



The Vault Series: Built, But Never Released

The Craig of the Creek Sneaker That Almost Happened

Not every product makes it to the consumer.

That does not mean the work did not matter.

During COVID, I was contacted by **Liquid Soul**, a culture-driven marketing agency based in Atlanta, about a footwear opportunity connected to Cartoon Network's animated series ***Craig of the Creek***.



The opportunity immediately made sense.

Craig of the Creek was rooted in imagination, adventure, friendship, outdoor exploration, and culture. The show had a world that felt active. Kids were outside. They were moving.

They were building their own universe out of creeks, trails, trees, cardboard, bikes, costumes, and imagination.

That kind of story naturally lends itself to product.

But the goal could not be to simply put characters on a shoe.

That is the easy version.

The real opportunity was to ask a better question:

How do you turn the world of an animated series into footwear that actually feels connected to the story?

Liquid Soul was working with Cartoon Network to identify Black-owned companies that could create different products inspired by characters from the show. Britney and the brand team reached out to me about creating a line of footwear for the series.

I later found out that when they were discussing companies to contact, I was referred by Liquid Soul's CEO, **Tirrell D. Whittle**, who was already a fan of the ROCKDEEP brand.



That mattered to me.

Not because it guaranteed anything.

Because it meant the opportunity did not come from a cold search. It came from someone who understood what we were building and believed the brand had the range to handle the project.

The early conversations were about the opportunity, the product options, the initial creative direction, and how my ideas would work alongside the ideas coming from the Cartoon Network Design team.

There were a lot of characters in the show, so narrowing the focus became important quickly.



The first characters we began ideating around were Craig Williams, the lead character, Sparkle Cadet, and Omar, who at the time was still referred to as Green Poncho.




Each character had a different energy.

CHARACTER IDEATION

Exploring personalities, colors, and the world of Craig of the Creek.

CRAIG WILLIAMS


Curious • Brave • Loyal
The heart of the creek.



Adventure Friendship Discovery Maps The Creek

SPARKLE CADET



Confident • Imaginative • Shining
A hero from a world of make-believe.



Imagination Magic Bravery Sparkle Hope

GREEN PONCHO / OMAR


Wise • Calm • Mysterious
Sees what others don't.



Nature Observant Strategy Quiet Strength The Unknown

ALTERNATE CONCEPTS

CRAIG



SPARKLE CADET



OMAR / GREEN PONCHO



Craig carried the main world of the show - curiosity, leadership, adventure, and the creek itself.

CRAIG

CHARACTER IDEATION

A natural leader with a big imagination and an even bigger heart. Craig sees the creek as a world of endless possibilities. Resourceful, optimistic, and always ready for adventure.



EXPRESSIONS



HAPPY CURIOUS EXCITED FOCUSED
SURPRISED CONCERNED THINKING CONFIDENT

POSE STUDIES



DESIGN NOTES

- Rounded shapes and clear silhouette feel friendly and approachable.
- Bright, optimistic color palette reflects his energy and imagination.
- Everyday explorer—practical, resourceful, and ready for anything.
- The staff is a symbol of creativity, bravery, and leadership.



ALT. CONCEPTS



COLOR PALETTE

SKIN	HAIR	HOODIE SLEEVES	HOODIE BODY	BAG	PANTS
CREEK WATER	FOREST	LEAF	MUD/ EARTH	STONE	SKY


MATERIAL & TEXTURE

COTTON HOODIE	CANVAS BAG	COTTON PANTS
WOOD STAFF	SMOOTH STONE	CREEK WATER

INSPIRATION & WORLD



ICONOGRAPHY



"The creek isn't just where I'm from. It's who I am."

We really wanted to capture his entire being. Craig through his eyes.

CRAIG WILLIAMS

THE CURIOUS LEADER

Resourceful. Kind. Brave. Craig leads with heart and curiosity. He's the glue that holds the creek crew together and always looks for adventure, discovery and a way to help others.



