Jay Chiat. Co-founder and leader of Chiat/Day, California-based agency that's become a formidable competitor in the East. A New Yorker by birth, he came home to establish a Manhattan office for the LA agency -- and quickly proved creative prowess works on both coasts. Here, from a recent conversation, are a few of the directions that have pointed Jay's way to success.

On beginnings:

"I was born in the Bronx but grew up in Fort Lee, New Jersey. In those days, Fort Lee wasn't suburban but rural. Safe. Comfortable. A good place for kids. After Rutgers and a degree in education, I got my first job as an NBC guide at $37 a week. A year later, the Air Force took me west to Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento. When my tour ended, I wanted to stay in California. That led to a job as a technical recruiter -- and my start in advertising, doing recruitment ads. Then a media rep told me a small Orange County agency was looking for a young writer. I moved south and, after four years, started my own agency with $4,000. I figured if it didn't work out, I could always get another job. We survived for four years with real estate and technical accounts; then moved into LA where I got together with Gay Day to form Chiat/Day."

On risk-taking:

"I'm uncomfortable when I'm comfortable. I have to start something new -- in the agency, or in my personal life -- every two years or so. Taking risks gives me energy. I can't help it, it's my personality. I'd like to think it's not really a compulsion toward high risks, but the spirit of the entrepreneur. This is the age of the entrepreneur, isn't it?"

On the big loss and the bigger win:

"Our first major client was Honda. We did terrific work, but got caught in the middle of a battle between sales and advertising. The experience was traumatic -- but, in retrospect, it was the best thing that could have happened to us. It forced us to recognize the need for sophisticated account handling. Until then, we hadn't had enough respect for account management."

On New York:

"I'm in charge of quality control. If the work's not up to standard, I call the creative team or even the client, and tell them. Clients appreciate that -- who wants to waste time looking at work the agency doesn't like? My other job is to keep the agency simple. As you grow bigger it's easy to grow complicated. So I do things like eliminate memo writing. Memos aren't communication; they're a corporate disease."

On finding good account people:

"We look for account people who understand advertising. It's amazing how few do. All account people are interviewed by creative people. Anyone who's just entrenched with the structure of advertising won't be comfortable with us. It's tougher hiring account people than creative people. After all, you can look at a creative person's portfolio. Maybe we ought to have account people tear out twenty ads they like, and tell us why. In any case, I look for energy, for a passion about the business."

On good writers:

"Good writers come in all sizes, shapes and ages. What they all seem to have in common is the ability to hear, to listen, to understand -- and to distill what they hear and learn into something that's human and persuasive."

On office organization:

"We don't have geographical departments. Instead, we cluster the people who work on a set of accounts together. When an agency is organized by functions, there's empire-building and departmental loyalties. I think our way helps make people responsive to the client, not to the department head -- and that's the way it should be."

On The Wall Street Journal:

"No matter what you sell, if the price tag is high, The Journal's audience is right. They have the means, and you can instill the will. The Journal offers what no other publication can match: an incredible immediacy. You run the ad, the
"Being in New York has given the agency new purpose, new energy. The myth is that New York is a tough place to crack. Well, it is -- but it isn't. There's so much business, so many opportunities, that you have far more chances. So that makes it easy. But it is tough to change your perspective and your life style."

On building a campaign:

"Our best work has always begun with a marketing solution, not a creative solution. The ads flowed from the strategy, not the strategy from the ads. Then we found a way to do it with consistency. We introduced a third discipline, account planning to represent the gage. Our only interest is the quality of the work. And we won't compromise."

On failure:

"If you see a bad ad coming out of Chat/Day, blame it on us. We can't fall back on the excuse that the client made us do it. We just don't have those kinds of clients. They come to us for the kind of work we do. If we fail, it's our failure, not theirs."

On print:

"We were weaned on print. In the early years, 99.97% of our business was print. And, on top of that, this is an agency started by two writers. So you can see where ad generates the business. I used to teach an advertising class at the university of Southern California. My students had to subscribe to two major trade magazines -- and to The Wall Street Journal. I find there's something in The Journal every day that I can use in our agency. I'm not looking for it, but there it is -- a piece of news or information that helps. If you're in sales, or marketing, or advertising, there's no other way to stay current. After all, this is a business that moves very, very fast -- and you can't stay on top of it without The Journal."