effort you put into your business!

STREAMS OF INCOME BASED ON EXPERIENCE LEVEL

NEW DESIGNER

Rank	Income Stream	Avg. Income Range
1	Graphic design	\$17,800-\$23,500*
2	Selling physical products	\$3,700-\$7,200
3	Selling digital products	\$3,400-\$7,500
4	Freelance surface design	\$1,400-\$4,300
5	Illustration	\$1,100-\$3,900
6	Licensing	\$1,200-\$3,400
7	Teaching art	\$400-\$2,600
8	Print on Demand	\$300-\$1,700
9	Fine art sales	\$100-\$1,400
N/A	Buyouts	Not enough data

^{*}See note at the bottom of page 35 for more information.

STREAMS OF INCOME BASED ON EXPERIENCE LEVEL (CONT.)

INTERMEDIATE DESIGNER

Rank	Income Stream	Avg. Income Range
1	Illustration	\$6,400-\$14,500
2	Graphic design	\$5,300-\$12,600
3	Freelance surface design	\$4,400-\$11,100
4	Selling physical products	\$4,500-\$9,500
5	Buyouts	\$3,500-\$7,900
6	Licensing	\$3,000-\$7,600
7	Selling digital products	\$2,500-\$6,200
8	Teaching art	\$1,900-\$5,900
9	Fine art sales	\$1,800-\$5,400
10	Print on Demand	\$1,900-\$5,200

VETERAN DESIGNER

Rank	Income Stream	Avg. Income Range
1	Teaching art	\$25,700-\$37,300
2	Graphic design	\$11,800-\$22,400
3	Illustration	\$12,200-\$22,000
4	Freelance surface design	\$11,300-\$20,400
5	Buyouts	\$8,200-\$19,600
6	Licensing	\$10,800-\$18,800
7	Selling physical products	\$7,700-\$14,600
8	Selling digital products	\$6,900-\$13,000
9	Print on Demand	\$5,100-\$9,700
10	Fine art sales	\$2,500-\$7,100

STREAMS OF INCOME BASED ON WORK EXPERIENCE

PART-TIME DESIGNER

Rank	Income Stream	Avg. Income Range
1	Graphic design	\$10,600-\$19,700*
2	Illustration	\$5,800-\$13,400
3	Teaching art	\$6,300-\$13,200
4	Freelance surface design	\$2,700-\$7,500
5	Fine art sales	\$2,200-\$6,400
6	Licensing	\$2,300-\$6,300
7	Buyouts	\$2,000-\$6,100
8	Selling physical products	\$2,500-\$5,900
9	Selling digital products	\$1,600-\$4,700
10	Print on Demand	\$1,100-\$3,500

FULL-TIME DESIGNER

Rank	Income Stream	Avg. Income Range
1	Teaching art	\$10,000-\$39,200
2	Graphic design	\$12,200-\$22,200
3	Illustration	\$12,000-\$21,400
4	Freelance surface design	\$11,600-\$21,200
5	Buyouts	\$8,900-\$20,300
6	Selling physical products	\$10,100-\$18,300
7	Licensing	\$10,200-\$17,900
8	Selling digital products	\$9,000-\$16,600
9	Print on Demand	\$5,500-\$10,100
10	Fine art sales	\$2,200-\$6,500

^{*}See note at the bottom of page 35 for more information.

QUALITY OF LIFE

DO YOU FEEL YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN A GOOD WORK/LIFE BALANCE IN 2023?

The majority of participants say they were **Sometimes** able to maintain a good balance. However, reading through the responses to the question on page 45, it's been a tough year for artists. Because of that, **Never** increased by 1.3% this year and **Always** decreased by 1%. Hopefully, we'll see things change for the better next year.

22.2%

ALWAYS

64.5%

SOMETIMES

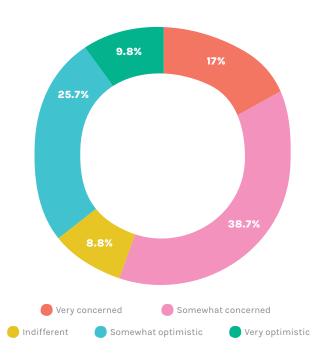
13.3%

NEVER

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SURFACE DESIGN INDUSTRY AND YOUR ABILITY TO GENERATE AN INCOME IN IT?

We were curious about artists' confidence in making money in the coming years. Over half of participating artists had **some level of concern** about generating an income (55.7%) while more than a third **had optimism** about it (33.5%).

We will be interested to see how the results of this question change over the years.



W=*****:

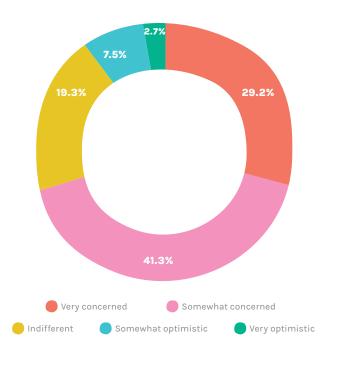
FURTHER READING

Creative Burnout & Improving Artist Mental Health
The Magic of Time Blocking for Artists
Overcoming Imposter Syndrome as an Artist

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ON THE SURFACE DESIGN INDUSTRY?

