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+ with
Design!***

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE JOYFUL
GENIUS OF ALEXANDER GIRARD AND
CHARLES AND RAY EAMES. P. 68


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Charles Eames tinkers with panels on his exuberantly
designed Solar "Do-Nothing Machine," 1958.

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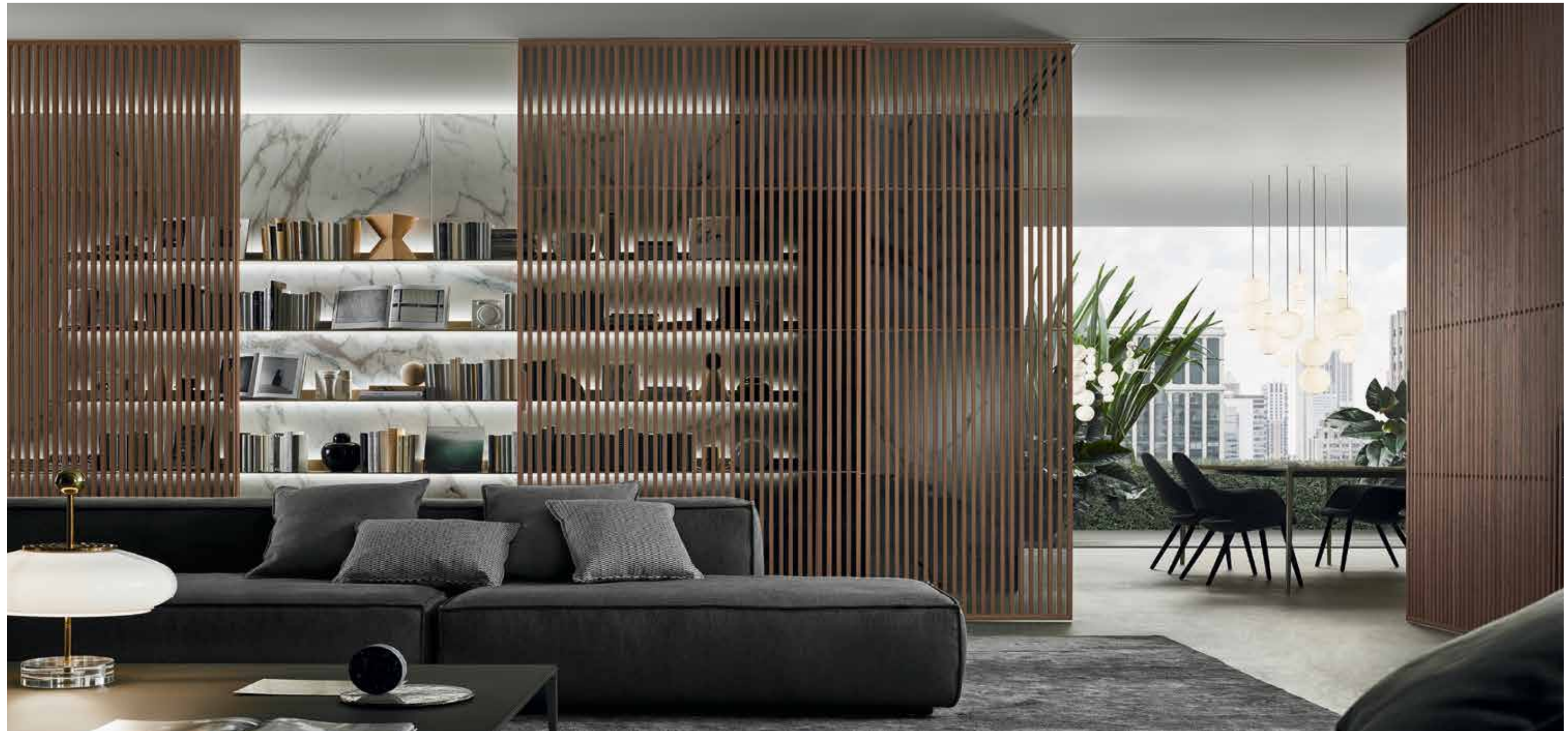
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MESSAGE / MATERIAL / MATTER / TEXT / IDEAS - SUBSTANCE



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Our inspiring roundup of gadgets, modern accessories, and other items you didn't know you needed.

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KANOPY

A free streaming service available from your local libraries includes a catalog of fascinating architecture and design documentaries, including our 10 must-sees.

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FRESH COAT

We know ... painting can be a chore. But with a reinvention of everything from swatches to paint can design, this startup is looking to make it a little less overwhelming.

60

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Sacred Thistle, a Golden Triangle-based, mother-daughter business is elevating the art of floristry.

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A popular downtown Denver restaurant gets a makeover — in the form of a crazy cool architectural ceiling installation — thanks to UNUM Collaborative.



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PLAYING WITH DESIGN

An upcoming Denver Art Museum exhibit inspired Modern In Denver to look at how play has influenced design history, with a special focus on the contributions of Alexander Girard and Charles and Ray Eames.

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What happens when chairs start to look more like hands, sofas like lips and lamps like full-sized horses? And how does it challenge our notion of everyday objects?

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THE HOUSE WITH TOO MANY DOORS

Paul Andersen of Independent Architecture has built his "Motherhouse," and its design details and outside-the-box architecture make for a very engaging home tour.

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Denver resident Sean VanderVliet is using his past startup experience to grow his ceramics business, Fenway Clayworks, with a decidedly mid-century spin.

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A NATURAL STATE

CCY Architects combined sublime simplicity, expert craftsmanship and a prime site with gorgeous views to create this Aspen house, where the challenges ended up translating into the greatest design opportunities.

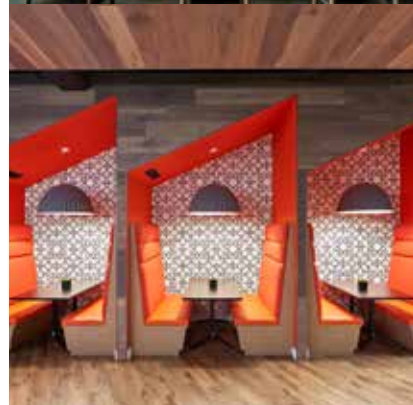
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DESIGN ENCORE

Workplace architecture firm Acquilano designed four locations for financial tech company BillTrust, including its brilliant new headquarters in New Jersey. Read more about its details and the two firms' increasingly synergistic collaborations.



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DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Roth Living has reinvented the way it does business with innovatively designed 21st-century showrooms. Get a peek inside its flagship Denver location to find out how it's attempting to reshape the appliance industry landscape.

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THE ART OF WORKING WITH ART

Corporate art advisory firm Nine dot Arts' new home turned drab and poorly renovated offices into a bright, eclectic space that features the work of artists near and far.



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TRAVEL BY DESIGN: HOUSTON

Never thought of the Bayou City as a destination teeming with progressive design, art and architecture? Think again — Houston's got Rothko, Van Der Rohe, Piano and so much more.

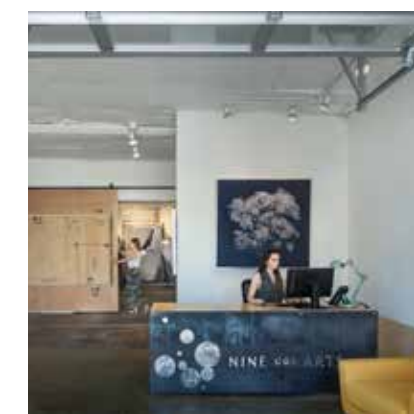
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SCALING UP ON SUSTAINABILITY

These days, good design should include sustainability, and this Denver sushi restaurant gets that. Find out how Bamboo Sushi is leading the industry in environmentally viable practices.



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NATURALLY MODERN

Perhaps you've noticed how many of the public buildings in Colorado's state and national parks have a modern design aesthetic? Read the story behind why this is while you find the inspiration to plan your next trip.

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ONE LAST THING: JOY RIDE

This German designed bike's sleek and simple design is turning serious heads. And by serious, we mean architects ... it's turning architects' heads. Literally.



P. 68

"I think Western Window Systems provides a great product that allows me to design large openings and maintain clean, thin window/door frames that don't become too bulky or busy."

- Richard McCann, designer, Blackbox Design Studios



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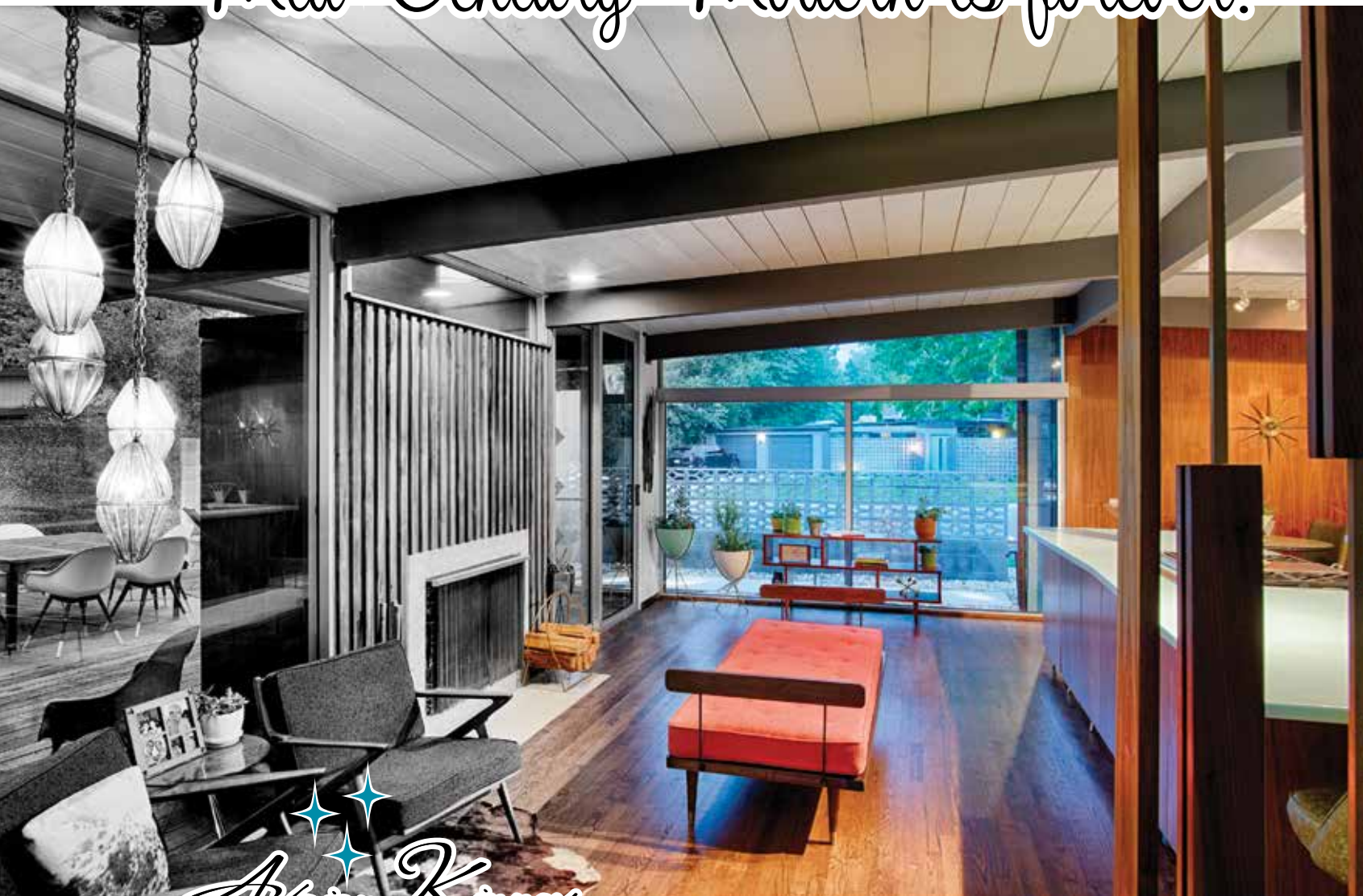
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hello.

We had a cover shot to get. It was a bright clear February day, but it was also frigidly cold and the sun was not cooperating with us. We had a deadline and it was hard to tell if our idea for the shot was going to work. The situation could have easily turned into a very frustrating and stressful day, but amongst the serious focus and required problem solving, I couldn't stop grinning. Here I was standing in front of a yellow-and-white-striped house with a 10-year-old girl in a yellow dress leaning out of a second-story window watching a dozen bright yellow balloons float into the blue sky over the house. Independent Architecture's "Motherhouse," designed by Paul Andersen, is a bold study embracing both rigorous design principals and a refreshing sense of fun and playfulness. Writer Ray Rinaldi talks to Paul Andersen about this remarkable house, his design vision and the varied and unique projects he has worked on in the last several years. His story starts on page 82.