CHARACTER EXPLORATION



EXPLORATION SKETCHES



COLOR PALETTE

PRIMARY



NEUTRALS



ACCENT



PERSONALITY & ROLE

- 
NATURAL LEADER
 He brings people together and always steps up.
- 
CURIOUS & CREATIVE
 Always asking questions and finding new ways to solve problems.
- 
KIND & LOYAL
 He cares deeply for his friends and his community.
- 
BRAVE & ADVENTUROUS
 Never afraid to explore the unknown.

OUTFIT & MATERIALS

				
SOFT KNIIT HOODIE <small>Comfortable & cozy</small>	DURABLE COTTON <small>Active & ready</small>	UTILITY BAG <small>Practical & worn in</small>	DENIM <small>Reliable & timeless</small>	SNEAKERS <small>Functional & clean</small>

WORLD & MOOD



SILHOUETTE STUDY



KEY DESIGN NOTES

- Keep silhouette clean, round and approachable
- Express youthful energy and optimism
- Outfit should feel practical for outdoor adventures
- Colors inspired by nature, exploration and friendship

REFERENCE



INSPIRATION



Sparkle Cadet had a more expressive, imaginative, character-driven visual language.



Omar had mystery, utility, protection, and the kind of outdoor identity that naturally connected to footwear.

GREEN PONCHO (OMAR)

THE STEADY STRATEGIST

Smart, resourceful, and mysterious, Omar is grounded and observant—he thinks before he acts and knows the creek like the back of his hand. He's the protector and problem solver of the group.



EXPRESSIONS & TURNAROUND



COLOR PALETTE

PRIMARY



NEUTRALS



ACCENTS



PERSONALITY & ROLE

- STEADY & RELIABLE**
The calm in the chaos. Keeps the crew grounded.
- OBSERVANT & WISE**
Notices everything. Knows the creek, and reads people.
- RESOURCEFUL**
Sees what's around him. Solves problems with creativity.
- LOYAL PROTECTOR**
Looks out for his friends and stands up for what's right.

OUTFIT & MATERIALS

- UTILITY PONCHO**
Water-resistant & durable
- LAYERED HOODE**
Comfortable & functional
- DURABLE PANTS**
Built for movement & the outdoors
- CROSSBODY BAG**
Carries essentials for any mission
- NATURAL STAFF**
Handmade, used with purpose

WORLD & MOOD



KEYWORDS:
NATURE • STEALTH • MISSION • PROTECTION • RESOURCEFUL • GROUNDED

SILHOUETTE STUDY



SKETCH EXPLORATIONS



EXPLORER **SCOUT** **GUARDIAN** **SKYWALKER** **REBELBLAZER**

TEXTURE & MATERIAL DIRECTION

- EPSTEIN WELON**
Lightweight & tear-resistant
- WEBBING**
Strong & functional
- Waxed Canvas**
Weathered & long-lasting
- NATURAL ROPE**
Earthy & handcrafted
- LEATHER ACCENTS**
Adds durability & character
- RECYCLED FLEECE**
Versatile & comfort

INSPIRATION



BUILT FOR THE WILD. MADE FOR THE CREW.

The original plan was to produce pairs for the voice actors to help promote an upcoming season of the series.



THE VOICE BEHIND THE CREEK

THE TALENT THAT BRINGS CRAIG, SPARKLE CADET & OMAR (GREEN PONCHO) TO LIFE.





PHILIP SOLOMON

AS CRAIG WILLIAMS

Philip Solomon is the voice of Craig Williams, the resourceful and kind-hearted leader of the Creek. His natural warmth and authenticity bring depth, humor, and relatability to the heart of the show.

NOTABLE CREDITS

Craig of the Creek, The Jellies!, Llana Llana, Average Joe, Uncle Grandpa



KAMALI MINTER

AS SPARKLE CADET

Kamali Minter is the voice of Sparkle Cadet, the fearless and imaginative leader of the Kelsey Creek. Her vibrant energy and comedic timing make Sparkle shine in every adventure.

NOTABLE CREDITS

Craig of the Creek, The Owl House, The Jellies!, The Casagrandes, Danger Force



ZENO ROBINSON

AS OMAR (GREEN PONCHO)

Zeno Robinson voices Omar, also known as Green Poncho, the strategic and steady protector of the Creek. His range and nuance bring quiet strength, wisdom, and heart to the character.