Artificial Intelligence's prevalence grew exponentially this year so it was important to ask artists how they felt about it. Unsurprisingly, more than two-thirds of participants were **concerned about AI** (70.5%) while just over 10% were **optimistic about AI**.

It's impossible to predict how AI will affect the industry in the future. In the meantime, it's important to express your value and uniqueness to clients and customers.



HAS YOUR ART BEEN COPIED, REPURPOSED, OR STOLEN THIS YEAR?

Unfortunately, artists who had their art stolen this year increased by 2.3% over 2022. It's a shame to see this statistic increase for the first time in this survey, but we're hopeful that it'll decrease again next year.

17.2%

YES

82.8%

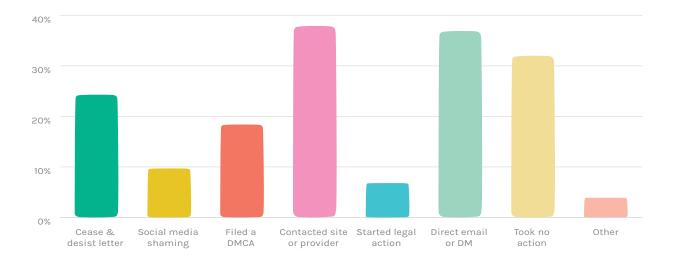
NO



FURTHER READING

Art Theft: What to Do When it Happens to You Basic Guidelines for Copyrighting Your Artwork How to Protect Your Art on Instagram & Online

WHAT STEPS HAVE YOU TAKEN TO RESOLVE IT?



For the 103 participating artists who were unfortunate enough to have their artwork stolen, most took at least some action. The most popular option was Contacting the site or provider (37.9%), followed by Direct email or DM (36.9%), and Took no action (32%).

While it is entirely up to each artist whether they pursue legal action or some other resolution, we encourage artists to advocate for themselves and seek help whenever they're able to (financially and emotionally).

WERE YOU COMPENSATED FOR THE STOLEN WORK EVENTUALLY?

While it's very unfortunate that most artists are never compensated for stolen artwork, the number of artists who were increased for the second year in a row (+3.9% over 2022 and 5.7% over 2021). More artists getting compensated for their work is a reason to celebrate!

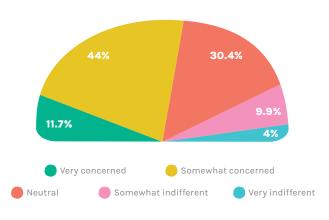
YFS

11.7% 88.3%

NO

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT YOUR WORK BEING STOLEN?

Of those who did not have their art stolen, 55.7% were concerned while 13.9% had some level of indifference. These stats are similar to the previous two years.



HAVE CURRENT EVENTS OR THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE AFFECTED YOUR BUSINESS IN 2023?

Although we're still happy to see that more than half felt that events didn't have an impact on their business, almost half of artists did — the percentage increased by 4.5% over 2022.

47%

YES

53%

NO

HOW HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR BUSINESS THIS YEAR?

We always want to provide participants an opportunity to share their business struggles, and we appreciated their honesty in this year's survey. As always, we received a variety of answers, but here are topics that appeared regularly:

- Cost of living and inflation forced artists to increase their prices. Higher cost of goods and shipping affected prices as well.
- Many faced challenges with their existing clients including less work, lower budgets, smaller product offerings with less variety, taking fewer design risks, and paying slower than usual.
- Oversaturation in the industry and companies working with fewer artists were the most common reasons participants gave for a decrease in new clients.
- For those who sell physical goods, many discussed the decrease in attendance at fairs this year, which significantly affected their overall sales.
- ◆ Sales on POD sites were down Spoonflower was the most common platform mentioned. Also, artists were unhappy with the "pay-to-play" fees some platforms introduced this year.
- Ageism affected a few participants' ability to be offered opportunities.
- Several participants had to switch to part-time in their art business and find work elsewhere or start new income streams to make ends meet.
- Many artists' physical or mental health was significantly affected this year due to world events, rising cost of living, lower sales, or having to work longer hours.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This survey is only possible due to the generosity of the 600 artists who were willing to share the details of their businesses with us — thank you!

I'd also like to thank Jena, my project manager, for building this report for the 4th straight year. Finally, I want to thank every person who took the time to share the survey with others. Thank you for continuing to make our biggest passion project such a success!

Every year when I analyze the survey data, I'm hopeful that incomes will increase. I'm delighted that was mostly true this year, but that doesn't mean there still isn't more work to be done with educating and encouraging artists to increase their prices.

I will continue to do what I can to generate important conversations around income and pricing in our industry and I hope this report has inspired you to do the same!



2023 SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Avg. Artist Age: 45

Avg. Art Income: \$23,500

Avg. Art Expenses: \$5,200

Avg. Licensing Price: \$450

Avg. Buyout Price: \$640

Avg. Hourly Rate: \$57 per hour

Most Popular Income Stream: Print on demand (POD)

Most Profitable Income Stream: Teaching

 Top 3 Markets: Home decor, home textiles, & greeting cards

Top Marketing Method: Instagram



If you enjoyed this survey report and would like to back this project, you can do so <u>RIGHT HERE</u>. Your support helps offset the costs associated with hosting the survey and creating this report.