My favorite designs and designers all embrace a sense of whimsy and curiosity to explore, experiment and not take themselves too seriously. When a design focus values the means as much as the ends and includes a belief that the process can be fun, incredible ideas can be unlocked. This spring, the Denver Art Museum is opening an exhibit that examines how some of the most important mid-century designers embraced play and made it an integral part of their practice. I am looking forward to "Serious Play," which opens May 5, and I encourage everyone to visit this unique exhibit that will be both insightful and a ton of fun! To celebrate and explore the important ideas in "Serious Play," writer Scott Kirkwood chose to focus on the mid-century work of Charles and Ray Eames and Alexander Girard. These important designers deliberately embraced playfulness and levity in their process and design explorations, which led to many of their iconic designs as well as a number of toys, games and other fun "inventions." Our story starts on page 68.

Their choice to let playfulness fuel their curiosity and design has influenced designers today, and we thought it would be fun to take a look at some of the more outrageous furniture designs from the last

several decades. Our roundup includes one of my favorites, something that makes me smile every time, the Campana Brothers' famous Banquete chair that uses dozens of stuffed animals to form the seat of the chair. That story is on page 78.

Our Travel By Design feature has taken us all over the world for the last three years, exploring the art, design and architecture in big cities and small towns. With the recent opening of the Johnston Marklee-designed Menil Drawing Institute, we decided a visit to Houston was in order. With such an incredible amount of amazing art and architecture in such a small area, our trip this time focused on just a handful of Houston's central neighborhoods, with many destinations within walking distance of one another. Beyond the new Drawing Institute, we explored The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery, Rothko Chapel, Glassell School of Art, Cullen Sculpture Garden and the new Transart Foundation designed by Schaum/Shieh. It is well worth the trip and I am sure James Florio's beautiful images, which start on page 152, will inspire you to book your trip tomorrow.

Another trip to get on your calendars is visiting some of our states' national parks and the visitor centers that were designed and built as part of the iconic Mission 66 program in the 1950s. Writer Atom Stevens calls it "Parkitecture Tourism" and provides us with some excellent history and detail on five of our national park and monument centers that accompany the uplifting shots photographer David Lauer captured of those structures and their surrounding landscapes. That story is on page 174.

The rest is of this issue is full of great design products and projects and the people who create them. We talk to Sean VanderVliet about his ceramic business Fenway Clayworks, visit the new Nine dot Arts workspace, learn how Roth Living's new Arch11-designed showroom is a game changer, and visit a CCY-designed home in Aspen. Enjoy the issue and happy spring!

Enjoy the issue and happy spring!

William Logan
william@modernindenver.com

THE COVERS



In a 1957 shot by Ralph Crane for Life Magazine, Charles Eames adjusts panels on his Solar Do-Nothing Machine, a colorful, kinetic marvel of a device that did nothing other than show that sunlight could be converted into electricity. When Life published the photo in March of 1958, the machine was labelled a "shimmering and fanciful contraption" and yet also a "forerunner of future solar-power machine" — both descriptors that, when taken together, prove Eames' famous quote: "Toys are not as innocent as they look — toys and games are the prelude to serious ideas." Find out more about the whimsical yet era-defining designs of Eames and others in our cover story, "Playing With Design," on page 68.

For our second cover photo, we visited architect Paul Andersen's "Motherhouse" to show yet again how serious design can be treated with a not-so-serious mindset. For this shot by James Florio, Andersen's 10-year-old daughter, Quinn, leaned out one of the home's second story windows (she was lethered for safety) to give context to the home's scale while also highlighting how fantastically carnival-like it is in appearance. Read more on the inspiration and vision behind this unique abode in our other cover story, "The House With Too Many Doors," on page 82.



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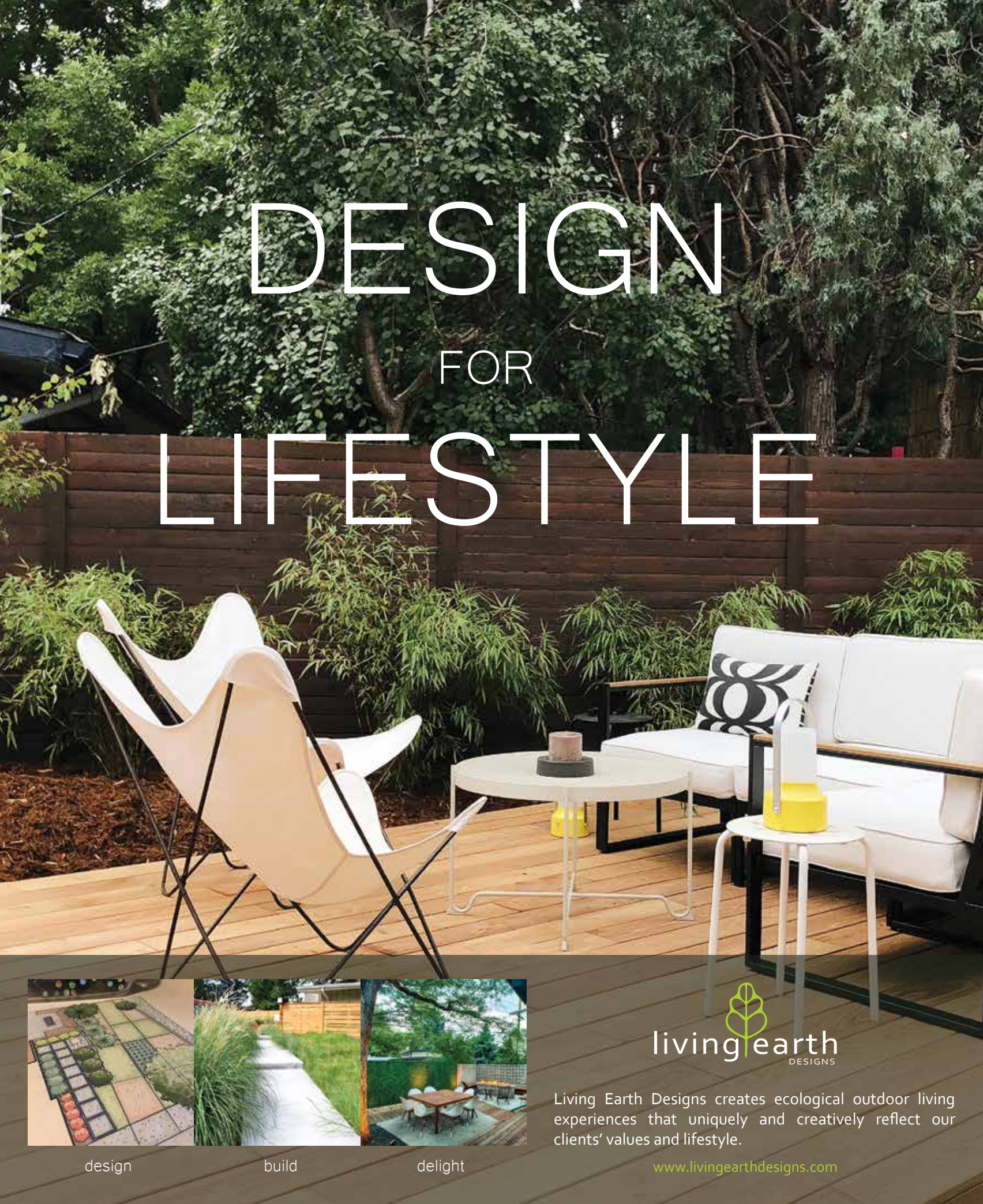
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Field Study

FURNITURE, TECH, ACCESSORIES, GEAR, SURPRISES

WORDS: *Tamara Chuang & Kris Scott*



KEEP CALM

The invasion of digital voice helpers like Alexa or Google Assistant has intensified the cacophony of noise at home, especially if there are young children who love to ask them to tell a joke or make obnoxious sounds. So maybe mui Lab is on to something. By turning real wood into a digital message board for minimalists, the Japanese company has created what it calls a “calm design device.” The connected piece responds to touch and becomes a screen to share messages and display weather, reminders or other information. When not needed, any hint of smartness goes dark, becoming a simple strip of wood again. However, if you can’t kick the audio habit, a speaker is included.

+mui.jp



BACK SPACE

Computer monitors have become bigger, slimmer and nearly frameless. But they still take up an inordinate amount of desktop space. Enter Samsung’s Space Monitor, a version with a much more minimalist footprint. The streamlined bezel-free screen has a long, thin neck that clamps to a desk’s back edge. Pull the screen toward you when you need to use it or push it back to the edge to regain desk space — up to 40 percent compared with a conventional monitor, says Samsung.

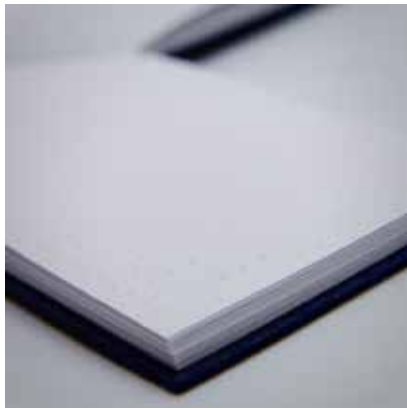
+samsung.com



THE BIG PICTURE

Sometimes, planning is just easier if you can see everything on one big piece of paper rather than flipping through pages of a notebook or swiping a smartphone screen to figure out who blew what deadline. That’s why Los Angeles-based Poketo turned its Project Planner into the poster-sized Project Wall Planner. The template has room to pencil in team members, tasks and a timeline. It’s definitely a more visual way to get the whole team on the same page.

+poketo.com



RIGHT ANGLE

The Sidekick Notebook is pure design novelty from Tan Mavitan, the mind behind the Triangle Notebook and the Double Sided Notebook, a notepad with two spines. But back to the Sidekick, this cleverly angled notepad opens into a right angle, fitting squarely in the corner below a keyboard. The 160-sheet pad with a dot grid may be an attention grabber, but it also comes in handy for doing things that notebooks are known for: taking notes.

+trianglenotebook.com



OMBRE BRIGHT

To create Dipping Light, artist Jordi Canudas literally dipped a lit lamp into paint several times to create gradually darker shades of the same color. The result is a multi-hued table lamp that spreads light in various subtleties of brightness. Produced for lighting company Marset and available in six finishes.

+marset.com



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MT. BEER

At some point, product designer Keita Suzuki probably poured himself a glass of frothy beer and said to himself, “This looks a lot like Mt. Fuji.” No, we don’t really know what he was thinking, but Suzuki shaped this beer glass with a wide base that narrows into a blunt top. With the right amount of beer and a generous foam head, the Fujiyama Glass does kind of look like the great Japanese mountain. It also comes in a special Paulownia wood box stamped with a small sketch to remind one of the Japan’s distinct and tallest peak.

+odetothings.com



ON THE GRID

Last year, Vogue named Brooklyn-based Vonnegut/Kraft one of “The 16 Most Innovative Furniture Designers Who Manufacture in the U.S.” The minimalist Sonia Side Table is a perfect little example of why. Inspired by a 1930 textile designed by Sonia Delauney, the tabletop is a simple cross hatch pattern that evokes the frayed edges of torn fabric. The aluminum base, however, includes an imprint of that same pattern in its top, which means it can be moved around to reconfigure the side table again and again. The Sonia is customizable and is also available as a coffee table.

+vonnegutkraft.com



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WAKE UP & SMELL THE INNOVATION

It's pretty rare these days that paradigms get toppled, and while reinventing what an espresso machine looks like might not seem like a big deal, we're guessing that the AnZa is ushering in a new era in big and small appliance design. A collaboration between design studio Montaag and California-based Kanen Coffee, the machine aims to vie for that "valuable bit of real estate on your kitchen counter" with a spectacularly sculptural design. Funded through Kickstarter, the AnZa is manufactured in combinations of concrete, Corian, wood, steel, white ceramic, brass and glass, and is as much a conversation starter as it is a means to that tiny cup of energy. It's available in two models — Concrete and Corian — for preorder now with first shipments expected to go out this spring.

+ anzacoffee.com



IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

New takes on old-but-iconic objects are always fun, and Swedish design studio Front's take on the classic green Banker's Lamp is no exception. Originally designed for Stockholm's Nationalmuseum art library reopening, the appropriately named Curve is now available as a collection through Zero. With its effortless style and slouchy posture, the Curve is a little bit like the cool kid of lamps. Or maybe it's more like a budding spring plant, stretching toward the sun. Either way, it's lovely and serene. The expanded collection includes pendants, floor and table lamps in blue, ivory, white and green with a choice of glass or metal shade.

