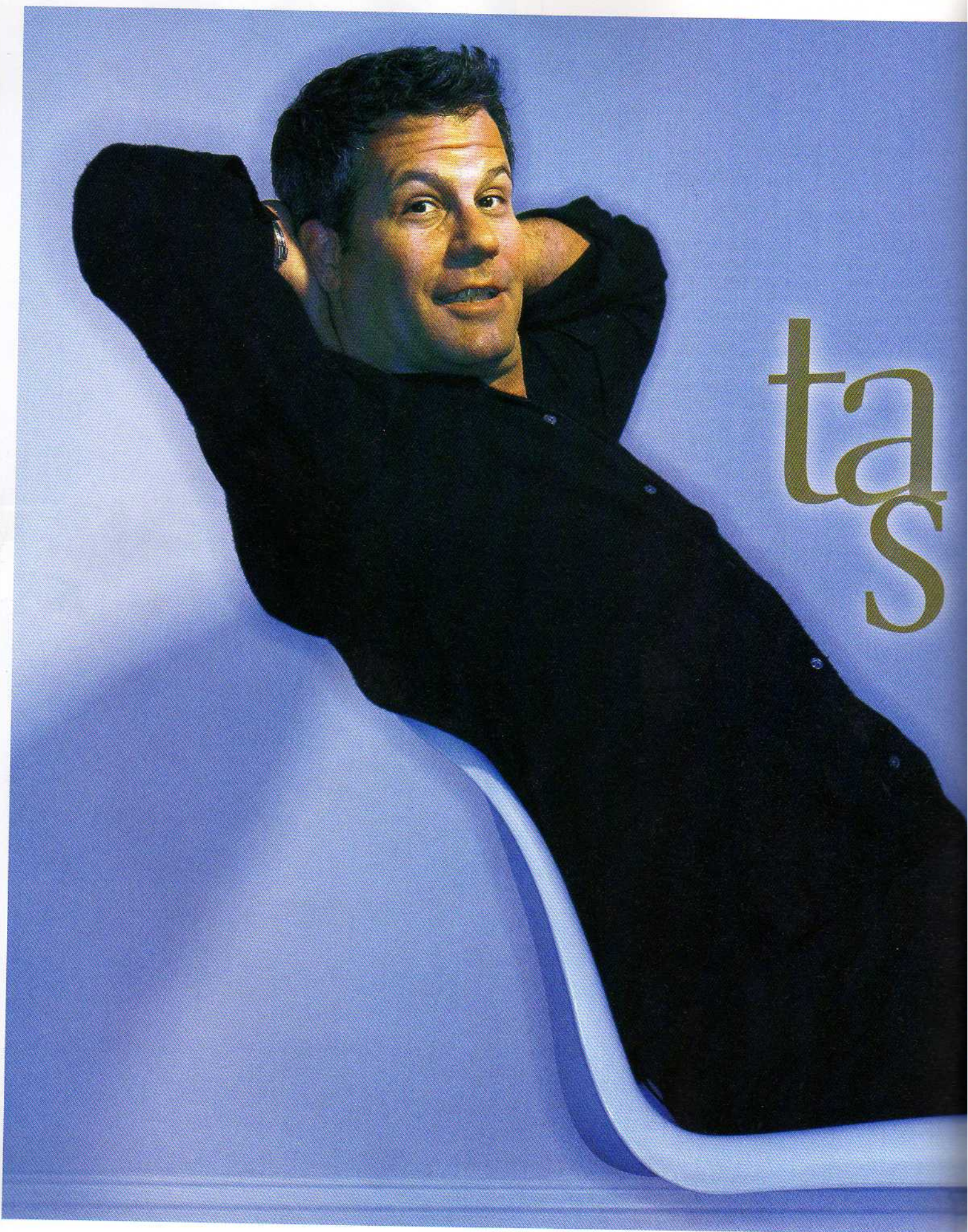


Richard  
Florida on  
how business  
should use  
the creative  
class

talent scout





tas



Richard Florida wrote  
the book on creativity.  
Now the critics are  
getting louder he's all  
red up to take the  
message on the road

ent  
out

Richard Florida has just woken up. Not to the emergence of the creative class – he identified that years ago. Not to the dangers of a society reluctant to let go of its industrial past – he is calculating those implications right now. And as for the Bush administration's lack of support for creative people, he has watched that with dismay for three years.

No, Richard Florida has literally just woken up. "Coffee?" he asks, padding around his kitchen with his grey-flecked black hair looking suspiciously like it has been styled to look as though it hasn't been styled. If you want a poster child for the creative class, Florida is it: he's slowly waking up at 10.30am, a consequence of being most productive in the wee small hours; he wears hip jeans, a black T-shirt and a chunky silver Rolex; he has black, heavy-rimmed, square reading glasses. Rather than cross his legs, he spreads out, leans back and clasps his hands behind his head, his black boxer shorts firmly above the top of his jeans in what may or may not be a homage to funky rapper dudes.

The irony, of course, is that this 44-year-old professor at Carnegie Mellon University, author of the wildly popular book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, captain of the good ship Creativity, is in Pittsburgh, which is about as uncool as cities get. Maybe that's the point: Florida sees Pittsburgh as something of a petrie dish for his theories, which have gained serious traction since *The Rise of the Creative Class* was released in the US two years ago. Those theories are well known: that there is a creative sector in economies alongside manufacturing and services; that the creative sector is the growth engine and, at least in a country such as the US, the key to future economic success as menial work migrates overseas; that the factors that foster the development of creative communities include openness and tolerance, typically found in areas with large gay and ethnic populations.

After a lengthy honeymoon, the backlash against Florida's theories is under way. "I love that, I love that, oh yeah," he says, smiling. The criticism, in Florida's view, means his theories are gaining mainstream acceptance; otherwise, why would publications such as *The Wall Street Journal* bother? In that newspaper, in January, a senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute, Steven Malanga, said Florida's theories were "economic snake oil" that relied on big, dubious leaps in logic. The first, Malanga said, was Florida's claim there was a causal connection between factors that foster creativity and economic growth; the second, the idea that creative workers are the economic growth engine rather than companies themselves.

Florida relishes the fight. Just hours after the interview, he flew to Peoria, a city about 260km south-west of Chicago long seen as emblematic of middle America,

story luke collins photography katherine lambert

