

**LONG SHOT**  
F A C T O R Y

presents

# If You Build It

Directed by Patrick Creadon  
Produced by Christine O'Malley and Neal Baer



**Release Date:** January 10, 2014 at IFC Center in New York City and January 24, 2014 at Landmark Nuart in Los Angeles

**Run Time:** 85 minutes

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## **SYNOPSIS**

From the director of WORDPLAY and I.O.U.S.A. comes a captivating look at a radically innovative approach to education. IF YOU BUILD IT follows designer-activists Emily Pilloton and Matthew Miller to rural Bertie County, the poorest in North Carolina, where they work with local high school students to help transform both their community and their lives. Living on credit and grant money and fighting a change-resistant school board, Pilloton and Miller lead their students through a year-long, full-scale design and build project that does much more than just teach basic construction skills: it shows ten teenagers the power of design-thinking to re-invent not just their town but their own sense of what's possible.

Directed by Patrick Creadon and produced by Christine O'Malley and Neal Baer, IF YOU BUILD IT offers a compelling and hopeful vision for a new kind of classroom in which students learn the tools to design their own futures.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There's something cool about solving problems, especially those really tricky, complex ones. If you meet someone who's truly great at problem solving, you find they have a tendency to inspire those around them. They're smart, often funny, and almost always strong, confident, wonderfully infectious individuals.

They're the kinds of people who would make great teachers.



When Christine and I first heard about designer Emily Pilloton and her partner, architect Matt Miller, we were immediately drawn to them. Our friend Neal Baer had read a book by Emily called *Design Revolution*, which featured one hundred radical new ideas by designers from around the world that were changing people's lives. One example is a genetically engineered flower that, when planted in an area that was filled with buried landmines,

changed colors when it touched metal. There are do-it-yourself solar panel kits that bring lights to remote villages, water cups made from clay and organic material that purify water and fight disease, and eye glasses that allow the user to adjust to their own needs without a trip to the optometrist.

Emily and Matt both believe that great design—which is really just great problem solving—can change the world. Unfortunately, the people and places that are most in need of improvement often don't have access to designers and architects. Only two percent of the people in the world ever hire a designer or an architect. The world we live in is primarily someone else's creation, so it's difficult to feel true ownership of our own surroundings.

That's why for years Emily and Matt worked hard to bring great design and creative problem solving to communities in need. They were especially careful to listen to those they worked with, and to include input from the community when new projects were designed and built and implemented. And although they were doing incredible work in communities all around the world, they recognized that there was only so much work they could handle. "These people don't need *us*, they need our skill sets," said Emily. That's about the time their phone rang.

It was Chip Zullinger, a renegade school superintendent from Bertie County, NC. Dr. Zullinger believed that if he could bring Matt and Emily to Bertie County and unleash the power of creative problem solving in a high school classroom, together they might be able to address some of the community's most pressing challenges. "Would you two be willing to take everything you know how to do and teach it to our high school students?"

Emily and Matt immediately said yes, quickly created a design-build curriculum they called "Studio H," and just weeks before the first day of class we were in North Carolina shooting what would become IF YOU BUILD IT.

Bertie County is the poorest county in North Carolina and faces countless challenges: high drop-out rates among high schoolers, high unemployment, stagnant education opportunities, high obesity rates, and a lack of access to fresh produce at reasonable prices. Those were just a few of the challenges. Emily and Matt would have been naive to think that their classroom and their students could have solved all of the problems that exist in Bertie County. But of course, that was never the goal. What Studio H was designed to do is plant small seeds and know-how in the students who participated in the class, and by doing so develop a new resource—a new generation of creative problem solvers—that could address some of these challenges in the near future with a new skill set.

We knew early on in the process that we would not (and *should* not) be able to shoot every day in the classroom. But we also knew that there were bound to be moments during the year that could be helpful in telling this story. So we as filmmakers did something we had never done before: we put cameras into the hands of the students and taught them how to tell their own stories. One student, Jamesha Thompson, was particularly good at shooting video and asking questions. We began to refer to her as the "Barbara Walters" of Studio H. When something important was happening in the classroom that we couldn't document, we knew we could rely on Jamesha to get the story. This filmmaking technique felt especially appropriate because it was so similar to the Studio H approach; by inviting the students to take ownership of telling their own stories, we were able to create a much more honest and intimate portrayal of what occurred throughout the school year. Much of the footage Jamesha shot is in the final version of the film, and she became fond of saying, "I love the camera, and the camera loves me!"

The making of IF YOU BUILD IT was an extraordinary learning experience for Christine and me. Not only was this a challenging film to produce and an extremely nuanced and difficult story to tell, the lessons that all of us learned in Studio H—students, teachers, and filmmakers—went far beyond the lessons of how to design and build things. What we also learned is that schools need to be what we as parents and educators and students decide they should be, that we as a nation are relying far too heavily on on-line education, that real change can't occur unless there is shared ownership in the new solutions that are being

created to address our most challenging problems, and, perhaps most importantly, that there is a designer inside each of us that just needs a little encouragement to grow and develop.