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5 — Freight Residences
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46 apartment units
garden level townhomes
garage doors + terraces
campus makers space



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WORDS: Scott Kirkwood

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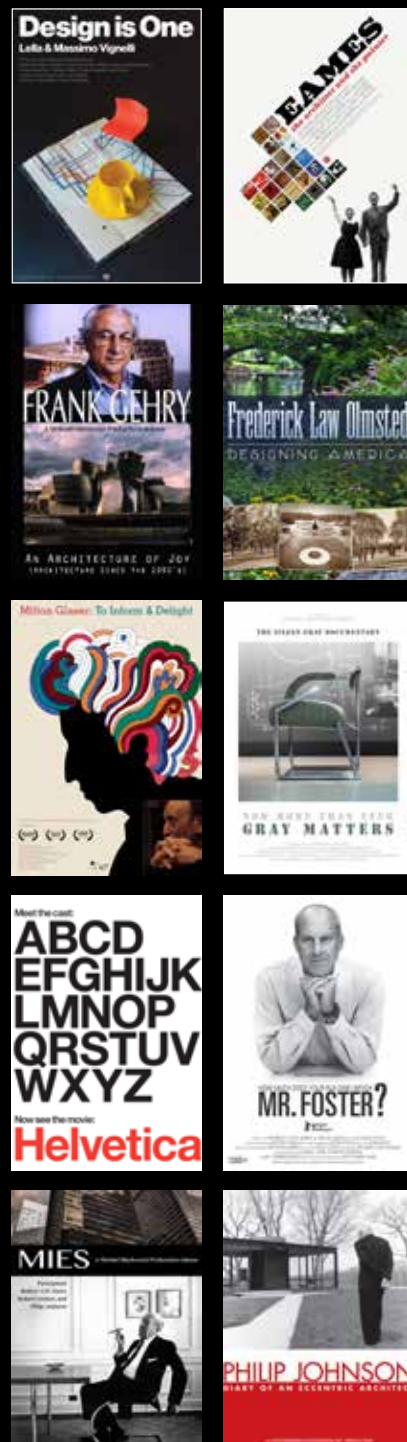
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The only catch? There’s a limit to the number of films you can watch each month; Denver Public Library offers eight per subscriber, which is enough to put a serious dent in our list of 10 must-sees. ■

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Ten must-see docs on Kanopy

Design Is One: The Story of Lella and Massimo Vignelli (2012), *Eames: The Architect and The Painter* (2011), *Frank Gehry: An Architecture of Joy* (2005), *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing America* (2014), *Milton Glaser: To Inform & Delight—An American Graphic Designer* (2008), *Gray Matters* (2014), *Helvetica* (2007), *How Much Does Your Building Weigh*, *Mr. Foster?* (2011), *Mies* (2005), *Philip Johnson: Diary of an Eccentric Architect* (1996)



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FRESH COAT

STARTUP PAINT COMPANY BACKDROP IS SHAKING UP AN INDUSTRY THAT'S NEEDED A TOUCH UP FOR A LONG TIME.

WORDS: Kris Scott

With names like Tanlines, Peyote Picnic, Skywalker and Pablo Honey, it's pretty obvious right off the bat that the recently launched BackDrop isn't your average paint company.

And sure, it would be easy to dismiss this startup as just another brand that's all hipster glitz without any real substance. But in this case, that dismissiveness won't stick.

For starters, BackDrop founders Natalie and Caleb Ebel launched their direct-to-consumer brand with the support of advisors from Glossier, Everlane and Warby Parker —you've probably heard of at least one of those not-too-shabby brands. And unlike other names in the \$11 billion home-paint industry, they do things a little differently.

"Backdrop offers an authentic approach to the home space, centered on people — not props — and rethinks everything from packaging to paint names," says Natalie Ebel. "We wanted to create the brand, products and customer experience that we were looking for but



couldn't find after painting every home we've lived in," adds Caleb. "Each time we were appalled by the hardware store paint brands and process, which haven't changed in 100 years."

To make their vision a reality, they chose a carefully curated launch collection of 50 hues. "If you've ever stood in front of 3,000 color cards at the hardware store until your eyes burned, you get it," says the company's website. Once customers narrow that selection down to a few favorites, BackDrop sends them 12-inch-square adhesive panels, at \$2 each, to put up on a wall. No impossibly tiny swatches or actual painting to gauge if a color works for the space.

The product, a premium quality, ultra-low odor and low, Greenwise-certified VOC paint, is delivered right to customers' doorsteps, and Backdrop offers a supply calculator to project exactly how much is needed before purchasing, plus a full assortment of supplies — branded tape, spackling, sandpaper kit — and a digital manual with "all the pro tips and tricks you need to paint your space."

And then there's the rectangular stainless steel can design, which is not only an updated, modern take from a packaging standpoint, but looks to be a vast improvement on the unwieldy, drip-insistent, wide-mouthed cans the industry has been using for decades.

Finally, if all that isn't enough to convince you that a shakeup of the paint industry is a good thing, BackDrop has heart. Before selling their first gallon of paint, they partnered with The International Rescue Committee, a non-profit that supports refugees impacted by the world's worst humanitarian crises. And, moving forward, through buying BackDrop paint, customers are helping involuntarily displaced families in some of the world's most challenging environments.

Now that's a perfect finish. ■

+ backdrophome.com or @backdrop

"BACKDROP OFFERS AN AUTHENTIC APPROACH TO THE HOME SPACE, CENTERED ON PEOPLE — NOT PROPS — AND RETHINKS EVERYTHING FROM PACKAGING TO PAINT NAMES. WE WANTED TO CREATE THE BRAND, PRODUCTS AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR BUT COULDN'T FIND AFTER PAINTING EVERY HOME WE'VE LIVED IN. EACH TIME WE WERE APPALLED BY THE HARDWARE STORE PAINT BRANDS AND PROCESS, WHICH HAVEN'T CHANGED IN 100 YEARS." - Natalie and Caleb Ebel



A BUSINESS IN BLOOM

SACRED THISTLE

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE'S SACRED THISTLE IS AIMING TO ELEVATE FLORAL DESIGN TO BEAUTIFUL NEW LEVELS.

WORDS: Caroline Joan Peixoto
IMAGES: James Florio



TUCKED INTO A QUIET, TREE-LINED STREET IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE AND SURROUNDED BY WORLD-CLASS MUSEUMS LIES A SMALL BLACK BUILDING WITH A REGAL APPEARANCE. IN THE SPRING OF 2016, CORNELIA AND SYDNEY PETERSON OPENED SACRED THISTLE TO FILL A GAP THEY SAW IN THE DENVER DESIGN WORLD.

“I had been working as a florist for five years, and I was tired of doing the same old thing. I was already using wabi sabi in my designs and knew that if I didn’t fill this hole quickly, someone else would, and I’d be kicking myself,” says Cornelia.

The art of wabi sabi is a Buddhist-derived lifestyle practice stemming from ancient Japan that seeks to highlight the imperfect and impermanent. Like many traditional Japanese practices, it isn’t limited to one medium, and its principles can be implemented in many forms. “For me, it’s an organic process. It’s finding that stem in the back, the one no one wants, and highlighting it. It’s revealing the beauty that the eye isn’t used to seeing,” Cornelia says.

Sydney — Cornelia’s business partner and mother — had worked as a Neiman Marcus creative director for more than 29 years before she felt ready for something else. “It was getting time for me to retire, and I was ready to leave such a large company, so Cornelia and I began to explore ideas together. If we had our own space — what would we do?”

The answer manifested into what Sacred Thistle is today: a visual tapestry of floral, plants, gifts and home items sourced locally and globally. While each individual item is unique and attractive in its own right, it is the collective gathering and expression of it that really draws the visitor in. “That’s all her,” Cornelia says, motioning toward Sydney, who is busily rearranging while talking.

“We never planned for retail to be such a large component of the store,” Sydney admits, “but when we saw this place — after seeing so many terrible places, and knowing right away this was right — well, then we had to fill it!”

The store’s location has been an essential element of its success, with regular visits from Denver Art Museum patrons. “And then we’ve become totally supported by the growing residential community here in the Golden Triangle,” says Sydney, who adds that neighborhood acceptance



“We don’t divide work; we both do everything,” say Cornelia and Sydney Peterson, nearly in unison. The mother and daughter have only been working together for three years, but their rhythm is undeniable. Cornelia learns from her mother’s curatorial eye and Sydney mimics her daughter’s masterful floristry. Together they run the day-to-day operations of the store and share the business responsibilities. “It wouldn’t be Sacred Thistle if it was just one of us, or one of us with someone else,” acknowledges Cornelia.

LEFT: One of two floral arrangements that Sacred Thistle created specifically for Modern In Denver’s spring issue, this grouping includes poppies, ranunculus, daffodil, hellebore, acacia mimosa and carnation. A second Sacred Thistle arrangement (page 63) features poppies, tulip, flowering quince, eriostrimon, rose and waxflower.

SACRED THISTLE

A BUSINESS IN BLOOM



Sacred Thistle fills its space with curated goods from around the globe. Local artisans' wares mix with vintage finds and imported pieces amongst an elegant selection of house plants and pottery.

has translated into a larger demand for services. Sacred Thistle provides floral for local design-centric businesses such as The Ramble Hotel, Morin Restaurant and the Clyfford Still Museum, in addition to a heavy schedule of weddings and events. More recently, the duo has been working with individual clients and architectural firms for interior styling.

The mother-daughter partners agree that they're trying to bring something unique to Denver through their personal style. Sydney is committed to filling the store with things they love. "We're never going to choose something just because we know it will sell. We choose it because it's something we would put in our own home."

"We're able to take inspiration from so many different places. There was a Women of Abstraction Expressionism exhibit at the Denver Art Museum a few years ago that continues to fuel me, and we travel to southern Colorado and New Mexico regularly. We have such a deep respect and appreciation for that old culture, and now there's this contemporary style mixing itself in, and it's just beautiful to feel." - Cornelia Peterson

Importing items from other cultures has become a staple of the store's identity, and creative vision trips have taken them to Morocco, the south of France, Thailand and Mexico. While many brands and boutiques bring in international items through distributors, it's paramount to Cornelia and Sydney to source directly from the artisan. "We go to the place, get a feel for the town or city. We get to know the makers we're buying from, so we can confidently share their story when we support their business," Sydney explains.

"We're able to take inspiration from so many different places," Cornelia is quick to add. "There was a Women of Abstraction Expressionism exhibit at the Denver Art Museum a few years ago that continues to fuel me, and we travel to southern Colorado and New Mexico regularly. We have such a deep respect and appreciation for that old culture, and now there's this contemporary style mixing itself in, and it's just beautiful to feel."

"There is an incredible movement happening right now with women; they're becoming so much stronger both in business and in politics, and being a part of that is so encouraging. It's an exciting time," finishes Sydney, before quickly turning to greet a new customer. ■

+ sacredthistle.com



NET RESULT

DENVER RESTAURANT CHOLON NEEDED AN UPDATE THAT WAS BOTH MULTI-FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETICALLY BEAUTIFUL IN ITS DESIGN. ARCHITECTURE STUDIO UNUM COLLABORATIVE DELIVERED JUST THAT.

WORDS: Kris Scott • IMAGES: James Florio



WHEN ADAM STEINBACH AND JIM PFEIFFER, CO-FOUNDERS OF UNUM COLLABORATIVE, WERE BROUGHT IN TO GIVE POPULAR DENVER RESTAURANT CHOLON AN UPDATE, THEY DIDN'T NEED TO LOOK ANY FURTHER THAN THE MENU FOR INSPIRATION.

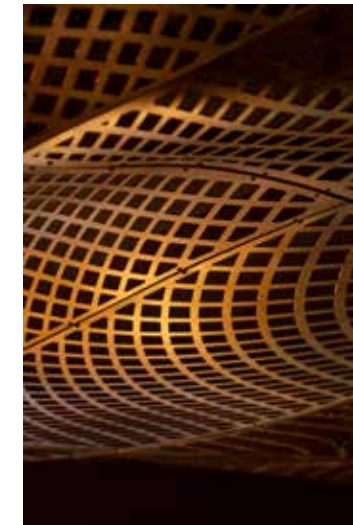
The restaurant asked UNUM to create a visually interesting installation that would accomplish three objectives. Located on 16th Street Mall, they wanted to draw the attention of passersby while also addressing a common critique of current customers: the noise level. The space, while beautiful, incorporated a lot of concrete and glass in its material palette, which in turn caused acoustic reverberation that diners found problematic. Diners also sometimes noted the glare from overhead lights, another issue that ChoLon wanted to modify.

Drawing on the influences of Southeast Asia on the restaurant's menu, as well as the number of seafood-prominent dishes, Steinbach and Pfeiffer decided to model the ceiling installation after a fishing net. Collaborating with Twig Custom Builders fabricators, UNUM's team investigated a number of materials, forms and techniques that would complement the ChoLon aesthetic. They ultimately arrived at stained Baltic Birch plywood panels that, Steinbach says, "provided enough flexibility to fabricate the form, was within budget and provided an authentic look" that seemed right at home inside the restaurant. The use of panels as opposed to one large piece would allow for more control throughout production and installation, as well as a strategy for long term maintenance.

The installation and other renovation features, which included new restroom design, kitchen finishes and resurfacing of furniture, occurred over just four days, with HIVE Construction acting as general contractor, working with UNUM and Twig on the coordination and execution of the effort.

