

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 42 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. What if the job you want doesn't exist? Today, Elise Rorick and I talk about that and more when we discuss getting into book design. I've retired the one on one brainstorming sessions and just launched an hour long discovery call where in addition to figuring out what your location independent career will be, we also work out a plan to get you there and give you accountability along the way. Visit [compasspod.com/discovery-call](https://compasspod.com/discovery-call) to book. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Elise, welcome to the show.

Elise: Hi Kathryn. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Elise: Oh Man. When I was a kid I sort of went through a little bit of everything, I think. I was one of those kids that like wanted to be a nurse and then the next day I wanted to be a vet and then I wanted to be a marine biologist and then an astronaut and like it was a little bit of everything, especially when I was younger. Oddly though, I don't know that anything that I'm really doing now or have done was ever on that list.

Kathryn: How had that changed by the time you left high school?

Elise: Well, so it was actually in middle school that I picked up one of my dad's cameras and kind of ran away with it. So I, all through middle school, high school, college and after was really into photography and that was kind of where what I decided I wanted to do was be a photographer. And then that sort of pivoted again later on.

Kathryn: What did you study in college?

Elise: I studied fine art photography and that was kind of just because fine art photography was the only degree that you could get in photography. And so I was at this weird place of, well I know that I want to be a photographer and also it is like completely expected by everyone in my entire life that I will go to college. So this is kind of the closest thing that fits that. So that turned out to be sort of like an unexpected twist that led me right where I think I always needed to be. So my book designs very often use a combination of like painting and drawing and photography and then obviously also like graphic design and digital design.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Elise: I think honestly it was through podcasts, like I was just listening to other podcasts of entrepreneurs and I think some artists. So like it was really just kind of through that exposure of other people that were doing it, that it occurred to me that that was even an option. The thing that I actually really love doing, it really doesn't exist as like a typical nine to five. And so I sort of just made my own thing and then discovered later

like, oh, well that actually is a thing. I heard about it. And it was just like, oh my gosh, that's the thing. That's what I wanna do. And then I was kind of sort of already doing it really, just by necessity almost. And I was like, okay, no, so this is actually like what I'm gonna do. That's my goal. All of that.

Kathryn: And how do you describe your work to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Elise: I say that I'm a freelancer or like a freelance book designer. Or sometimes I'll say like a book cover designer. People know what I mean a little more, if I say it that way.

Kathryn: And when you're talking to somebody who really wants to know the details?

Elise: I typically go a little more in depth and say that I am an enchantment artist and book designer and so I kind of have built my entire brand around the term enchantment, because my whole thing is that I can and do create book covers that are enchanting. So like if a, if a potential readers sees the cover it pulls them in and they want to know more and pick up the book. And so like that's kind of my special skill and that's how I market myself.

Kathryn: How did you get started in designing books?

Elise: I have basically always been a huge nerd and when I was in college and getting my fine art photography degree, which included like photography classes and also kind of more fine art classes. Everything that I did for assignments all wound up being like inspired by the books that I was reading or related to the books that I was reading. And so it was kind of like staring me in the face for a while there before I finally... Book cover designer is a job and that could be what I do to blend or merge or utilize all of my different things that I'm interested in.

Kathryn: How did you find your first clients?

Elise: This was a few years ago now and so I kind of would just spend anytime I had free time just kind of searching all of the different like freelancer sites looking for people who are looking for book design. And I actually met the girl who is now my very best friend because she is an author and she was looking for a designer. The Internet really, which is kind of amazing and marvelous.

Kathryn: How do you find clients now?

Elise: So now it's honestly not totally dissimilar. I'm doing a lot more inbound marketing now. There's still definitely times where I'm looking at job postings on upwork. Mostly I've tried to connect with people though in Facebook groups. They're for writers, especially of like different genres and that sort of thing. And so I tried to just be really present and helpful in those groups. And then I'm connecting with people who kind of are my ideal clients. Sometimes in the group someone's posting, I'm looking for a designer. Sometimes they are posting something that's writing or book adjacent and then that's how they get to like my website or my newsletter.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Elise: My first struggle just like as a creative business person was to just degree in fine art photography, but it didn't really teach me anything about business, like at all. So that was like the first big hurdle that I had to overcome was this weird place of like, okay, well now I have a degree in this and I know how to do the art and the photography and the design and all of that, but there aren't jobs available. So like how do I actually do this and make money at it at all? In some ways, like I'm still kind of figuring out and navigating because I think that's just an ongoing thing. If you're a freelancer or an entrepreneur of any kind cause like you get it figured out and set and then something changes. And then you have to figure it out again.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Elise: The novel that my best friend wrote that I designed the cover on, I designed the interiors. I did artwork for the interiors. I did artwork that just like went on merchandise and like, because she and I were such close friends by the time that was published I was like really, really intimately familiar with that story and it's legitimately one of my favorite books just because it's that good of a novel like from an emotional and or an artistic standpoint. I think like that one was really huge.