Bertie County, NC is 2,600 miles from our home in California, and yet this always felt like a very personal story for Christine and me. Our three kids go to public schools in Los Angeles, so we understand the challenges and the potential that public education has to offer. We felt from the beginning that Emily and Matt and their students would make for an interesting story. What we didn't realize was that it would become such a universal story, resonating with parents, students, and educators far outside Bertie County limits.

Imagine a world with better, more creative problem solvers. That's what Studio H is about, that's what IF YOU BUILD IT is really about, and that's why we are so thrilled to share it with others.

*—Patrick Creadon, Director*

## ABOUT STUDIO H

Studio H is a public high school "design/build" curriculum that sparks community development through real-world, built projects. Originally launched in rural Bertie County, NC, Studio H is now based at REALM Charter School in Berkeley, CA.

By learning through a design sensibility, applied core subjects, and industry-relevant construction skills, students develop the creative capital, critical thinking, and citizenship necessary for their own success and for the future of their communities.

Over the course of one semester, students earn high school credit and have the opportunity to design, prototype, and build a full-scale community project. Studio H graduates have designed and built chicken coops for families in need, and a 2,000-square-foot farmers market pavilion.

Currently, Studio H is being taught at REALM Charter School in Berkeley, where students have built concrete furniture; handmade, laser-etched skateboards; and a freestanding classroom space for the whole school community. They also just completed the first session of Camp H, a summer building camp for girls ages 9-12, as well as a middle school tinkering class.

For more info, please visit [www.studio-h.org](http://www.studio-h.org).

**FILMMAKERS**

Director PATRICK CREADON

Producers CHRISTINE O'MALLEY  
NEAL BAER

Associate Producers DANIEL J. CLARK  
JOHN KESSLER

Editors NICK ANDERT  
DANIEL J. CLARK  
DOUG BLUSH

Director of Photography GEORGE DESORT

Music PETER GOLUB

**FEATURING (in order of appearance)**

MATTHEW MILLER  
EMILY PILLOTON

CAMERON PERRY  
CHERYL BYRUM  
ANTHONY JOHNSON  
DR. CHIP ZULLINGER  
RON WESSON  
STEVIE MIZELLE  
JAMESHA THOMPSON  
ERICK BOWEN  
KERRON HAYES  
RODECOE DUNLOW  
CJ ROBERTSON  
COLIN WHITE  
ALEXIA WILLIAMS  
WILBERT BISHOP

TYCEUS PUGH  
BARRY WARD  
VERNON FUESTON  
DANIELLE VAUGHAN  
AMBER DUNLOW  
JO ANN CONNER  
MAYOR JIM HOGGARD  
COACH GREG WATFORD  
STEVE MIZELLE  
ERIC WANDMACHER  
THOMAS NEWKIRK  
JUDY MOYE  
DORIS JOHNSON  
BRAD FEINKNOPF

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PUMA CREATIVE MOBILITY AWARD

## ABOUT THE INSTRUCTORS

**Emily Pilloton** and **Matthew Miller** are the founder/executive director and project manager, respectively, of Project H Design.

Pilloton holds a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Master of Product Design from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has taught at the School of the Art Institute, published a book called *Design Revolution: 100 Products that Empower People*, appeared on the Colbert Report to talk about humanitarian design, and lectures worldwide, including presentations at the TED Global conference and others.

Miller holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Tennessee and a Master of Architecture from Cranbrook Academy of Art. He has designed and built houses and schools in Detroit and Uganda, and has taught architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design; University of California, Berkeley; and more. He is an accomplished welder and fabricator, with a MacGyver-like ability to build anything out of anything.

## ABOUT THE STUDENTS



### **Stevie**

After graduation from Bertie County High School, Stevie became the first member of his family to go to college. He is currently studying animal behavior at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC, and made the Dean's List his freshman year. He still comes home from college

every weekend to tend to his farm. "If it weren't for Matt and Emily, I never would have gone to college." After graduation, Stevie plans to move to Florida to become a professional wrestler. He also plans to continue working on his farm.

### **Erick**

Erick is studying Information and Computer Technologies at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. After taking a year off from sports, he plans to tryout for the football team next year. Erick is also a volunteer fireman and plans to become a full-time firefighter when he graduates from college. "I think about Studio H a

lot," he said recently. "It's the best class I ever took. We were like a family, getting things done together."





### **Jamesha**

Jamesha would like to become an OB-GYN doctor when she gets older. She is currently taking classes at a local junior college.

### **Cameron**

Cameron currently works full-time for Domino's Pizza. He is also taking classes to become a full-time fire fighter. "I need to find a job I love, and I know that firefighting is going to be a great fit for me."



### **Rodecoe**

Rody works for Avoca Farms in Merry Hill, NC. He also stays busy with his dogs and his truck.

