

Science Meets Design

Growing company in Portland, Oregon making beautiful science-themed gifts for professionals, students, and nerds alike.

Cognitive Surplus was started by Kristen and Geoff Zephyrus to celebrate the intersection of science and design. Since their start in 2013, Cognitive Surplus has grown from a little side-project in a NYC apartment to a business that supports not only Geoff and Kristen full-time, but now also a small and wonderful team in Portland, Oregon.

They got started making science products in a little apartment in NYC because they had been searching for an elegant gift for Kristen's science teacher mom, and kept being disappointed by the things they found on the market. One day, they picked up a periodic table shower curtain only to find that had some very unfortunate mistakes (it listed Carbon as a noble gas - the horror!), and thought they could do better - so they got to work.

Since neither of them had a background in business or product design, they just had to figure it out one piece at a time, working iteratively to make improvements to their designs and process. Currently, they sell notebooks, glassware, tote bags, thermoses, shirts, posters, wax seals, and greeting cards, all inspired by different branches of science. All of their designing, prototyping, and some light production is done in Portland. For the full production runs of products, they source from manufacturers both in the United States and internationally in order to create the highest quality products.

Here's what Kristen has to say about what inspires her and Geoff:

"We are fascinated by and curious about the science in the world around us. We love everything from physics jokes to the exquisite beauty of early scientific etchings and illustrations. We're inspired by a sense of wonder for our universe and a desire to look closer. We think gazing up at the night sky, watching leaves turn color in the fall, and the way magnets work is intriguing and kinda magical, and we hope that we're able to share some of our excitement through our designs."

Besides their commitment to making beautifully designed, scientifically accurate products, Cognitive Surplus is completely committed to building a diverse, inclusive workplace, and making environmentally conscious choices within their company and in their own lives. They use 100% recycled paper, compostable plastic, eco-friendly shipping materials, green energy, and offset their carbon footprint through carbonfund.org. Learn more about their company or check out their awesome products at cognitive-surplus.com.