Kathryn: You could start fresh today knowing everything you already know. Is there anything you would do differently?

Elise: Oh man, that is such a hard question because hindsight is 2020 and so there are definitely some things that in some ways maybe I should've gone like to a different school that would have been more cost effective and not had so many student loans. At the same time, everything that I have done is what got me here and I don't know that I would have wound up here doing any of this if I had tried to do it differently. The one thing that maybe I wish I could go back and tell my younger self would be to try and do more internships in school because that was another thing that like in art school there wasn't even mentioned or like suggested to me that maybe I should do an internship. Then after I graduated I sort of realize and notice that, oh actually that would have been a really good thing to do, but by that, when it was too late, because you can't do an internship unless you're actually a student. So I was kind of like, okay, well now I need something to bridge the gap between student and like business person or person working out in the real world. The internship structure seems to do that pretty well, but by the time I realized that I had like missed the boat. That would probably be the one thing that I would change. But even that like again, maybe I could have gotten here faster if I had done that or maybe not. Maybe I would've wound up somewhere else entirely.

Kathryn: Odds are there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Elise: You're totally right. There's no, there is no typical day but I do have sort of like some favorite days so that kind of looks like letting myself wake up. Whenever I naturally

wake up. I usually wake up between like 8:00 and 9:00 and kind of give myself time to have a nice slow morning. Like it's so easy to just check our phones and check our email and check Facebook and like just get inundated with all of the messaging and everything. And so I try to be really conscious about not doing that. I just make coffee and have a bit of breakfast and usually we'll listen to some sort of podcast while I'm doing that because I just, I want all the information always like about everything. Like I said, total book nerd but that like converts over into like podcasts about like classical mythology or politics or , you know whatever it is, there's so many different topics. I like to make my to do list for the day, the night before so that once I'm like done with breakfast and I'm sitting down to work, I don't get overwhelmed with the "urgent" things.

Elise: I find that I'm like way more productive and also way less anxious if I have written my to do list the night before and limited it to, these are like the couple of major things that I need to get done today, especially within like anyone book project. The days are not really going to even look the same but I do spend time working on the book project at whatever stage that I'm at and then usually break for lunch. Usually winds up being around 1:00 and if it's nice I try to like get up, stretch, walk around, kind of take a real break away from either the computer or the painting. I do try to get up and move around for a bit and then get back to it. Sometimes it is checking email or email correspondence or sometimes like this week I've just wrapped up a big design project. I will still get into like the Facebook groups and kind of just run down the list and check them all and see if there's anything relevant to me or to book design or anything like that going on and like sometimes that can spin off into a different project or conversation or whatever it is.

Elise: And then I kind of wind up making dinner later in the evening, usually like seven or eight ish. I like to cook when I can, although that doesn't always work out. Usually in the evenings I am reading or painting for fun. So it's really awesome that I get to talk with authors and work with authors and writers and all of that and work on painting and book design and that sort of thing. And I absolutely love it. But I also definitely have tons of project ideas like painting ideas and just like love to read tons of books on my own. So that's kind of usually how I wind down in the evenings is with either painting or reading. Sometimes both or sometimes like I'll put on an audio book and paint or just some, some combination of one of those. And then I usually make tea at night to kind of like relax myself and get ready for bed.

Kathryn: Why are you excited about right now in the field of book design?

Elise: Okay, so the thing that I am most excited about right now is how many authors that I keep running into and talking to that are leaning more towards self-publishing. Not that like I have anything necessarily against traditional publishing, but first of all it's much easier for me to work with a self publishing author than with an author that's going through a publisher or with a publishing house just because bureaucracy is a thing. And I think as an independent business person, I definitely prefer to work with other independent business persons. And if you're a self publishing author you are inherently your own little small business. And so I'm really excited that not only are there a lot more tools out there making it easier for people to go that route, that's just a very cool,

exciting thing. That is definitely a trend that is growing and so I'm really excited to see where that goes.

Kathryn: Now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income ranges and how long have you been doing this work?