Ultimately, the ceiling installation accomplished the objectives of reducing noise and light levels while also drawing the attention and interest of mall traffic. "It stretches the length of the dining room, establishing a dynamic visual anchor from the street, while lowering the scale of the space and providing a more intimate setting for patrons," Steinbach says. Additionally, "the undulating surfaces of the structure's compound curvature disperse reverberation, while sound absorbing panels mounted to the concrete deck above capture sound to aid in reducing overall noise levels." Finally, its perforated plywood helps diffuse glare from the lights above.

While the restaurant's stunning new feature has helped solve many of the space's shortcomings, its unusual beauty has been its most defining feature. Pfeiffer says this is because it just has a certain poetry to it, "capturing the tension and grace of a casting net reaching out over the water." ■



OPPOSITE: Each of the 70 panels was created using 3D modeling software and a series of algorithmic design processes in order to establish a complex, multidirectional — meaning each panels curves in the X, Y and Z direction — surface. When joined together, they create a quilt of more than 1,000 square feet. **ABOVE:** Exposed fasteners and connections were embraced as part of the overall industrial aesthetic, allowing for a composition that complements the ChoLon dining room's austere concrete and glass interior.



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“Toys are not as innocent as they look— toys and games are the preludes to serious ideas.”

- Charles Eames

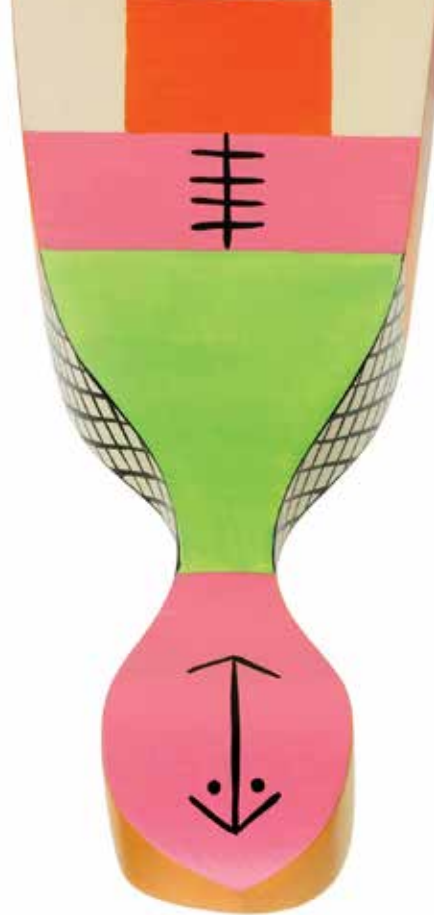
CHARLES AND RAY EAMES AND ALEXANDER GIRARD BROUGHT A NEW, PLAYFUL APPROACH TO THEIR WORK THAT HELPED DEFINE MID-CENTURY DESIGN.

Playing with Design.

IT'S ALL FUN & GAMES...

UNTIL SOMEONE MAKES SOMETHING FABULOUS. WITH AN UPCOMING DENVER ART MUSEUM EXHIBIT CURATED TO SHOWCASE THE MID-CENTURY ERA'S PLAYFUL APPROACH TO DESIGN, MODERN IN DENVER TAKES A DIVE INTO HOW THESE CREATIVES SHOOK OFF THE CONSTRAINTS OF SERIOUSNESS TO HELP DEFINE A GENERATION.

WORDS: Scott Kirkwood



WHEN WORLD WAR II CAME TO AN END IN 1945, EVERYTHING CHANGED.

Our world got a little more colorful, a little more playful and a little more provocative. Big band and jazz gave way to Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard. Women's fashion was defined by polka dots and poodle skirts. Films evolved from the wholesome appeal of “Singin’ in the Rain” to risqué fare like “Some Like It Hot,” which the Catholic Church considered “morally objectionable.”

Artists were taking chances — and design was no different. Americans bought bigger cars, moved into bigger homes and filled those homes with everything from televisions to kitchen appliances and, of course, furniture. From chairs in unlikely shapes forged of unlikely materials to clocks, shelves, dolls and toys, designers like Charles and Ray Eames and Alexander Girard injected a sense of playfulness that hadn't been seen in decades. Their unique approach to the craft provides the lens for a new exhibit created by Milwaukee Art Museum curator Monica Obniski and Darrin Alfred, a Denver Art Museum curator. “Serious Play” opened in Milwaukee last September and lands in Denver from May 5 to August 25.

“When you tell people you're creating an exhibit focused on mid-century modern design, they'll often respond, ‘OK, great, been there, done that,’ says Obniski. “We'd respond, ‘Well, no — actually you haven't seen it from this perspective.’

Home Sweet Home

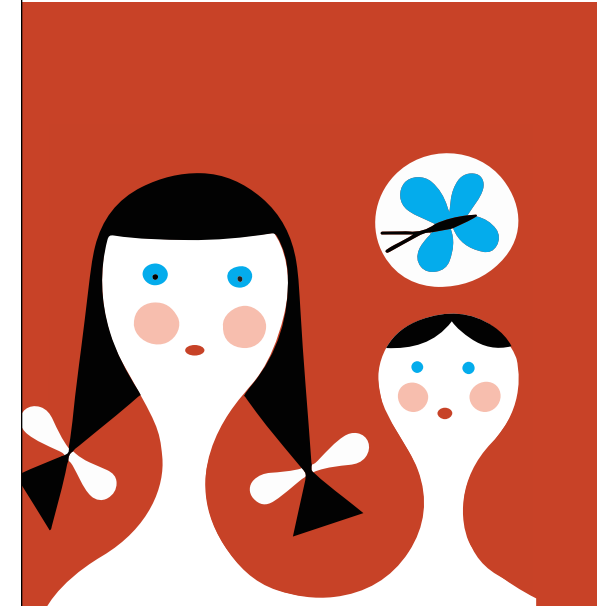
One of the major themes the exhibit explores is the idea that Americans were increasingly using their homes to showcase their personalities, something already common among the One Percenters, but less so among members of the middle class. They learned it from films, from advertisements and from magazine spreads in Good Housekeeping and House & Home, whose editors noted that the major problem facing homeowners was the lack of adequate storage space. Unheralded items like shelving units — once considered bland and utilitarian — came out from behind closed doors to take on a starring role in store displays and photo shoots.

“Some of the early Herman Miller ads for the Eames Storage Units incorporated many of the items they were living with or featured in their studio—from butterfly kites and Native American baskets to items they'd found in nature like tumbleweeds, shells and starfish,” says Alfred. “The Eames were essentially teaching Americans how to incorporate objects that they'd been accumulating in more interesting and unusual ways.”

“The things that people surround themselves with are really part of our identity — part of how we see ourselves and how other people see us,” says Obniski. “Whether you surround yourself with philosophy books or cocinas that you picked up on a trip to Mexico, so that you can

“When you tell people you're creating an exhibit focused on mid-century modern design, they'll often respond, ‘OK, great, been there, done that.’ We'd respond, ‘Well, no — actually you haven't seen it from this perspective.’”

- Monica Obniski,
Milwaukee Art Museum



One of 26 classic Girard illustrations included in his 1972 children's board book, “COLOR.” Though originally designed for preschoolers, the book has become an iconic favorite among design enthusiasts for its playful-yet-sophisticated illustrations and design. In addition to books, Girard designed other objects for children, including memory games, wooden blocks, puzzles and more.



In 1952, Alexander Girard was hired by Herman Miller to helm the brand's new fabric and textile division, where he collaborated with George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames. Girard's initial collection was largely based on his architectural training and consisted of boldly colored upholsteries with straightforward patterns in shapes, stripes and checks. Later, his textile designs would become increasingly complex and inspired by his lifelong fascination with folk art. Girard was one of the first modern designers to elevate textiles to something that could transcend pure functionality through the adept application of color, form and pattern.



Alexander Girard

talk about them at a cocktail party on a Friday night, all of these things are imbued with meaning. And a lot of these concepts came out of mid-century modern design."

Getting Down to Business

The approach extended beyond the living room and into the board room. From 1952 to 1973, Alexander Girard served as director of design for the textiles department at Herman Miller, where bold colors and unexpected folk art helped define his reign. In 1964, when creative director Mary Wells Lawrence was tasked with a major rebranding campaign for Braniff Airlines, she hired Girard and Italian fashion designer Emilio Pucci for a campaign dubbed "The End of the Plain Plane." The campaign tagline was, "We won't get you where you're going any faster, but it'll seem that way," and the two designers manufactured an explosion of color that mixed folk art with space-age design in a way that was surprisingly effective. Girard created more than 17,000 elements for Braniff, including color palettes splashed all over the inside and outside of its fleet, a custom typeface and textiles for upholstery



The Compact Sofa, designed in 1954 by the Eameses for Herman Miller and upholstered in a Girard "Colorado Plaid" wool textile, is one of many pieces included in the Denver Art Museum's "Serious Play" exhibit.

and blankets. Much of it was inspired by his love of folk art from South American countries, which Braniff served with regular flights, of course.

"If you were to ask the average person on the street, they would probably tell you that folk art is antithetical to modern design," says Obniski. "But Girard shows us really interesting ways that the two can, as he has said, 'work in play' in a modern way. What's most exciting about his work is the way he incorporates these vernacular elements in a way that's always fresh, interesting and unique, whether he's focused on product design or interior design. I don't believe there's another modern designer who embraced folk art and used it as holistically as Girard."

Alcoa was another unlikely company that contributed to mid-century focus on play. During WWII, aluminum was used in the production of aircraft, ships and millions of soldiers' mess kits. After V-E Day, the aluminum industry was eager to persuade Americans that its product was valuable for more than pots and pans, so the company invited designers to create new ➔73



girard braniff

In the mid-1960s, Girard collaborated with Braniff Airlines and fashion designer Emilio Pucci to rebrand the airline in a decidedly more imaginative and, dare we say, groovy fashion. While probably the most visible sign of his work was repainting the airlines' fleet in Girardesque shades of orange, turquoise, medium and baby blues, ochre, lemon yellow and lavender, Girard also had his hands on everything from ticket counters, marketing materials, a new typeface

and folk art-inspired "dove" logo to airport lounges and in-flight matchbooks and playing cards (the latter included Girard illustrations on one side of the cards while the other showed travel-centric English phrases such as, "Where is the ladies toilet?" and "How long are we going to stay here?" translated into other languages). In total, Girard designed more than 17,000 brand elements for Braniff.



The Pucci brand is synonymous with geometric prints in a kaleidoscope of colors, so it was no surprise that Emilio Pucci's Braniff collections were futuristic, space-age inspired designs unlike anything the industry had previously seen. This included dresses, tights and scarves in a mix of bright colors and Pucci prints, "RainDome" helmets—an early concept not surprisingly deemed impractical after one year—and matching hats and carry-on luggage. Pucci leaned heavily into themes of provocativeness, with some uniforms inspiring the James Bond-inspired nickname, "Pucci Galore."



HOUSE OF CARDS

In the early 1950s, Charles and Ray Eames designed the “House of Cards,” a deck of 54 playing cards, followed by medium and “giant” versions of the set. The latter is a 20+ set of 11.5 by 7.5 inch cards printed with images taken from “the Arts, Sciences and the World Around Us.” Each card — in all sizes — had six slots on it that could be used to join them together, building structures in a seemingly endless number of ways. Today, many of the famed designers’ card creations are still available from the Eames online shop.



and unexpected products that could show off the material’s versatility. Austin Cox designed an aluminum chess set. Lester Beall created a stereo system dubbed “the music sphere.” And as part of Alcoa’s 1959 “Design Forecast,” Charles and Ray Eames created the solar “Do Nothing” machine. Contrary to its name, the whimsical kinetic sculpture was one of the earliest examples of solar energy’s potential.

Blurring the Lines

To the Eameses, there was very little difference between turning a commercial project into a toy and turning a toy into a commercial project.

“Designers like the Eameses, Girard and George Nelson all saw play as

an integral part of their process as opposed to something that was separate from their process,” says Alfred. “Charles Eames said, ‘Toys are not as innocent as they look — toys and games are the preludes to serious ideas.’ This idea of playing and tinkering and not necessarily having an end product in mind frees you up to imagine something in ways that you wouldn’t normally consider if you were looking for a solution to a problem.”

The Eameses’ creation, The Toy, was a full-size DIY construction kit made up of dozens of wooden dowels and colorful plastic-coated panels in the shapes of triangles and squares. Unlike similar toys of the era, which came replete with detailed instructions, The Toy was completely

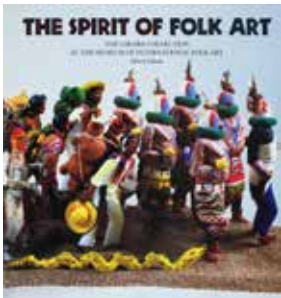


WOODEN DOLLS

Girard’s Wooden Dolls are a motley crew of human and animal characters originally created as objects of interest for his new Santa Fe home. In an essay titled “Land of Enchantment” for textile company Maharam, Girard’s granddaughter Aleishall Girard Maxon, writes: “While my grandfather was a very forward-thinking person, an avid reader of science fiction and a believer in technology and innovation, he also had a deep reverence for what had come before. He found joy in blending the old with the new, and his own homes were the perfect playground for this sort of experimentation.”