NOTABLE CREDITS

Craig of the Creek, Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous, Transformers: EarthSpark, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Victorious



REAL VOICES.
REAL STORIES.
REAL IMPACT.



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING
THE TALENT AND THE STORIES
THAT INSPIRE US ALL.

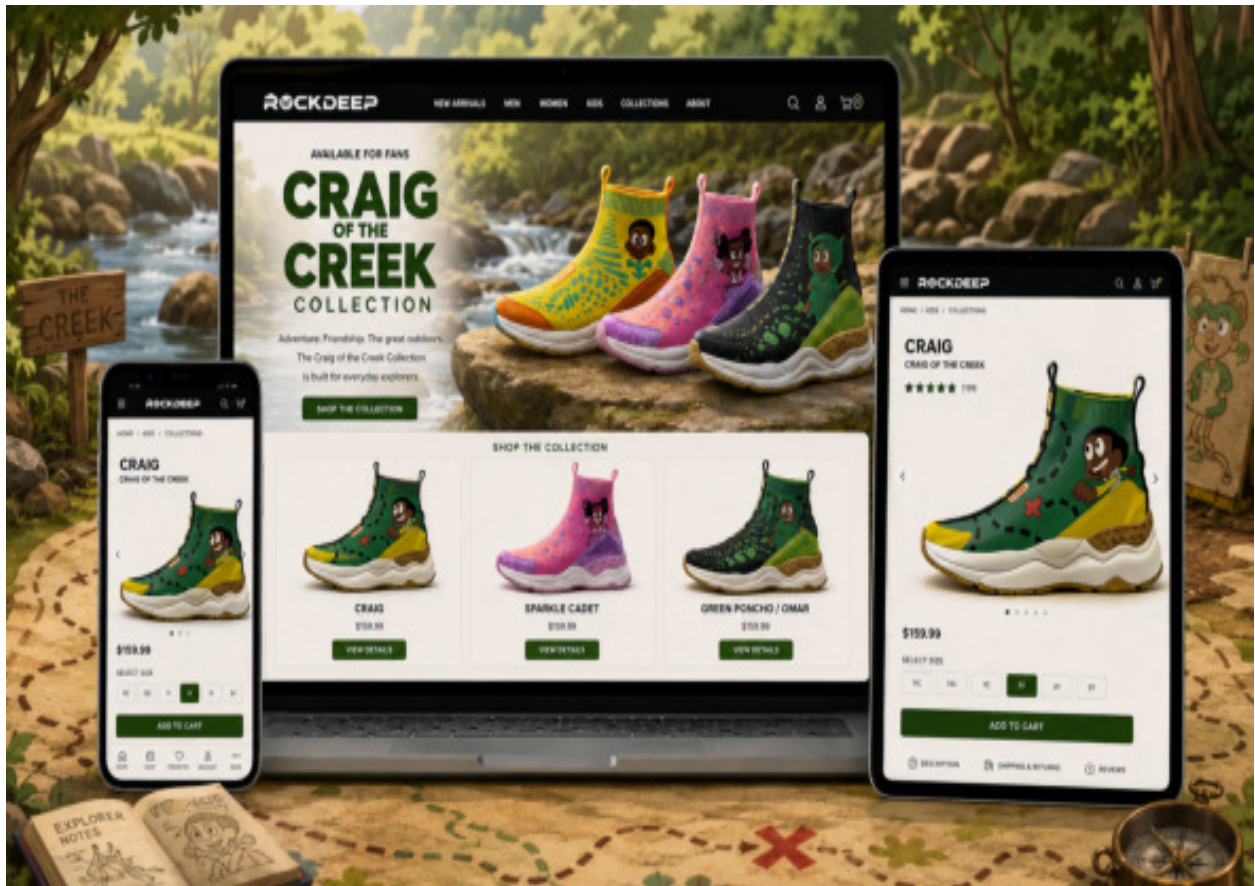


WATCH CRAIG OF THE CREEK
ON CARTOON NETWORK
AND STREAMING PLATFORMS.



The initial message was also that creators and companies involved would have the ability to sell additional product through their own platforms.