### **Kerron**

Kerron graduated second in his class from Bertie County High School. He is currently a sophomore at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC, where he is on scholarship and studying engineering. He plans to become a designer and builder after college.



### **Anthony**

Anthony works for a logging company in North Carolina. He drives a truck and pulls fallen timber out of the forest. He also stays busy hunting and fishing, and doing volunteer work with his church.

### **Colin**

Colin was the valedictorian of his senior class, narrowly beating out Kerron for the honor. He's currently at North Carolina State University studying Environmental Technologies Management with a minor in Environmental Technologies. "Emily and Matt inspired me to sacrifice luxury in life for purpose. Before I took their class, I really wanted to make a lot of money and buy stuff. Today, finding purpose in what I do is much more important to me and my studies."



### **CJ**

CJ joined the marines after graduation. In his spare time, he enjoys hunting and golfing. He aspires to become the kind of soldier that his father is.

### **Alexia**

One of the quieter students in Studio H, Alexia hopes to become a fashion designer someday and make custom-made clothes. Near the end of the Farmers Market build, she sewed a pair of shorts for Matt's friend "Wando" that said "Wando Rocks" on them.



## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **Patrick Creadon (Director)**

Patrick Creadon was born in Chicago and is a 1989 graduate of the University of Notre Dame. He earned his Master's Degree in Cinematography from the American Film Institute in 1996.

Creadon began his career as a cameraman at PBS, shooting and producing cinéma vérité-style stories for the critically acclaimed series "The 90's." His feature-length directorial debut WORDPLAY was a breakout hit at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. After an intense bidding war, the film was sold to IFC Films and The Weinstein Company. WORDPLAY went on to become one of the top 25 highest grossing documentaries of all time.

His follow-up film I.O.U.S.A., a non-partisan examination of America's national debt, premiered at Sundance in 2008 and was shortlisted for Best Documentary for the Academy Awards. Critic Roger Ebert named I.O.U.S.A. one of the top five documentaries of the year.

IF YOU BUILD IT is Creadon's third feature-length documentary and is a recipient of grants from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund.

Creadon has served on several film festival juries, including the Sundance Film Festival, the Los Angeles Film Festival, the Ashland Film Festival, and the Cinema Eye Awards. In 2011, he made his television directing debut on NBC's "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Creadon is married to and collaborates with producer Christine O'Malley. They are raising their three young children in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles, CA.

### **Christine O'Malley (Producer)**

Christine O'Malley has been producing and writing documentaries for film and television for over 15 years. O'Malley served as associate producer on the Academy Award®-nominated documentary film ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM (2004).

WORDPLAY, the first feature length film she produced and co-wrote through her production company O'Malley Creadon Productions, was nominated for both a Critics' Choice Award and a National Board of Review Award for "Best Documentary of 2006." O'Malley and Creadon's second film I.O.U.S.A., an examination of the size and scope of America's national debt, had its world premiere at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival.

Other credits include Harry Shearer's documentary THE BIG UNEASY (2010), and Sundance Selects' THESE AMAZING SHADOWS (2011). She executive produced SUPERHEROES (2011), an award-winning documentary that premiered at the 2011 Slamdance Film Festival and aired on HBO as part of its summer documentary series.

IF YOU BUILD IT is O'Malley's latest production and is a recipient of grants from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund.

Christine O'Malley is married to and collaborates with filmmaker Patrick Creadon. They have three young daughters and live in Los Angeles, CA.

## **Neal Baer, M.D. (Producer)**

Along with producing IF YOU BUILD IT, Dr. Neal Baer is currently an executive producer and showrunner for the CBS television series *Under The Dome*.

Baer is a pediatrician and television writer who combines his passion for medicine and storytelling to present episodes that challenge the audiences' views on a spectrum of social and political topics.

Baer received his BA in Political Science from Colorado College, Masters Degrees in Education and Sociology from Harvard, as well as an MD from Harvard Medical School in 1996. Baer was Executive Producer of the NBC hit series "ER." A member of the show's original staff and a writer and producer on the series for seven seasons, he was nominated for five Emmy Awards as a producer. He also received two Emmy nominations for Outstanding Writing in a Drama Series, along with two Writers' Guild nominations.

After "ER," Baer became the Executive Producer of the hit NBC drama "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" for eleven seasons. The show received six Emmy Awards and a Golden Globe Award for acting under his leadership. Baer is currently developing projects for CBS.

Baer also spends time in Africa teaching photography and filmmaking so that people can tell and share their own stories around the world. He recently taught a young Mozambican orphan how to make a documentary film to chronicle his search for a family after his parents died of AIDS. That film, MOZAMBIQUE, was chosen to screen at IDA's DocuWeeks (2010) and has since screened in forty film festivals around the world.

To learn more about building a program like Studio H  
in your community, visit [www.projecthdesign.org](http://www.projecthdesign.org)

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