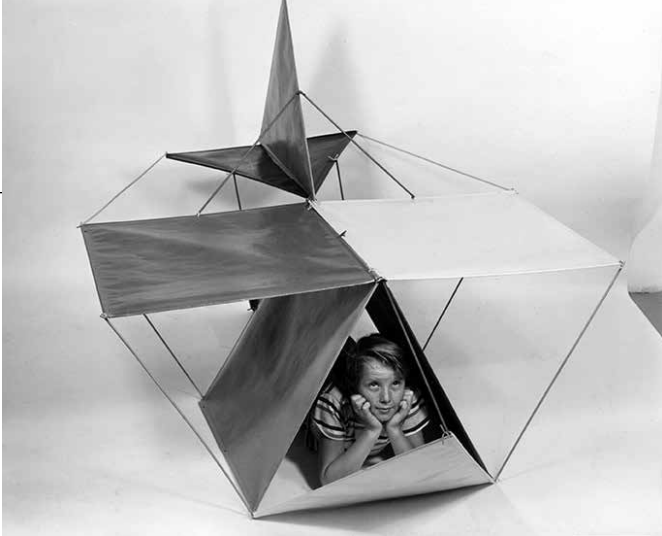
Girard and his wife Susan moved from Grosse Pointe, MI, to the Land of Enchantment in 1953. Though he already had a love affair with Latin America — he and Susan honeymooned there in 1939 — Santa Fe’s architecture, culture and creative scene further influenced his love of folk art, which in turn influenced much of his design work, including these dolls. Some of the originals can be found in Germany’s Vitra Design Museum, and —

for those who want to own their own Girard wooden doll — Vitra recently released re-editions of almost 30 figures, all fabricated and painted by hand.



Fittingly, adds Girard Maxon, the “final and most personal project” of her grandfather’s career was the permanent installation of his folk art collection at the International Museum of Folk Art in Santa Fe. Today, an entire wing of the museum is dedicated to a remarkable collection — around 10,000 pieces — of the Girards’ folk art, toys, miniatures, textiles and more. In total, there are more than 90,000 other Girard objects in the museum’s collection that are often included in special exhibitions.

For those who can’t get to Santa Fe to see the permanent exhibit, writer and folklorist Henry Glassie has carefully curated 300 objects in his book, “The Spirit of Folk Art,” that represent a broad cross-section of the Girard’s folk art collection, including ceramic figures, beaded purses, intricate textiles, dolls and toys.



Playing with Design

“The ideas that the Eameses were developing, whether for children’s toys or their parents’ furniture, embodied the same concept of an industrial kit of parts that could be easily reconfigured again and again to construct whatever you could imagine.” - Darrin Alfred

“Large. Colorful. Easy to assemble. For creating a light, bright, expandable world large enough to play in and around.” These were the only instructions that came with the Eames-designed Toy. Even the name was resolutely generic so as to not impose any preconceived notions about how it could be used once unpackaged. With slim wooden dowels, pipe cleaners and a collection of plastic-coated panels packed into a hexagonal tube, the product was hailed in a 1952 New Yorker advertisement as “the most imaginative plaything of the decade!” **OPPOSITE:** Ray Eames experiments with a scaled up version of the Toy in 1951.



free-form, inviting children to create a theater or a playhouse or an airplane. The mash-up of Piet Mondrian and life-size Tinker Toys allowed children to manufacture their own worlds and then crawl inside of them.

“The ideas that the Eameses were developing, whether for children’s toys or their parents’ furniture, embodied the same concept of an industrial kit of parts that could be easily reconfigured again and again to construct whatever you could imagine,” says Alfred. That playful, “no rules” approach applied to their dozens of side projects, too, including short films like “Parade” and “Tops,” which had no particular goal beyond exploration. The couple recognized that the naiveté of a child opens up new worlds of creativity: Charles and Ray would often invite members of their staff to work on projects for which they had no particular expertise because that outsider’s perspective brought a new, expansive viewpoint to the process.

Today, the idea of incorporating play into our work is rather commonplace, from start-ups’ ubiquitous ping-pong tables to creative professionals’ “side-projects” that quickly turn into Etsy stores. But several designers seem to have sprung directly from the lineage of Eames and Girard.

Spanish furniture designer Jaime Hayon creates modern, minimalist

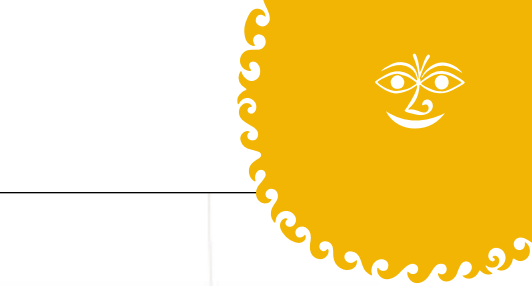


sofas and chairs that wouldn’t be out of place in a Herman Miller catalog from 50 years ago; he also crafts playful vases and porcelain objects that use shape and color in clever ways that would’ve made Girard proud.

Dutch artist and designer Marcel Wanders partners with elite brands like Baccarat, Louis Vuitton and Swarovski, but he also creates goofy “balloon chairs” and bizarre “monster chairs,” and encourages employees to get away from the office by piloting the studio’s boat through the channels of Amsterdam.

Hella Jongerius, another Dutch designer, is known for her colorful textiles, ceramics and furniture. She displays her playful experiments and works in progress alongside her finished products on a widely followed Instagram account, where one of her recent posts sums up her philosophy: “Without play, there can be no design that inspires the user. Without foolishness and fun there can be no imagination.” ■

The “Serious Play: Design in Midcentury America” exhibition opens at the Denver Art Museum on May 5 and will run through August 25. Visit denverartmuseum.org for more info.



Designed in the 1940s and ‘50s, the Eames Plywood Mobile, Molded Plywood Elephant and Hang It All coat rack are three more examples of how the Eames introduced a persistent focus of playfulness, humor and whimsy into their life’s work. Though the elephant has endured the test of time — versions of it, the mobile and the coat rack are still available in stores and online — the Eameses originally fabricated a virtual zoo of creatures that accompanied the pachyderm, including a frog, horse, seal and bear.



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WHEN EVERYDAY OBJECTS BECOME SOURCES OF WONDER OR EVEN DERISION, THEY MAKE PEOPLE STOP AND APPRECIATE THE MAGIC-OVER-THE-MUNDANE — AND IN THE PROCESS MARVEL AT SOMETHING AS FORGETTABLE AS A (GIANT HORSE) LAMP.

FURNITURE FANTASTICA

WORDS: Alicita Rodriguez



ON a recent “Million Dollar Listing New York” episode, a broker walks into an apartment and refuses to sit in a chair covered in stuffed animals, joking that the chair could eat him. The piece in question, the Dolphins and Sharks Chair by Brazilian designer brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana, is upholstered in plush — you guessed it — dolphins and sharks.

When the chair becomes available at auction — it was designed in 2002 as a limited edition — it is estimated to sell for about \$20,000.

Like a lot of art that pushes boundaries, the chair is more concerned with form than function. It makes us question the very notion of a chair — how we define it, what it should do, what it could do.

More importantly, it’s fun.

The *Banquete Chair* by Brazilian design duo and brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana. The Campanas have made many different versions of this chair using a variety of plush toys. This one was created in 2002.

All of these disembodied human parts, blown up to grand scale, make people re-see and re-acknowledge the furniture. It’s impossible to passively sit in Friedeberg’s Hand Chair with its enormous, graceful fingers, to merely pass by Pesce’s foot because it dominates the room and reminds us that we are but a small part of the universe.



ABOVE: *The Hand Chair* by Mexican Surrealist Pedro Friedeberg. He designed the chair in the early 1960s and versions have been produced in silver, gold leaf, plastic and wood.

TOP: *The UP_7 PIEDE* sculpture/chair, designed by Gaetano Pesce in 1969 and made from polyurethane foam.



The Bocca Sofa, originally designed by Salvador Dali in 1936, was reproduced by Studio 65 for Italian interior design brand Gufram in the early 1970s and is still in production today.

Frank Gehry’s sinuous *Wiggle Side Chair*. Designed in 1972, the chair is made from cardboard reinforced by hardboard panels.

Created by Norwegian designer Terje Ekstrom in the early 1970s, the *Ekstrem Lounge Chair* is available in a number of colors.



The interior design world sometimes takes itself too seriously. If design is an accepted art form, then designers should also be given — and take — artistic license. When that happens, the pieces that shock and bother people often become iconic.

PLAYING WITH SCALE

Three great examples from the mid-20th century use the human form to examine possibilities: *Hand Chair* by Pedro Friedeberg, *UP_7 Piede* by Gaetano Pesce, and *Marilyn Bocca Sofa* by Studio 65.

A wooden chair in the form of an enveloping hand, a giant foam foot that doubles as a chair and sculpture, an upholstered red mouth inspired by Salvador Dali’s surrealist sofa.

Yet to classify these pieces as mere furniture should give pause — and therein lies their genius. Russian art critic Viktor Shklovsky coined the term “defamiliarization” in his 1917 essay “Art as Technique.” The problem, as he saw it, was that the very act of living our lives makes perception automatic: “Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war. And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life.”

All of these disembodied human parts, blown up to grand scale, make people re-see and re-acknowledge the furniture. It’s impossible to passively



FURNITURE FANTASTICA



sit in Friedeberg’s Hand Chair with its enormous, graceful fingers, to merely pass by Pesce’s foot because it dominates the room and reminds us that we are but a small part of the universe. And certainly, people won’t take for granted the arresting sight of a painted mouth once they are forced to lounge on its pillowy lips.

FANCIFUL & FANTASTIC

A degree of fantasy can always breathe life into everyday objects. Conceptual designers rely on storytelling and bold manufacturers willing to translate their escapist visions into concrete form. Homeowners and companies seeking to experience what Shklovsky terms “the artfulness of an object” can turn to designers and brands known for a playful spirit.

On this front, Italian studio Edra does not disappoint. Their collection includes furniture resembling stacked starfish, interwoven snakes and crystalline flowers. For arctic lovers, there is Pack, a large, ice floe-shaped sofa that features a backrest shaped like a bear lying on its side. Designed by Francesco Binfaré, Pack turns a home into a fairy tale scene. Similarly, French designer Philippe Starck makes an everyday side table an occasion for enchantment with Atila, a colorful forest gnome that is “cute and humorous but with

The iconic *Marshmallow Sofa*, available in solid and multi-colors, was designed in 1956 by Irving Harper and manufactured by Herman Miller.



Dutch designer Pieke Bergmans created a collection of globular *Light Blubs* that are hand-blown and contain LEDs.

The *85 Lamps* chandelier, constructed from lamps, wires and connectors, was designed in 1993 by Rody Graumans for conceptual design company Droog.

Marcel Wanders designed the *Zeppelin 2* pendant in 2005. It has a white powder coated internal steel structure that’s sprayed with a unique “cocoon” resin, and a faceted crystal globe that creates a sparkle effect.

The *Gnome Atila* stool or side table, designed by Philippe Starck in 2000, is manufactured in Italy by Kartell and also available in black and gold.



The life-size *Horse Lamp* was a 2006 creative collaboration between Dutch company Moooi and Swedish design team Front.

The *Pack Sofa*, designed by Francesco Binfaré for Edra, measures about 12 feet wide and 8 feet deep.



one eye on functionality,” says its manufacturer, Kartell. Atila may not be for everyone, but it’s not easy to forget.

Finally, there’s Horse Lamp, which utterly transforms the concept of the lamp as an object. A life-sized horse with a lampshade over its head, Horse Lamp is designed by Swedish studio Front for their Animal Thing collection, humorously billed as “furniture to fall in love with at first sight, or hate forever.” Horse Lamp destroys the notion of the floor lamp as a decorative object because, while functional, it is neither precious nor insubstantial. It turns a living room into a magical space where animals just wander in and take up residence. Whether it’s a polar bear, a garden gnome or a black horse, fantastic designs alter the accepted parameters of household objects.

OBJECT THEORY

Returning to the defamiliarization theory for a moment, consider how the brain affects visual processing: “After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it,” explains Shklovsky. The artist’s job is to prolong perception and, in the case of furniture design, this is notably more difficult because houses and buildings are full of objects people no longer see, from toasters and tables to lamps and lounges.

However people feel about a chair covered in stuffed animals or a sofa shaped like lips, these whimsical versions of familiar objects make people stop and look. Playfulness in design — whether it comes from altering scale, experimenting with materials or creating a story — ultimately forces people to reengage with the objects that surround them. ■

THE HOUSE WITH TOO MANY DOORS

Striped, pointy and full of excess, Motherhouse redefines what it means to fit into a neighborhood.