For us, that meant the possibility of producing pairs for fans of the show through the ROCKDEEP website.



That is where the project became especially interesting.

- We were not approaching it like a novelty item.
- We were approaching it like a real footwear project.

Our pitch was to repurpose one of our existing ROCKDEEP silhouettes, the Mansa Musa upper, and pair it with an outsole we had used across some of our hiking and outdoor footwear SKUs.

ROCKDEEP

MANSA MUSA

COLORWAYS & MATERIAL OPTIONS

THE PITCH:
Repurpose the Mansa Musa upper and pair it with our outdoor / hiking outsole to create character-driven footwear with real-world performance and story.





Liquid Soul



ROCKDEEP

COLORWAY EXPLORATIONS




CRAIG WILLIAMS
INSPIRED BY CURIOSITY, NATURE & LEADERSHIP




SPARKLE CADET
INSPIRED BY CONFIDENCE, FUN & IMAGINATION




GREEN PONCHO (OMAR)
INSPIRED BY STEALTH, INTELLIGENCE & LOYALTY




SUNSET EXPEDITION
INSPIRED BY ADVENTURE & EXPLORATION




MIDNIGHT CREEK
INSPIRED BY MYSTERY & THE UNKNOWN




FOREST TRAIL
INSPIRED BY RESILIENCE & THE JOURNEY

OUTDOOR / HIKING OUTSOLE



-  **MULTI-DIRECTIONAL LUG PATTERN**
Superior traction on varied terrain.
-  **DURABLE RUBBER COMPOUND**
Built for grip, stability and long wear.
-  **NET / DRY PERFORMANCE**
Engineered channels help with water dispersion.
-  **OUTDOOR READY**
Trail-tested. City capable.

MATERIAL OPTIONS

							
ENGINEERED KNOT Lightweight, breathable. Flexible. Structured where it matters.	RIPTOP NYLON Tear-resistant, durable, outdoor inspired performance.	PREMIUM NUBUCK Soft touch, elevated look. Adds depth and character.	TPU OVERLAY Support where it counts. Adds durability and structure.	REFLECTIVE ACCENTS Visibility in low light. Functional and subtle by design.	UTILITY WEBBING Secure fit, functional detailing, outdoor inspired.	CUSTOM PULL TABS Character color pops. Easy on. Easy off. Signature detail.	BREATHABLE MESH Ventilation zones for all-day comfort and performance.

ONE UPPER. ENDLESS STORIES.

The Mansa Musa upper is the canvas. The character drives the color, materials tell the story.

BUILT DIFFERENT.

That decision was intentional.



MANSA MUSA
ROCKDEEP SIGNATURE SILHOUETTE

A versatile upper built for culture, comfort and performance. Repurposed for storytelling. Reimagined for a new world.

COLORWAY EXPLORATION

MATERIAL & TEXTURE INSPIRATION



CRAIG WILLIAMS
CURIOUS. OPTIMISTIC. LEADER.
Always ready for the next adventure.

COLOR PALETTE



MATERIAL DIRECTION







SPARKLE CADET
BOLD. EXPRESSIVE. CONFIDENT.
She shines and leads with heart.

COLOR PALETTE



MATERIAL DIRECTION







GREEN PONCHO (OMAR)
SMART. STEADY. MYSTERIOUS.
Moves quiet. Sees everything.

COLOR PALETTE



MATERIAL DIRECTION







ROYAL QUEST
Bold. Confident. Regal.

DESERT PATH
Earthy. Warm. Timeless.

ONYX CROWN
Steak. Powerful. Elevated.



EMERALD TRAIL
Fresh. Natural. Adventurous.

SUNSET RIDGE
Vibrant. Energetic. Fearless.

NIGHTFALL
Dark. Mysterious. Refined.



GLACIER FLOW
Cool. Clean. Modern.

PURPLE RAIN
Creative. Rich. Statement.

SAFARI DUSK
Grounded. Rugged. Classic.



