

## **Moving Outside Your Comfort Zone**

*Why you should consider seeking work away from the world's big capitals*

by Sasha Martens

When candidates tell me they are considering a move to “America,” I’ve learned that often, what they really mean is: “I want to move to New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco.”

In the same way, when Americans talk to me about a desire to “live abroad,” most of the time this translates to: “I want to move to London.”

This is understandable: all of these cities are international hives of activity. They’re great places and have a lot going for them.

But if you’re looking to enhance your career or seeking international adventure, limiting your options to a handful of trendy capitals can be... well, limiting. Fascinating opportunities and life experiences are to be found all over the map, so why not keep an open mind?

In the advertising world, some of the top creative agencies over the past twenty years have been outside New York and California. To name a few: Fallon (Minneapolis, MN), Crispin Porter (Miami, FL), Wieden+Kennedy (Portland, OR) and the Martin Agency (Richmond, VA.) More recently, agencies such as VML (Kansas City, MO), David Agency (Miami, FL), TDA (Boulder, CO) and Mono (Minneapolis, MN) have been producing compelling work and racking up awards at national and international shows.

If you’re from outside the U.S. and you want to give your career a boost, there is a lot to be said for targeting companies in these cities: they may be more willing to bring you in, and once you’re there, you’re more likely to land a variety of major assignments than if you were at a big New York agency, where teams often compete to land a single noteworthy gig. Stick around long enough, and you’ll be leaving with substantial experience.

John Godsey, executive creative director at VML, said international talent is well-appreciated in Kansas City, where his agency combines a humble Midwestern attitude with the creative drive to win big.

Noting that most of VML’s executives are in their late thirties to forties, Godsey said they “don’t act like stuffy execs” and actively work alongside the rest of the staff. “We have over 50 major accounts in this office alone. So you get tired of one account—or a group of accounts—and you can move to others,” he said, adding that about 600 people work at VML’s Kansas City headquarters.

He also highlighted some of Kansas City’s lifestyle attractions.

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“You get the benefits of living in a city of two million people without suffering the annoyances of living in a city of ten million. You still get all the great concerts and cool music clubs but can actually get a ticket to them,” he noted, adding that Kansas City residents are generally very friendly, which makes meeting people easier than in some megalopolises.

There are other, less tangible, benefits to exploring cities outside your comfort zone. In some ways, anyone familiar with big world cities can adapt to life in New York, London or Amsterdam. These cosmopolitan hubs have a lot in common. But if you’re looking to get better acquainted with America, places like Madison, WI, will give you much more illuminating perspective. Moving there may not be a straightforward cultural adjustment, but it can be exciting, and many candidates who have made this sort of jump have come back to tell me how rewarding it was.

Likewise, for Americans eyeing work outside their borders: think beyond London, and remember that being a fish out of water can be a good thing. If you spend a few years in Vietnam, Argentina or Russia, that experience will stay with you for the rest of your life. It’s not for everyone, but if you’re flexible and curious, it can be amazing.