WORDS: Ray Mark Rinaldi • IMAGES: James Florio

Architect Paul Andersen's new Motherhouse plays like a great cover version of a classic rock 'n' roll song, honoring the structure and style of the original, but adding a few rhythmic twists and lyrical flourishes all its own.

In this case, the venerated source material is O.M. Ungers' "House without Qualities" in Cologne, Germany. That might be an obscure reference to most people, but the house — combining the symmetry of classicism with the simplicity of modernism — is an important project in architectural academia. "House Without Qualities" is basically a white box with identical sets of double doors and windows on all four sides — essentially, there's no front and no back — and students love to parse its merits.

Ungers, an architect and theorist, built it in 1995 as a late-career experiment, attempting to combine various ideas about design, excess and spacial purity and turn them into a functional house people could actually live



The Motherhouse and its inspiration, the 1995 "House Without Qualities," in Cologne, Germany. Denver architect Paul Andersen made his recently completed structure unique by adding a diagonally striped pattern to the facade. The gable roof is a nod to an existing neighborhood style.





Andersen carefully coordinated the interior details of Motherhouse. Upstairs doorways are inspired by the pitch of the building's roof. The ceiling above the stair mirrors the steps below it.



in. In other words, he was playing, in that way deep thinkers do.

And so is Paul Andersen. Except that his project is in the historic, middle-class Sunnyside neighborhood where architectural experiments — especially ones clad in diagonal, yellow-and-white stripes — are strikingly uncommon.

“I thought it might be interesting to do a Denver version of that house, like a single-family, American-style version of it,” Andersen explains while recently giving a tour.

So, Andersen designed in many attributes that are common in the surrounding residential area. The house is two levels and 3,000 square feet, about the size of its Victorian-influenced peers. And it has a series of sawtooth gables on its roof, though Andersen gave that

an additional quirk by adding an extra pint-sized gable on the south side to shake things up, mimicking some tricks he saw and admired on contemporary houses in the nearby Englewood suburb.

While Motherhouse honors Ungers’ severe, four-sided rigor, it toys with it as well. Ungers aligned his doors and windows vertically; Andersen set his slightly askew. Whatever point Ungers was trying to make with his project, Andersen is making a counterpoint with his. They are in dialogue.

It’s a bit extreme, building an entire house just to chat with one of your intellectual heroes, but not at all out of character for Andersen, whose tiny, two-person firm, Independent Architecture, is all about continuing the ongoing conversation about design and encouraging public appreciation of his field. “Architecture has no



“I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING TO DO A DENVER VERSION OF THE UNGERS HOUSE, LIKE A SINGLE-FAMILY, AMERICAN-STYLE VERSION OF IT.”

- PAUL ANDERSEN



“ARCHITECTURE HAS NO INHERENT VALUE. WE DON’T REALLY NEED IT, JUST LIKE WE DON’T NEED MUSIC OR MOVIES. AND JUST LIKE MUSIC AND MOVIES, ARCHITECTURE ACQUIRES VALUE WHEN PEOPLE LOVE IT.”

- Paul Andersen



Inside Motherhouse, wood floors and cabinetry change hues following the patterns of exterior doors and windows. Throughout the building, doors and windows are created with the same dimensions and materials, blurring the lines that normally separate their look and function.



inherent value. We don’t really need it, just like we don’t need music or movies,” he says, explaining the firm’s mission. “And just like music and movies, architecture acquires value when people love it.”

Independent’s portfolio of work offers a lot to fall in love with, no matter what your architectural preference. There are serious and sensible projects, like the Catamount Center dormitory, a student residence at the environmental research facility located just outside of Colorado Springs. But there are also fun and frilly attractions, such as the Bubble Garden, a romp-friendly children’s play land at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, made of white, plastic spheres and fake grass.

There are bold experiments transforming common materials into innovative housing units or shelters, like Two Barns and the Bump House, both of which turn

pre-fab, agricultural shed materials into versatile and open-ended contemporary structures.

And there are over-the-top dreams. For example, Foam Thing — an indoor amphitheater built for Denver’s 2015 Biennial of the Americas, with seating fashioned out of giant Styrofoam blocks. Or the Bubble Gum Canopy, an oversized pavilion designed for a Denver Botanic Gardens competition that features a sprawling, flat roof held up by a series of pink columns that resemble stretched, chewed gum. Some of the projects are built, some are in the planning stages and some don’t have a snowball’s chance of ever being realized. To Independent, there’s no difference. They’re equally valid because they were conjured more for that big conversation than they were for actual construction, or as Andersen puts it, to “challenge our assumptions and give us choices about how the world should look and the ways that we can look at it.”



Andersen works with teens designing a new lounge for the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver’s fourth floor. The furniture, modeled here, will be made of two-by-four wooden boards and installed this spring.





Independent Architecture designed this dormitory at the Catamount Center, an ecological research institute located near Colorado Springs. The building, integrated with its sloped site, offers Catamount students a wide-angle view of Pikes Peak. The courtyard in the center doubles as outdoor classroom space.



There's some pie-in-the-sky luxury in the way the firm operates — architects bring in money when they break ground, not when they dream — but Independent makes it work. The firm's small size gives it financial flexibility so it doesn't need to have a lot of projects going to cover its operating expenses. Plus, Andersen supplements the income from his practice by teaching. He's an associate professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago and travels there several times a year from his Denver base to work with grad students.

There are advantages to having a faculty position at a major architecture school. You have access to the time and the hardware to plot out and develop fresh concepts. You get peers who want to discuss the esoteric edges of architectural thought. It supplies inspiration beyond what most architects get from client meetings where practical things like costs and zoning codes limit the discussion.

"I get to talk to people who work differently and take different positions on important architectural issues," Andersen says. "The schools are where big ideas develop and are challenged, mostly through drawings, models, texts, exhibitions, lectures and gossip — rather than buildings."

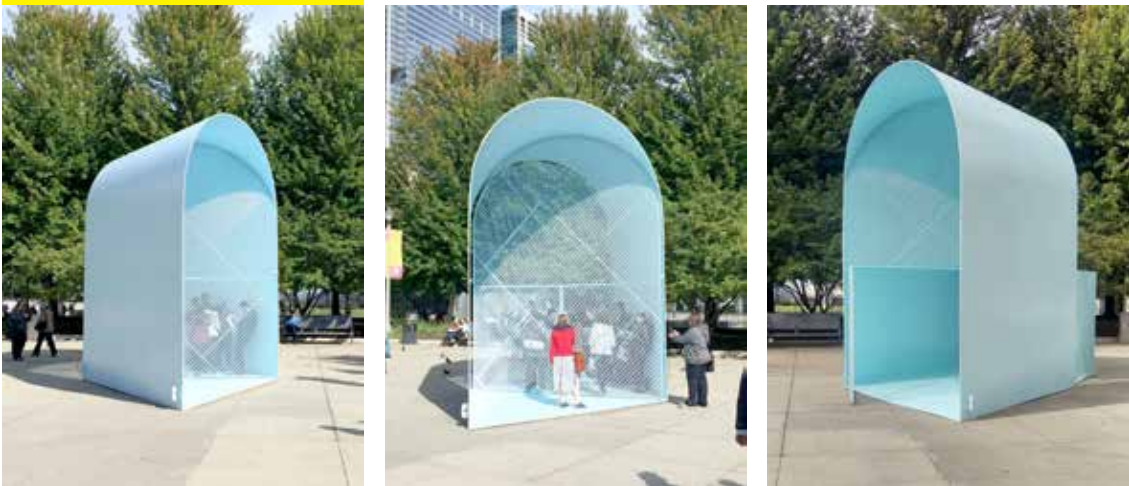
Independent Architecture's built work does provide an opportunity for real-world applications of some of those off-beat ideas, and Andersen believes its Denver location has its advantages. The city is far enough away from the epicenter of American architectural academia, for example, that he can work through concepts without a lot of people noticing. "If a project really goes off the rails, nobody is paying attention, so we can just move on to the next one," he says. "The most challenging aspect is that they're also not paying attention when we do something really great."



Andersen designed “Five Rooms” for the most recent Chicago Architecture Biennial. The project was an intervention inside the Chicago Cultural Center that used structural glazed tile to divide an existing, nondescript hallway into five smaller gallery spaces.



Independent Architecture collaborated with Paul Preissner Architects on this kiosk for the Chicago Architecture Biennial in Millennium Park. The barrel-vaulted structure is divided by a metal screen creating separate spaces for potential vendors and their customers. It was eventually moved to Chicago’s Rainbow Beach.



Paul Andersen co-wrote “The Architecture of Patterns” with David Salomon and collaborated with David Carson on its entertaining design. The soft-cover book explores patterns found in the contemporary social fabric and how they influence building design.

“But that’s not a big deal. I’ll take freedom over attention.”

That said, recognition isn’t a problem for Andersen these days. Motherhouse has received significant attention already, winning a mention from the 2018 Progressive Architecture Awards. The honor goes to innovative projects that are yet to be constructed, and it’s a prestigious and often career-advancing nod that has gone, in the past, to such esteemed firms as Steven Holl Architects, Morphosis Architects and Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

In his comments on Motherhouse, Progressive Awards juror Florian Idenburg seemed to understand exactly how Independent’s broad practice was manifested in the Sunnyside project: “It is playing with the very conventional American idea of home, with the porch and garage in a suburban setting. It’s a very American house,” he wrote.

Motherhouse comes with some unconventional attributes, of course, starting with the name. The place isn’t

for Andersen’s mother, though she’s an investor in the unique endeavor that’s part case house and part spec house. It’s actually going on the market soon — “if we make money, that’s great, but we’re not trying to make money,” Andersen says. The name teases the idea that young architects can only get backing for their projects from their families.

There are other unusual characteristics, including the diagonal stripes, which are aligned with the pitch of the roof rather than the walls, and which also cover a detached 550-square-foot, rear-yard garage. They give the house a unique personality, but are another attempt to honor the hyperlocal style; Sunnyside is full of ornate jewel boxes whose wood-shingled facades are painted in rows of multicolored shades.

And the house doesn’t exactly have a front door. There are possible entrances on every side of it, and no less than four equal and functional doors facing the street. Andersen is purposely not telling people where

to enter and he’s setting the doorbell, mailbox and address plaque on posts placed off to the side of the property, with no navigational indicators of how one might actually get inside the place.

The future owners will get to toy around with Motherhouse, deciding, — and possibly changing — where their guests officially arrive. The dialogue with design, the innovation and evolution, the progress and the playing, will likely go on and on. ■

Ray Mark Rinaldi is a freelance arts journalist who splits his time between Denver and Mexico City. He writes about the fine arts for the Denver Post and his work has appeared in Dwell magazine, the New York Times, Hyperallergic, and other publications internationally. He is a fellow with the National Arts Journalism Program and a 2018 winner of the Rabkin Prize for visual arts writing.



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THE MOD POTTER

WITH FENWAY CLAYWORKS, DENVER'S SEAN VANDERVLIEET IS BRINGING POTTERY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY WITH A MODERN AND CLEAN AESTHETIC THAT "YOUR KIDS WILL FIGHT OVER SOMEDAY."

WORDS: Kris Scott • IMAGES: James Florio

FOR YEARS, Sean VanderVliet went to the same 9-to-5ish jobs that most of us do. First at startup Craftsy, where he was a business systems manager, streamlining and integrating software platforms, and then later moving on to another startup venture, FrictionLabs, where he managed the rock-climbing chalk manufacturer's supply chain, warehouse and shipping operations. None of that work, however, was as satisfying for him as his longtime hobby. So, he left the world of startups for a new one — one of clay lumps, spinning wheels and the intricacies, science and sometimes-maddening guesswork behind glazing —becoming a full-time potter.



But it wouldn't be accurate to say he's left the past in the past. As he's turned into a more prolific and skilled potter, VanderVliet's time at startups is turning out to be his ace in the hole, and might just be the driving force, along with his crazy work ethic and mad throwing skills, behind what he hopes is his eventual clay-based empire. Below, he tells Modern in Denver more about that, as well as how pottery became his true passion and why.

CAN YOU DRAW A LINE FROM YOUR WORK AND TIME AT CRAFTSY AND FRICTIONLABS TO WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW?

Absolutely. I would never have had the confidence to even try this (without that experience). When I left to do this full-time, it was never to just make and sell pots. I wanted to build a business. At Craftsby, I really had to learn how to manage my time, and how to deliver clear timelines and expectations to colleagues. That's been so helpful with how I communicate with current accounts. The last thing I want to do is overpromise and have people be disappointed with what they receive or when they receive it. I was also introduced to so many software platforms there that I started Fenway Clayworks knowing exactly which ones would best work for my own business. FrictionLabs helped even more. Seeing how a product-based business works, understanding rudimentary business stuff like supply chain principles, what an hour of my time is actually worth, and how to truly calculate costs. Without that, I never would have known what I was doing. Those hurdles alone, for a lot of potters and craftspeople, are so high that I think most people struggle to make the leap.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT BEING A POTTER THAT SPEAKS TO YOU AND KEEPS YOU INTERESTED?