KNIT STRUCTURE



RIPSTOP NYLON



SUEDE ACCENTS



WEBBING & STRAPS



RUBBER OVERLAYS



MESH BREATHABILITY



LEATHER DETAILS



TPU HEEL SUPPORT

OUTSOLE REFERENCE

High-traction outdoor outsole borrowed from our hiking and outdoor performance line. Built for grip. Made for movement.



MULTI-DIRECTIONAL LUGS
For superior grip on various terrains.



FLEX GROOVES
For natural movement and adaptability.



DURABLE RUBBER COMPOUND
Built to handle the outdoors and everyday wear.

The show was about kids moving through outdoor space. The creek was not just a backdrop. It was the world. It was the playground, the map, the adventure, and the story engine.



So the shoe needed to feel like it could live there.

The outsole gave the concept outdoor credibility. The upper gave us a familiar structure to build from.

The colors, graphics, character references, pull tabs, and detailing gave the product its connection to the show.



That is the part of product storytelling I love.

When it is done correctly, the story is not pasted onto the product.

The story shapes the product.

We worked with the design team at Cartoon Network to finalize the design direction for each character.

The plan evolved into a limited-edition pair for the voice actors and select fans, along with an inline general release concept for Craig as the lead character.



We had already begun sampling the Craig inline release to get ahead of the process.

That was important to me.

At ROCKDEEP, one of our biggest priorities was making sure the production pair could live up to the rendering.

A rendering can make almost anything look good.

The harder part is getting the actual sample to carry the same energy, proportion, color, finish, and quality once materials, construction, and factory realities enter the process.

LIQUID SOUL
MARKETING GROUP

ROCKDEEP

RENDERING TO REALITY
We had already begun sampling the Craig inline release to get ahead of the process.

CN
CARTOON NETWORK

CRAIG OF THE CREEK

RENDERING

LASER CUT MAP PATH

OUTDOOR DNA

A rendering can make almost anything look good.
The real test is in the sample.

EARLY SAMPLE

EARLY SAMPLE
NOT FOR SALE

ROCKDEEP PRIORITY:
MAKE THE SAMPLE MATCH THE VISION.

- ✓ COLOR ACCURACY
- ✓ MATERIAL & TEXTURE
- ✓ GRAPHIC PLACEMENT
- ✓ PROPORTIONS
- ✓ CONSTRUCTION
- ✓ OVERALL ENERGY

COLLAR DETAIL

GRAPHIC CLARITY

LASER CUT PATH

HEEL CONSTRUCTION

OUTDOOR TRACTION

IDEAS EITHER HOLD UP OR FALL APART DURING THE PROCESS.
This sample proved the concept—now we make sure production does too.

DEVELOPMENT CHECKPOINTS

- ✓ PATTERN & FIT
- ✓ MATERIAL SOURCING
- ✓ COLOR & PRINT TESTS
- ✓ CONSTRUCTION REVIEW
- ✓ SAMPLE APPROVAL

MATERIAL SOURCING

COLOR TESTING

PRINT & GRAPHIC TESTS

CONSTRUCTION REVIEW

EARLY SAMPLE APPROVAL

BUILT FOR ADVENTURE.
MADE FOR KIDS.
MADE TO MOVE
THROUGH THE
GREAT OUTDOORS.

That is where ideas either hold up or fall apart.



In this case, the sample started to prove the concept.

LIQUID SOUL
MARKETING GROUP

ROCKDEEP

THE SAMPLE PROVED THE CONCEPT

CN
CARTOON NETWORK

CRAIG OF THE CREEK

The shoe had the right energy. It felt playful, bright, outdoor-driven, and connected to the world of the show without becoming a basic character shoe.

FINISHED SAMPLE
CRAIG INLINE RELEASE

QUALITY & DEVELOPMENT VALIDATION

- COLOR MATCH ACCURATE
- MATERIAL PERFORMANCE
- CONSTRUCTION QUALITY
- OUTDOOR TRACTION TESTED
- HEEL STABILITY VERIFIED
- FLEX & COMFORT APPROVED
- FIT & FUNCTION CONFIRMED
- GRAPHIC & STORY ACCURACY

PROOF OF CONCEPT
NOT FOR SALE

THE CONCEPT HOLDS UP.