Elise: So I have been a photographer for I think, almost 10 years now, a full time photographer for over five years, a freelancer for the last three years. And it really has been in the last year and a half to two years that I have sort of like a lot more seriously shifted into book designing. So like even still, I still have a little bit of a balance of multiple streams of income. One of them is photography, one of them is book design, one of them is just artwork, like selling artwork. So I'll total my income range. The first year that I was a freelancer, I think my income was like \$32,000 before taxes, which that was like the best year income I had had to date at that point. So that was really exciting. Obviously that's not like the end goal. The second year I think I was right around \$45,000 before taxes and then this year, which is my third year I, I'm pretty much right on track to be somewhere between \$40,000 and \$45,000 I'm not a hundred percent sure exactly how like the rest of the year's gonna shake out, but I'm on track to be somewhere in that range, possibly a little bit higher.

Elise: And like my goal is definitely to keep growing and to keep increasing, especially the book design side of things which is, it's not quite where the majority of my income comes from yet, cause I'm still sort of transitioning and like rebalancing everything. But it is definitely like the projects that I work on that are book design projects are definitely my bigger income projects, if that makes sense. Which is why I want to do more of them. Aside from the fact it's the combination of everything that I love. The past couple of months with that big project that I had going, that was about half of my time for the weeks that I was working on it and then also probably somewhere between a third and half of my income. It's probably at a, like a third or less overall, right now. I'm still kind of in a transition period. So sort of starting small like last year was less. This year I have more book design projects that I've been working on next year hopefully, obviously it'll be more than that.

Kathryn: Where do you see it topping out?

Elise: So I think average wise like just for industry average, I think it's like \$60,000 to \$80,000 like that's basically what my income goal is. Somewhere right around there hopefully/most likely. That is definitely I think the industry average or is somewhere in there.

Kathryn: How do you decide what to charge?

Elise: That has also been kind of a long process of just figuring it out and I basically charge per project or like per thing that they're having designed. There are many different ways to design a book cover and there are many different uses. So like an ebook cover design is a different project than a hardcover dust jacket design. And so there's kind of like a base honestly and then it increases from there based on the other work that needs to be

done. And I base my project prices on how long, I know on average it will take me to do that type of project. And then on an hourly rate, which I sort of figured out by just kind of adding up my expenses, like my bare minimum expenses. And then I also did an option that was like a more ideal situation, what are the expenses. And so that sort of gives me my two ends of, well my goal is to make this much per year, but I add my bare minimum, it's this much per year.

Elise: And so I price based on my goal because obviously that's my goal, that's what I have to price it is. And so it kind of is just a math equation. Once you figure out what your expenses are and what it will cost to live the way you want to live, then that gives you what your hourly rate has to be. And then that hourly rate is kind of how I figure out what my different, like an ebook cover versus the dust jacket cover versus something that's just like a graphic design, like some covers are just typography basically. And so that's a lot faster to do than something that's going to require like an in depth detailed like realistic painting or drawing that then gets incorporated into the design of the cover. Just all the different options but based on how much time it takes and then based on that hourly rate is how I figure it out.

Kathryn: Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Elise: I wouldn't say I have quite achieved this yet, but I am definitely working on having passive income streams because that definitely does help with stability. So I released an illustrated bullet journal last year and then I actually am about to release a non illustrated bullet journal. I also have another project that I worked on as my senior thesis in college, but I'm kind of like reworking it and going to republish that. And so the idea there is just to have books that are available kind of anytime and always and something where you do the work once and you put it up online on Amazon and theoretically they build up your passive income. And I am getting some passive income. It's not to the level yet where I would say I can necessarily like count on it.

Elise: It's kind of just bonus right now, but it's also still very much in the early stages. And so the content is pretty new and it kind of just needs time to really get some traction and get going. So I have those. I'm also planning on releasing a course on skillshare that will be just like photography 101. And then I might also do like a bullet journal related class, like an online course, which is not really related to book design. In terms of passive income on book design. I don't think that that is really a thing unless I were to like write a book or do a course on like how to DIY it. But I definitely am going for more passive income streams in my other life interests and areas of business for sure.

Kathryn: What tools and gear do you recommend beginners start with?