I love clay so much. To me it's like a true meritocracy — you can either throw a good pot or you can't, and it's so obvious. I like that. Little is left to the judgement of the viewer. Also, that sensation where, when I'm throwing pottery, there is nothing else I can think about. If I'm not thinking about how much clay is between my fingertips, how much pressure I'm using, how fast the wheel is going — I'll ruin the pot. There's nothing else in my life that requires 100 percent of my attention like that. And I love that every day I do it, I get better. I can throw 10 bowls in one day and my tenth will be a lot better than the first.

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN AS A POTTER?

My work has changed a lot. Back in the day my file was quite a bit different. It was a lot flatter — I couldn't throw with height because that's really challenging. I don't feel like I actually got to a point to where I felt like my work was any good until four or five years ago, and I've been doing this for 18 years.



VanderVliet does the bulk of his pot throwing in his RiNo home studio (shown on the preceding spread), and his glazing and firing at the Arvada Ceramic Arts Guild. To achieve the boldly colorful hues in his newer Eichler line, he applies three layers of underglaze — typically not used as a finishing glaze — in each color, applying multiple layers of masking tape to achieve the crisp lines. The process, he notes, takes three to four times longer than his other pottery pieces. Figuring the technique out involved “a ton of testing,” and experimenting with glaze techniques is a process he's learned to embrace. “You could glaze the rest of your life and still feel like you had a lot to learn.”



“I LOVE CLAY SO MUCH. TO ME IT'S LIKE A TRUE MERITOCRACY — YOU CAN EITHER THROW A GOOD POT OR YOU CAN'T, AND IT'S SO OBVIOUS. I LIKE THAT. LITTLE IS LEFT TO THE JUDGEMENT OF THE VIEWER.”

– Sean VanderVliet

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN YOUR AESTHETIC TO PEOPLE?

Somebody I was talking to recently assumed I had another job, and they had decided I was an architect. That kind of says a lot about my work. I think a lot about Scandinavian design, and its influences of on '50s and '60s modern architecture in the U.S. When I'm making pieces — it's funny and it's one of the things I like about where I'm at — I don't make them thinking or hoping people will buy them. I make what I want in my own home. I make what I want in my own home, and trust that enough people out there will be drawn to the direction I'm taking.

YOU STARTED FENWAY CLAYWORKS IN EARLY 2018. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN THE LAST YEAR?

What I'm trying to get better at is learning how to ask for help. I've done it alone for about a year, and my goal all along is to prove there's something here, that there's an appetite for it, and that people are engaged by it. And in that way it's been a huge success. I know I have a real thing here. And now I'm at that step of, 'How do we scale this and how do we find the right people to fill in and not do this all alone?' Because I can't anymore.

SO WHAT'S THE ULTIMATE GOAL?

I'd love to eventually be the modern equivalent of Farmhouse Pottery, but for a younger audience with 21st century homes — fresher, lighter, more modern. And I think that's totally attainable. This year is really going to be about finding the right people to help: someone to own the marketing, from social media to the website to product photography and things like that. Since I'm the only one producing pots, anything that takes me away from the wheel is challenging for me.

I'd absolutely love to go out and hire two full-time potters to come in and throw a line I design. I don't think I'm there yet, but that's ultimately what I want. I want to have a space — an actual physical brick and mortar store — where people can come and see potters working and have a cup of coffee in the mugs we make. Have a production area where people can watch people throw pots or glaze them and also shop retail. That's the ultimate vision. I want to make modern heirlooms. I want my pots to be things that your kids or grandkids will fight over someday. ■

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More of VanderVliet's Eichler line pieces are shown here and opposite. The middle photo, opposite, are a set of "trees" from his earlier Snowmass line, which he still produces. Of the Eichler pieces, he says: "I could never fill a kiln if I did all my glazing like that. And the nice thing is people still love the Snowmass style, and I do, too. It's very light and fresh." Below is a pot waiting to be glazed, and some earlier pieces he did while experimenting with the underglazing process.





A NATURAL STATE

An extensive redesign combines expert craftsmanship with elevated simplicity to let this Aspen home live more comfortably in its outdoor setting. After all, it's not every home that has a butte for a back yard.

WORDS: Kris Scott
IMAGES: Draper White



There are countless Colorado homes that intentionally foster a connection between the indoors and outdoors. The state is, after all, known for its breathtaking landscapes, its residents known for their love of the outdoors. With many of these houses, however — whether due to site selection, zoning restrictions or the architect in charge — that connection can be seen and appreciated, but still feel somewhat removed.

That is definitely not the case with the Red Butte home in Aspen. From almost any room in the house, the trees seem like neighbors waving at you in the wind, the wild grasses and shrubs, just feet from a sliding glass door, an extension of the home's luxurious material palette. The nearby rock formations — including the butte for which the home is named — a part of the architecture.

Which is exactly what architects Todd Kennedy, AIA, and John Cottle, FAIA, of CCY Architects wanted it to

feel like. Though the house looks like a new build, it was actually a remodel, albeit a very extensive one. Zoning regulations dictated that the new house exist in the same footprint as the previous structure. This restriction initially felt like a constraint, but Kennedy and Cottle note that it ended up being their greatest opportunity because of how ensconced in the natural surroundings the original site was.

CCY's clients are a gregarious couple from Houston — Cottle calls them “maybe the nicest people in the world” — with a love of hosting family and friends for games, meals and sharing bottles from their extensive wine collection with guests. They selected the site in large part because of its proximity to Red Butte — the husband grew up with a geologist father and has always been fascinated by geology. The wife loves the nearby wildlife. They both love that the lot feels pastoral yet maintains a connection to its surrounding neighborhood. Before the remodel began, they lived in the existing house for a year.



“TO ME THE MAIN STORY OF THE HOUSE, OR A BIG PART OF IT, IS: WHERE WAS THE DESIGN HERE? WHAT SHOULD IT BE ABOUT? AND WE EVOLVED TO A PLACE WHERE WE THOUGHT THE ARCHITECTURE SHOULD GET OUT OF THE WAY AND LET NATURE AND THE SURROUNDINGS TALK.” - John Cottle

When they did finally meet with CCY, it was because the firm has extensive experience with Aspen’s building codes and permitting process, but also because the clients were struck with how the projects in CCY’s portfolio “fit into the environment.” Clients and architects met for a three-day intensive design charrette, conducted at the house pre-remodel, often on an outdoor deck. Discussions were had, countless sketches penciled out, and everyone repeatedly walked the home’s existing footprint trying to gauge the best design approach. The homeowners, of course, brought their own list of needs to the table, which included plenty of space to entertain and spend time outdoors. “The clients always wanted a house that was about people first — something that was sophisticated but informal,” Cottle says. The couple notes that they also requested that the final design be comfortable, have modernist appeal and a low-maintenance material palette.

During the charrette process, Cottle says, “we started to think of the house as a series of vignettes, especially in terms of its exterior and its mapping, and how those vignettes could grab the different pieces of nature and still screen the neighbors.” It was during this process that the constraints started to reveal themselves as more of an opportunity, he adds. “To me the main story of the house, or a big part of it, is: Where was the design here?



TOP: The plantation grown teak deck, which wraps around three sides of the house, was one of the original home’s existing features, though it has been extensively remodeled. “It really helps blur the line between indoor and outdoor living space,” says CCY’s John Cottle. “and you really grab this red butte, which was so important to the clients.” **ABOVE:** The space, which you can also glimpse in the background of the top photo, serves as part-pantry, part-bar when the clients entertain.



The star design features of the living room are its intimate connection to the outdoors and the “bookmatched” steel panels that clad the fireplace. “It’s a remarkably simple solution that’s about the beauty of the steel and not a whole lot else,” says CCY architect Todd Kennedy.

What should it be about? And we evolved to a place where we thought the architecture should get out of the way and let nature and the surroundings talk.”

To accomplish that they removed solid walls, allowing natural features to act as exterior walls and privacy screens. Expansive windows let evergreens and an aspen grove to the south, and the sharply rising butte to the north, become spatial definitions for living areas.

The home’s connection to nature isn’t solely based on how up close and personal that nature is — it also has a lot to do with the vernacular of CCY’s design. Kennedy notes that they “decided fairly early on that the project should be done in a really simple, spare language — that we would be able to grab nature more effectively if the project got simpler and simpler and simpler. If the architecture got out of the way, in a sense, then it could have a more successful connection to the site.”

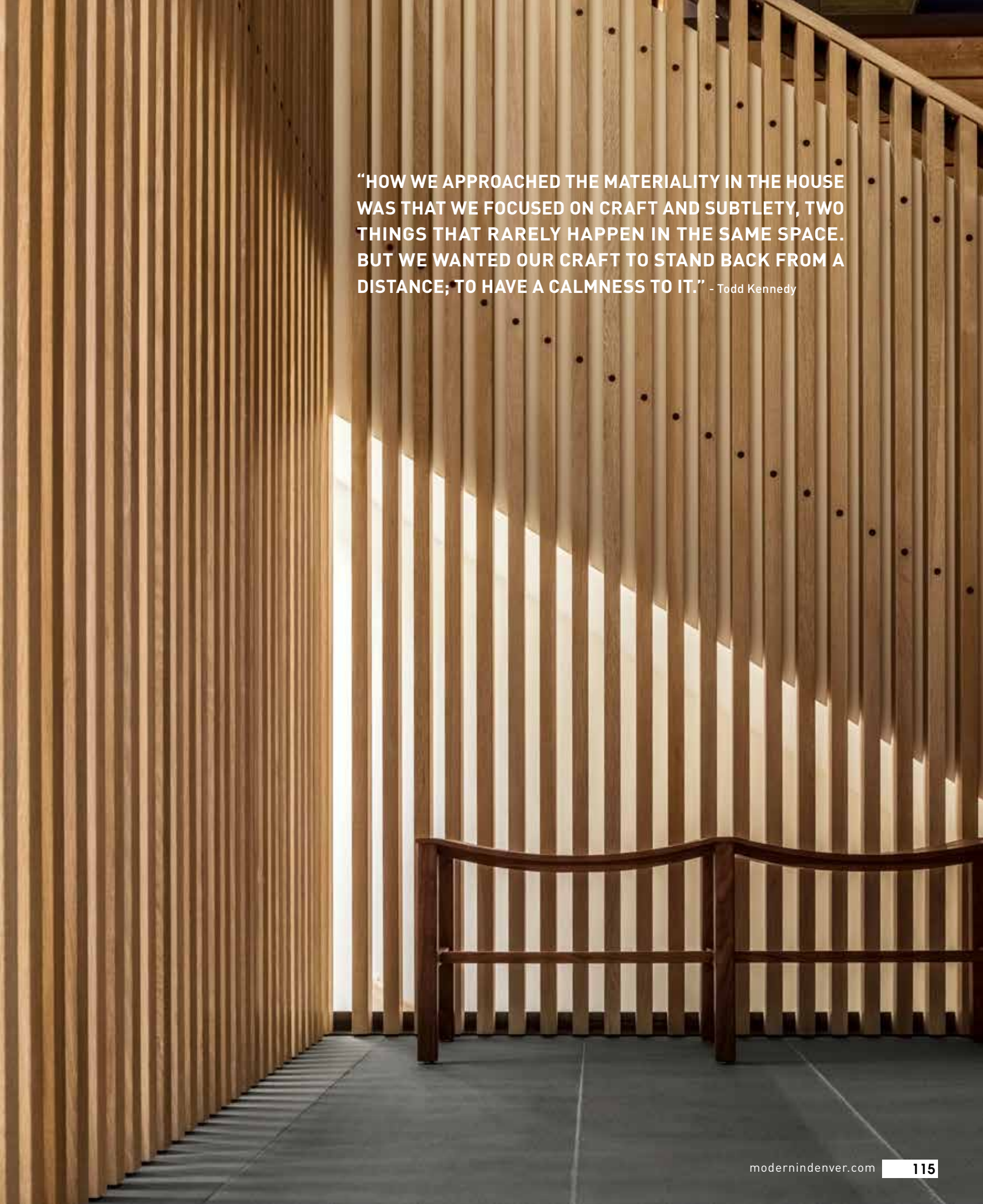
That approach in no way meant artless, though — a fact that Cottle says has a lot to do with Kennedy’s skill. “Todd is a master at making things that are simple but that also have care and passion and richness.” The clients also note this complete dedication to detail when talking about their new home. Its appeal, they say, “is a function of truly of obsessing over every single detail — how something goes around a corner, how a piece of wood terminates at the end of a hall. Everybody involved in this project was meticulous. Everyone obsessed over everything.”

“How we approached the materiality in the house was that we focused on craft and subtlety,” Kennedy adds, “two things that rarely happen in the same space. But we wanted our craft to stand back from a distance; to have a calmness to it.”