- ✓ STORY ACCURATE
- ✓ ADVENTURE READY
- ✓ KID-APPROVED
- ✓ BUILT TO LAST

DEVELOPMENT CHECKPOINTS

- ✓ MATERIAL SOURCING
- ✓ PATTERN & FIT
- ✓ CONSTRUCTION REVIEW
- ✓ TESTING & REFINEMENT
- ✓ SAMPLE APPROVAL

ALL IN. ALL REMOTE. ONE GOAL.
Aligning on every detail over Zoom during COVID.

THE ENERGY. THE QUALITY. THE STORY. WE GOT IT RIGHT.
Now we move forward and bring Craig to life.

Rocky (ROCKDEEP) | Brittany (Liquid Soul) | Turrell D. Whitley (CEO)
CN Design Director | CN Footwear Designer | CN Brand Manager

The shoe had the right energy. It felt playful, bright, outdoor-driven, and connected to the world of the show without becoming a basic character shoe.

Then the business reality changed.

ISH HAPPENS

During the process, the Liquid Soul team reached out and let us know that Cartoon Network would only allow us to sell roughly 10 to 25 pairs of the final versions.

THE BUSINESS FRICTION POINT
GREAT DESIGN. REAL IMPACT. CLEAR POTENTIAL.
BUT THE SYSTEM WASN'T BUILT FOR WHAT WE BUILD.

WHAT WE BRING TO THE TABLE

- ✓ ORIGINALITY
Unique storytelling through footwear
- ✓ DESIGN EXCELLENCE
Purposeful details. Thoughtful execution.
- ✓ QUALITY & INNOVATION
Better materials. Better construction. Better experience.
- ✓ CULTURAL RELEVANCE
Connected to kids. Connected to the show. Connected to today.

CREATIVE FREEDOM + PURPOSE DRIVEN DESIGN

VS.

THE REALITY WE WERE GIVEN

- ✗ LOW VOLUME
10-25 PAIRS
Extremely low volume from the start.
- ✗ HIGH COST STRUCTURE
Complex license, approvals, materials, and logistics.
- ✗ NO ROOM TO SCALE
Not enough units to make quality footwear financially sustainable.
- ✗ ACCESSIBILITY CONFLICT
Our mission is accessible pricing. The numbers didn't support it.

THE MATH DIDN'T WORK
At that volume, costs per pair made the retail price something we couldn't stand behind.

THE MISSION WAS AT RISK
We didn't start ROCKDEEP to sell exclusive, high priced product. We started it to keep kids in mind.

CREATIVITY WAS LIMITED
When the numbers are impossible, the creative process eventually gets boxed in.

BOTH SIDES FELT IT
We wanted it to work. They wanted it to work. But the system wasn't aligned.

THE BIGGER TRUTH
It wasn't about the relationship. It wasn't about the product. It was about a business model that couldn't support what we stand for.

GREAT PRODUCTS SHOULDN'T BE RARE. IMPACT SHOULDN'T COME WITH BARRIERS. ACCESS SHOULDN'T BE A TRADE-OFF.

THE QUESTION WE KEPT ASKING
If the product is right...
If the story is right...
If the mission is right...
WHY CAN'T THE MODEL BE RIGHT TOO?

THE FRICTION WAS REAL. THE DECISION HAD TO BE REALER.

That created a major problem.

Footwear does not work like a T-shirt.

Sampling, development, materials, molds, production coordination, minimums, freight, and finishing all carry real costs.

Producing only 10 to 25 pairs would have created a major net loss, especially after the investment already made in sampling.

THE BUSINESS FRICTION POINT
Creativity met a licensing cap.

SALES LIMIT:
10 to 25
PAIRS

Too few to support development costs

EXCLUSIVITY VS ACCESS

Accessible pricing mattered

THE IDEA WAS STRONG. | **THE SAMPLE WAS REAL.** | **THE BUSINESS STRUCTURE NO LONGER WORKED.**

The only way to make the math work would have been to price the shoes at a level that did not make sense for the consumer.

And that was not something I was willing to do.

The average consumer for this project was not a collector chasing artificial scarcity. It was kids, parents, fans of the show, and families who may have wanted something special connected to a world they loved.

