

THE CREATIVE CLASS HAS RISEN

THE CEO AND FOUNDER OF THE CREATIVE CLASS GROUP, RANA AND RICHARD FLORIDA, ON THE ONGOING EVOLUTION OF THE CREATIVE CONSUMER; REBELLIOUS LEADERSHIP; AND THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL

WORDS BY OLIVIA SQUIRE

Everybody loves to hate a hipster. Pithy press putdowns about the cultural cannibalism of communities by bearded wannabes and rock star offspring – masquerading under snappy titles like ‘Shoreditchification’ or ‘Brooklynisation’ – have become part of our mainstream social commentary. However, with almost a third of the US workforce now belonging to the ‘creative class’ (which includes occupations in science and engineering, business, law, arts and media, academia and medicine), a more nuanced look at the group that is transforming not only our cities but also the way we work, connect and travel is essential.

Richard Florida, the “rockstar intellectual” (Fast Company) who coined the term ‘creative class’ in 2002 with the publication of his generation-defining book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, founded The Creative Class Group to consult on the growth of this sector alongside CEO Rana Florida. Their belief in the power of creativity to unlock human potential and drive the economic and cultural development of modern society chimes with the coming of age of the millennials – and provides an important insight into the next generation of high-end travellers. We asked the duo to give us the lowdown on the evolution of the creative consumer and how the luxury travel industry can best connect with them.



RANA
FLORIDA

How would you describe the credo of the Creative Class Group?

We believe that every single human being is creative, and that it is only when we tap and harness every single person’s creativity that our society can truly grow and prosper.

As chair of THE REBELS 2015, how would you define rebellion in the travel industry?

Above all, creative class consumers are looking for authentic experiences. When they visit a city, they want experiences that are unique to that place and representative of its local culture, that are not generic and pre-packaged. Tourist districts in most major cities are starting to look the same: a Starbucks on every corner, LVMH stores, and all the rest. It’s a little paradoxical, but staying true to your heritage is one of the most rebellious things you can do.

What does it take for businesses today to be rebels, break the mould and become market leaders?

It’s no longer enough for a leader to think just ‘outside-the-box’: they have to think outside-the-universe. Businesses need to be visionary in their mission and inspire their consumers. Art, creativity and self-expression are keys not just to business and product creation, but also leadership.

Having interviewed high-profile individuals from diverse fields including Bill Clinton, Michelle Obama, Zaha Hadid and Tory Burch, what qualities make them successful?

Successful leaders aren’t afraid to take risks and they aren’t afraid of failure. After all, trial and error is how we discover and learn. Creative risk-taking is written in every fearless leader’s DNA; creative businesses and luxury travel brands should applaud it rather than fear it. The key to growth is continuous reinvention.

It’s surprising to me how few organisations foster a culture of outside-the-box thinking. We are taught to set goals, to achieve measurable results, to applaud success and steer away from failure. But we are rarely encouraged to push the boundaries of new ideas. The world-renowned creativity

expert Sir Ken Robinson has observed that you can't learn or create anything new unless you first open yourself up to the possibility of being wrong.

Organisations that want to break out of the ordinary need to create a culture of experimentation. Innovative designer eyeglass retailer Warby Parker sets aside one day a week for its staff to submit 'dumb ideas.' Its founders told me that some of their most innovative ideas come from just such practices. "Fail fast, fail often" is a mantra in Silicon Valley, the land of invention. Tech entrepreneurs don't just own up to their missteps on the road to success; they brag about them. As the motto goes, "Failure is something everyone must have on their CV."

As someone who has led corporate strategies for high-profile clients including Disney, Converse and BMW, what can luxury travel brands do to attract the next generation of creative class traveller?

Members of the Creative Class are savvy, connected and intelligent. They know a lot, and they know the difference between something that came out of a cookie-cutter and something that's authentic and real. Creativity comes out of the combination and recombination of ideas, the mixing of influences and cultures. When they visit a city, they want to learn about the arts that have arisen out of that place's people and history; they want to be immersed in street-level music, fashion, and architecture. When it comes to foods, they want to experience both traditional cuisine and the latest trends. The Creative Class traveller wants to see, hear and taste things that they couldn't anywhere else.