Elise: I am maybe a little bit old school, but I definitely still do most of my design on, like just with pen and paper and like I've. I have a Wacom tablet and it's definitely super helpful once I'm like digitizing, but I have tried to just like paint digitally from the get go and it is not the same thing. So I definitely still do the pen and paper. I definitely think that like those foundational art classes that I was sort of forced to take because I wanted to do photography. I think those wound up being like the most valuable classes that I took actually because they were so foundational and taught me how to see, which turns out

to be like the biggest necessary thing when you're doing design work. So I would actually recommend kind of like the very basics and like get really good at that and then move on. Then the other thing that I have that is pretty much fundamental I would say is the Adobe creative suite. So Photoshop, Indesign, Illustrator. Those three kind of are the three foundational tools that I use because of course the final product that you're designing is digital. Though, combination of those three programs is what I use to produce all of the final files that I deliver to clients.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to get into book design?

Elise: Oh, I would say read and like pay attention to the other covers that are out there. Like you can learn a lot just by looking at what is out there already. And then the other big thing I would say is just networking because book design and book publishing and all of that, they're very saturated and very competitive industries. Not everyone is good and not everyone has like the budget or the dedication. There are plenty of opportunities, but to kind of be, I guess a little bit wise in terms of not doing work for free or don't be too cheap, don't undervalue yourself and then just like do your best to network with the people who are actually in this business. Small independent publishers I have found are really good people to network with as well cause they're kind of like that perfect in between between the author who has a finished manuscript but no money to hire an editor or a proofreader or a book designer to actually get it out there and the giant behemoth more traditional publishing companies who mostly work with their in house designers and have pretty strict rules and want to really, really dictate where both the writing and the design and the independent, the smaller independent publishers are kind of a really nice middle ground. And so I would say that those are the people you want to try and network with.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Elise: My next steps are, I've spent most of the year of 2019 like really refining my marketing and clarifying and solidifying and all of that. And so continuing to implement all of these newer things is definitely my next step. It's not released yet. I actually just submitted the files and I'm waiting on a first proof copy for the blank bullet journal. And most of the reason I did that is just because the illustrated bullet journal is rather expensive because printing 250 pages full color is just expensive, there's no way around it. And so I wanted to give people a little more cost effective option. So I'm doing that. And then in conjunction with that, I am releasing or launching a group, I call it The Collective and it is kind of like a off Facebook art and wellness is really not the right word, but it's kind of like art for the sake of art and creativity for the sake of creativity.

Elise: So just like setting aside time to work on just a fun creative prompt or work on a journal prompt, like a self-reflective type of thing because that's like everything that I put into and do with the bullet journals. And so it's kind of like a supplemental, they go hand in hand, like the illustrated journal, the blank bullet journal and The Collective are all like three pieces of the same puzzle kind of. And so that is my big thing that I'm working on that is outside of book design but it's related because like there are creative writing prompts and there are journaling prompts and other just like creativity and reflection prompts. And so my target market for the collective is also authors, previous authors

that I've worked with before and also new authors that might find me through the collective and then discover that I do book design. And so like, it kind of all feeds on itself of that is exactly the big marketing and sort of advertising and branding thing that I've been working on all year. And so finishing that all up for the rest of the year 2019 is kind of my big thing.

Elise: And then I am also working on a collaborative writing project. It's collaborative art and writing and it's all just like exploration with visual art and with writing like short stories or poetry. And so that project has technically sort of already launched but took a hiatus and so I am relaunching that probably in like end of September or October. So that again it's not exactly book design but it also definitely is book design because it's sort of like editorial and curatorial, a bit and then once all of the artwork and the writing pieces have been created for it, then I will absolutely take all of that, design it into a book, that is the end goal for that project. It's to create like a collaborative book but it's not like the typical book design client that I would normally have cause it's kind of a book project for myself I guess and other and all of the other artists and writers that wind up being collaborators. It's kind of book design from the flip side of it, like not my usual role. Exactly.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Elise: I am on mostly on my own website honestly. So it's Lusicovi Creative is the name of my company and that's [lusicovi.com](http://lusicovi.com) that links to and is like connected to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, all of those. I am on LinkedIn, although I don't, I don't like that one as much. Really the social media network that I'm on the most is probably Instagram because you know, photographer, artists. That's kind of the one that was built for me, so I just love that platform a lot. And then you can find me on there for sure. Find me on my website, email me any, any of those three.

Kathryn: We will get those links all in the shown up just to make it super simple for everybody to connect. Elise, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Elise: Thank you so much for having me, Kathryn. This has been great.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at [compasspod.com/insiders](http://compasspod.com/insiders) Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at [compasspod.com/042](http://compasspod.com/042), that's [compasspod.com/042](http://compasspod.com/042). Join us next week when we talk with Alison Gold, social change consultant.