ROCKDEEP was built on a different premise.

I started the brand to create footwear that looked good, felt good, had quality, carried a story, and could still be accessible to the average consumer.

A 10-to-25-pair release might have sounded exclusive.

But for this project, it would have worked against the spirit of the product.

It would have created cost without access.



And access mattered.

So I had to make a decision.

I was not willing to sacrifice the voice or integrity of the brand for a project that had no guarantee of changing our business, especially if the final structure made the product inaccessible to the same people it was supposed to reach.



WE CHOSE INTEGRITY OVER COMPROMISE
OUR DECISION WASN'T EASY.
BUT OUR VALUES ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE.

- BUILT FOR KIDS**
We design with real kids in mind.
Comfort. Durability. Fit.
Nothing less.
- ACCESSIBLE BY DESIGN**
Great design should be within reach.
We don't create hype.
We create value.
- STAY TRUE TO OUR VOICE**
We don't follow trends.
We build our own lane.
Always have. Always will.
- LONG-TERM IMPACT**
We build brands and products
that last longer than the moment.

**THE RIGHT DEAL MEANS NOTHING IF IT COSTS US WHO WE ARE.
WE'D RATHER BUILD LESS, THAN BETRAY WHAT WE BUILD.**

Even if the project had created visibility, I still had to ask whether it aligned with the brand.

For me, the answer was no.

That does not mean I had ill will toward Cartoon Network.

I did not.

I understood what happened.

Most people who have worked in product, licensing, entertainment, or brand collaborations understand that the creative team is not always the final decision-maker. Sometimes legal, licensing, risk, approvals, or internal business constraints can reshape a project after the creative work has already begun.

That is part of the work.

Frustrating, yes.

Personal, no.

Once it became clear that the project no longer made sense for us commercially, we let the Liquid Soul team know that we would need to recoup the costs for the samples and work created to that point, and we would need to sell the samples on the open market.

They understood.

They asked us to hold off while they spoke with Cartoon Network.

A few days later, they came back and let us know that Cartoon Network was willing to pay us for the samples produced and the work performed.



I appreciated that.

It was professional.

It did not turn the project into a release, but it respected the work.

And sometimes that is the best possible outcome for a project that cannot move forward.

- The lesson was not that we should never take on opportunities like that.
- The lesson was not that we should have done everything differently.

I already understood that not every design sees the light of day.

That happened many times while ROCKDEEP was still in business. We still have more than 300 designs that never made it to the website.

- Some stopped because of cost.
- Some stopped because of timing.
- Some stopped because the market shifted.
- Some stopped because the business case changed.
- Some stopped because they were good ideas, but not the right ideas for that moment.



- The rest stopped because we simply didn't have the one thing needed to move them forward.

Capital.

That is the reality of product creation.

What matters is what the work reveals.

The Craig of the Creek sneaker never released.

But it still showed how I think.

- It showed how I approach IP.
- It showed how I translate story into product.
- It showed how I protect brand integrity when the business structure no longer supports the original idea.
- It showed that product creation is not just about making something cool.

It is about making something that makes sense.

- For the character.
- For the consumer.
- For the brand.
- For the business.

That is the part people do not always see.

The unreleased work still counts.

And this is only one project from the vault.

I will be writing more about the products, collaborations, samples, and concepts that never made it to the website - not because they failed, but because they still tell the story of how the work really happens.

Built, but never released.

Still worth talking about.



About The Vault Series

This article is part of **The Vault Series**, a continuing look inside the ROCKDEEP archive of unreleased products, projects, concepts, collabs, and samples.

Some ideas made it to renderings. Some made it to tech packs. Some made it to samples. Some were released in small ways. Others never made it to the website at all.

They stopped for different reasons: cost, timing, licensing, capital, market shifts, production realities, or business structures that no longer supported the original idea.

But the work still matters because each project reveals something about the creative process, the business behind product creation, and the decisions that shape what consumers eventually see.

I'll continue sharing more stories from the vault on LinkedIn and on my website, with additional photos, renderings, sketches, samples, and behind-the-scenes details from the ROCKDEEP archive.