You've mentioned a passion for 'spaces that epitomise creativity, innovation and design' and intersect the public and private arenas. How can travel brands participate in this idea?

The most memorable structures and developments aren't standalone but contextual; they are intimately integrated into their neighbourhoods rather than imposed on them. A hotel, for instance, should be connected to its locale in both its form and function and even in its programming – the food that's served in its restaurants, the music that plays in the lobby, the art on its walls, and even the magazines that its newsstand displays.

How do you think luxury travel brands can drive philanthropy through their activities, and do you think the wider creative class shares this concern?

Absolutely. Creative Class consumers are knowledgeable and concerned; they have well-developed social consciences and value sustainability and are turned off by ostentatious luxury and vulgar consumerism. Mission-driven organisations that care about their global footprint are the ones that will succeed. It's not just about jumping on the eco-green bandwagon but really making a difference in the local economy and the world. Jobs, the environment, income inequality, animal welfare, nature, homelessness, education, healthcare – there are so many ways that luxury travel brands can tap into a cause that is meaningful and that also has a huge impact on consumers' perceptions of them. Organisations that are genuinely committed to larger causes have an edge in recruiting the best talent too. Workers want to feel like their jobs serve higher values.



**RICHARD
FLORIDA**

Back in 2002 when you first published The Rise Of The Creative Class, the concept of a new economic and cultural class was greeted as somewhat revolutionary. Over a decade later, how has the position of this class changed in society?

Intellectual and creative content are core drivers of the global economy today; design is a source of competitive advantage across industries; and technology and innovation are key to productivity growth. We have experienced seismic shifts in the way we live, work and produce, and the Creative Class are on the leading edge of all of them.

What is the economic value of this section of society?

Members of the creative class see themselves as change agents, as drivers of cultural and social trends, and they are important factors in the growth of cities and urban

communities. From a consumption standpoint, they have tremendous buying power. Though the Creative Class make up only 30% of the US workforce, they earn half of all the wages in the U.S. and control over 70% of discretionary spending.

How has the creative class evolved and what does this mean for the future of the luxury travel industry?

The Creative Class are highly intelligent and those characteristics are still the same, perhaps even more so. They also now value artisanal products and brands with a mission. This highly intelligent and engaged consumer will be seeking more from the industry. They are seeking more than luxury and exotic locations – they want real and authentic experiences. A walled-off hotel in a remote part of the city is no longer an attractive option, even for a business traveller. The Creative Class wants not just consumer amenities but experiences right outside the door. They want access to culture, nightlife, restaurants, parks and green spaces, retail and much more.

If the creative class crave multifunctional spaces where they can work hard and play hard; collide with like-minded thinkers; and engage in local experiences, how can travel and hotel brands make this happen?

When we worked for Starwood Hotels as their cultural ambassadors we created the Hub. Rather than a standalone lobby, the hub was a place where guests could work and connect. It had a restaurant by über Chef Jeans George; a coffee bar designed by coffee king Ricardo Illy; art commissioned by local artists; music by local musicians; and we curated the library, filling it with content on design, urbanism, fashion, food, architecture, music and architecture. High speed internet was a must, with comfortable seating for guests to work and dialogue. Knowledge workers are more global and connected than ever and the boundaries between work and pleasure, public and private life are increasingly blurred. They need and expect to find spaces that are conducive to working, whether they're travelling for business or pleasure.

Is there a difference in how the creative class travel for work and for pleasure?

Leisure and work time are crossing over and so are the trends in the way we work. The days of being chained to a desk in a skyscraper office cubicle or in a tech park on the outskirts of town are over. The Creative Class incorporate work into everything they do and are constantly on the go. We work more with our minds than ever before, but we need to release our energy in fun and creative ways too.

Do you believe that people now travel to certain destinations with the purpose of expressing themselves?

Absolutely. The Creative Class are pioneering new extremes in travel. The destinations they are going to are further away and they expect to be more engaged and active when they get there.



Rana Florida is the Chair for the 2015 LE Miami awards, THE REBELS. Remember to check out the shortlist she selected alongside this year's panel and to vote for your winners before 4pm on Thursday 11 June via the LE Miami app.