To that end they used a “mountain monochromatic” material palette that included reclaimed elm in ➔116



“HOW WE APPROACHED THE MATERIALITY IN THE HOUSE WAS THAT WE FOCUSED ON CRAFT AND SUBTLETY, TWO THINGS THAT RARELY HAPPEN IN THE SAME SPACE. BUT WE WANTED OUR CRAFT TO STAND BACK FROM A DISTANCE; TO HAVE A CALMNESS TO IT.” - Todd Kennedy





different ways to introduce a “subtle shift in texture and character that adds depth and richness that maybe doesn’t exist upon your first impression,” says Kennedy. The rest of the home’s materiality was similarly spare: concrete floors, painted sheetrock, steel and beetle-kill spruce.

The culmination of this equation — simplicity plus an almost obsessive thoughtfulness in the project’s details — is a home that feels serene and comfortable yet reveals itself layer by layer, detail by detail. The more you gaze at its details, the deeper your understanding of the extreme amount of care that went into its seamless-yet-carefully crafted design. The homeowners note that it was a remodel that “turned into an art project.”

Take, for example, what Cottle calls “one of the defining moments of the house:” the stairs. Each vertical wood slat is precisely spaced, each piece of hardware meticulously placed. “Todd spent half a day laying out where the fasteners were going to go on the stairs,” Cottle says. “After that was done, we started thinking, ‘How can this, as an expression of craft, begin to make its way into other



A trio of views revealing how comfortably the master bedroom connects to the site’s largely untamed outdoors. Though this room appears simple and restrained, CCY’s design for this space was meticulous. The roof overhang was specifically sized to allow full views of the nearby Red Butte while lying in bed. They also added a half-wall, visible in the bottom photo, which serves to “edit out quite a few houses in that direction.” The outdoor trellised wall provides privacy for an outdoor shower, and the space is a beautiful example of how serenely the material palette of steel, elm, spruce and concrete blends together.



moments of the house?” And that really occurs in a lot of the millwork details — the bathroom vanity, built-in benches, window seats and shower screens. Those are all a good example of how that detailed expression of craft pulls all the way through the house.”

Another example are the “bookmatched” steel panels that clad the fireplace. “We wanted to focus on how the fireplace could create an art wall in the space,” Kennedy notes. To that end, CCY worked with a Seattle-based fabricator/craftsman who spent days flipping through countless stacks of steel plates to find two with annealing marks — those made when steel is heated and cooled — that “made sense together.”

Kennedy notes that these panels and other materials throughout the house are a reflection of how the firm has evolved in its approach to materiality over the last few years. “We’ve gone back to letting a piece of wood be a piece of wood and embracing this feeling that it doesn’t need to be perfect. It’s about finding beauty in the reality of what a material is,” he says.

In the end, say the homeowners, a “true collaboration” developed between the architects, clients and everyone involved. “That was the beauty of working with CCY. They worked with us on every detail. We all wanted the same thing in the end, and we accomplished it. We would do it all over again.” ■

In yet another example of simplicity adding depth, CCY used an East Coast-based painting subcontractor to apply a finish to the windows of the 7,728-square-foot home. “The finish she used really transformed them,” Kennedy explains. “She used an ebonized finish — they’re not quite stained and not quite painted —that added richness and depth. It definitely helps elevate the window system from standard to something that feels quite a bit more rich.”

PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECTURE + INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE
CCY Architects

BUILDER
Sallie Golden Building and Design
Steeplechase Construction

LANDSCAPE
Connect One Design

INTERIORS
Kathleen Pressler

BATHROOM CABINETS
Genesis Hospitality Corporation

COUNTERTOPS
Thassos Marble & Caesarstone

ENTRY DOORS + FIREPLACE STEEL PANELS
Custom steel by Company K (Seattle)

EXTERIOR SIDING
Beetle-kill spruce — Vintage Woods

PATIO DOORS
Wieland, Loewen

DESIGN ENCORE

Denver design studio Acquilano and financial tech giant BillTrust have collaborated on four of the latter's professional spaces, in the process building a synergistic relationship based on trust, ingenuity and creativity. Their latest triumph? BillTrust's colorful and cohesive New Jersey headquarters.

WORDS: Kris Scott

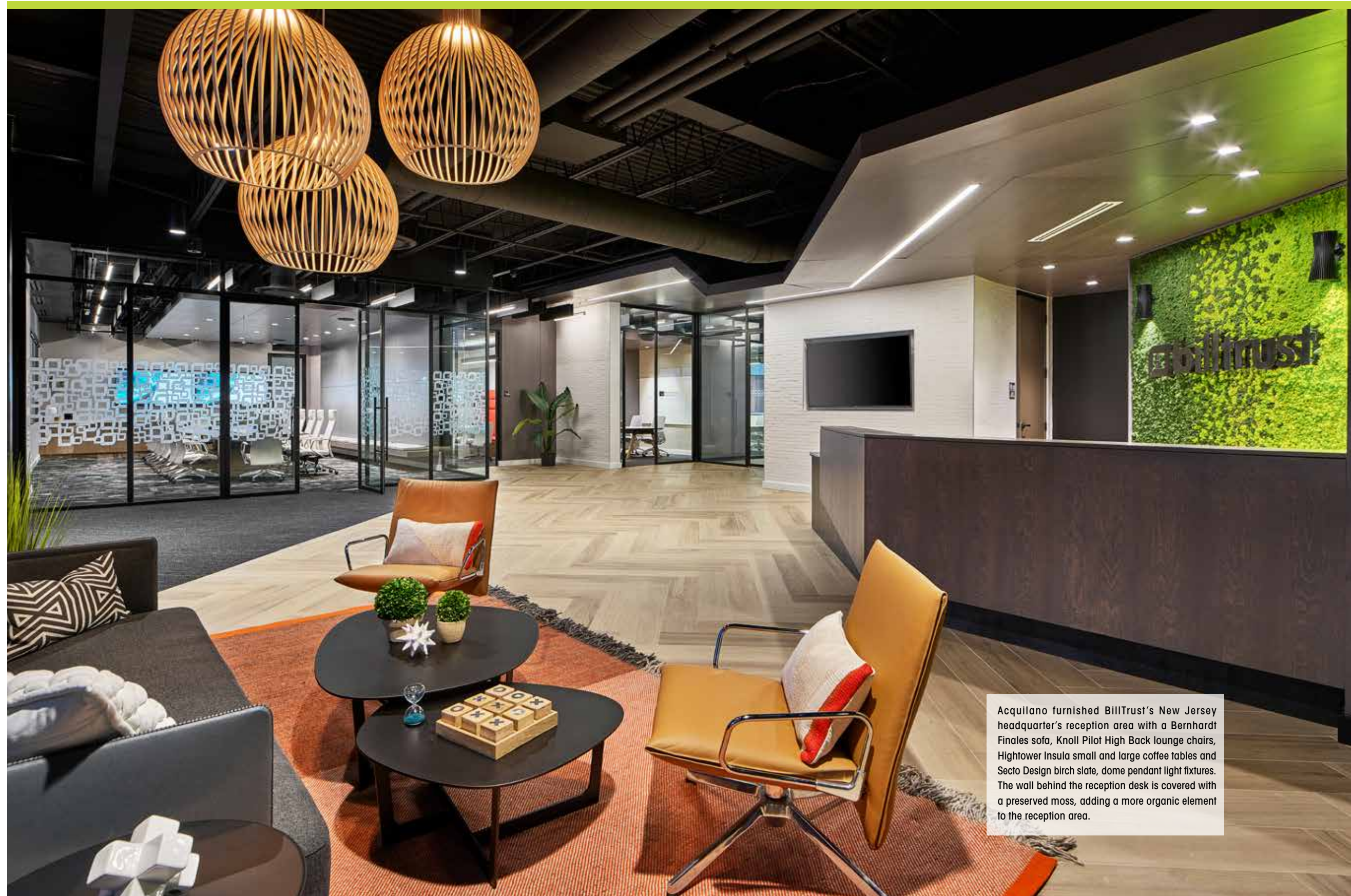
IMAGES: Jeffrey Totaro

In the spring of 2016, workplace interior architecture firm Acquilano wrapped up a Denver-based expansion project for a new client, BillTrust, a financial tech company headquartered in New Jersey.

A little over a year later, based on the success of that experience, BillTrust's chief financial officer, Ed Jordan, flew Acquilano principal Drew Marlow and project manager Rachel Sivak out to New Jersey to help him locate a new space for the growing fin-tech company's new headquarters.

"It was unique," Marlow and Sivak note. "We were brought in to help find the future home of BillTrust. We commonly consult on real estate searches but having an in-depth understanding of the company and its people elevated our influence." The real estate professionals had lined up viewings of virgin sites, a brownfield manufacturing site, second-generation typical office, and their existing facility, a former American Standard factory. "Ed identified the company's priorities — growth, parking, proximity, cost and timing. Otherwise he looked to Acquilano to identify the challenges with each of the properties, but most importantly, to 'see the vision.' Is there opportunity here to create a headquarters environment that would strengthen BillTrust's close company culture, a large part of the new facility's ultimate design."

The team landed on the "typical office" site, which would require an extensive overhaul. But, in what has come to be true BillTrust fashion, some things come first, Sivak says. "The first thing they ask is, 'Where's the ping-pong table going?' and the second is, 'Have you laid in our popcorn machine?'"



Acquilano furnished BillTrust's New Jersey headquarter's reception area with a Bernhardt Finales sofa, Knoll Pilot High Back lounge chairs, Hightower Insula small and large coffee tables and Secto Design birch slate, dome pendant light fixtures. The wall behind the reception desk is covered with a preserved moss, adding a more organic element to the reception area.

DESIGN ENCORE



TOP: The conference room includes a glossed walnut Nucraft table with hoop legs and 20 OFS Pur Highback swivel chairs, as well as additional floating-bench overflow seating along the wall.

ABOVE: The coffee bar, one of the many places employees can gather when not working, features Andreu World barstools and two WEP Bella wooden pendants.

RIGHT: An open lounge area outside the scrum rooms is furnished with Naughtone quilted, melon-hued Clout 2 sofas and the circular Knoll Rockwell Occasional and Allemuir Host tables. The Boet bar stools are manufactured by Hightower.

“WHEN YOU’RE TALKING 90,000 SQUARE FEET AND, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT’S A LITTLE BIT CIRCUITOUS TO GET THROUGH THE FLOOR PLAN, YOU DON’T WANT TO TURN THE CORNER AND SEE A 200-FOOT STRAIGHT SHOT OF BORING. WE PLANNED THE CORNERS AND INTERSECTIONS TO PROVIDE A BIT OF ARCHITECTURAL RELIEF. THESE POINTS ARE DISTRIBUTED ALONG THE TRAIL, DESIGNED AS MOMENTS OF INTEREST. THIS WAY, EVERY TURN PRESENTS A NEW EXPERIENCE AND BEGINS TO PROVIDE UNIQUE CHARACTER TO EACH OF THE DEPARTMENT’S AREAS.” - Drew Marlow, Acquilano



This breakout alcove, opposite a row of scrum pods, is designed to help soften circulation and improve flow. Acquilano outfitted it with Bernhardt Apel ottomans and a whiteboard for spontaneous strategizing. Lighting is provided by an ALW Circular Pendant.

Unlike other tech companies for which a ping pong table is more of a symbolic cliché than serious enticement for team members to engage in fun, BillTrust takes its ping pong very seriously. Company CEO Flint Lane is, after all, a tournament level, competitive ping pong player who also happens to own one of the largest ping pong recreation centers in New Jersey.

The placement of the table was a factor in the decision to design and install a heavy-timber, white oak, central “feature” staircase with seamless, adjacent stadium seating that doubles as informal meeting space and a place to watch the table tennis games. “Ping pong is a huge part of their strong culture,” Sivak says.

In fact, taking BillTrust’s company culture seriously, says Jordan, is a big part of why the company chose to work with Acquilano again. “Their creativity and ability to listen to what we want and then deliver something that’s not traditional — they’ve been able to do that. They’re excellent to work with, they’re very timely and efficient, and they relate to who we want to be and how we want to be presented.”

The concept of connectivity, for example, is one of the tenets of BillTrust culture, and therefore plays a central role in its headquarters’ design. There’s an area near the entry, for example, with vending machines, two bar-like seating areas and weekly fresh fruit bowls that Marlow likens to a “trailhead.” “Billtrust wanted to provide its

employees a central node where different departments would interface daily,” Sivak says.

There’s also the company dining area, which resembles a café more than corporate breakroom. Its asymmetrical, brightly colored booths are meant to evoke whimsy and playful drama that draw people in, as well as an oversized central island where BillTrust’s employees gather for potlucks and parties while listening to the muffled popping sounds of nearby ping-pong contests.

When not in those common areas, however, people are hard at work, and the manner in which much of that labor gets done is another focus of Acquilano’s design. “Scrum is the core of how they work,” Marlow says, referencing a fluid form of project management that involves frequent meetings and daily communication carried out in quick bursts of work called “sprints.”

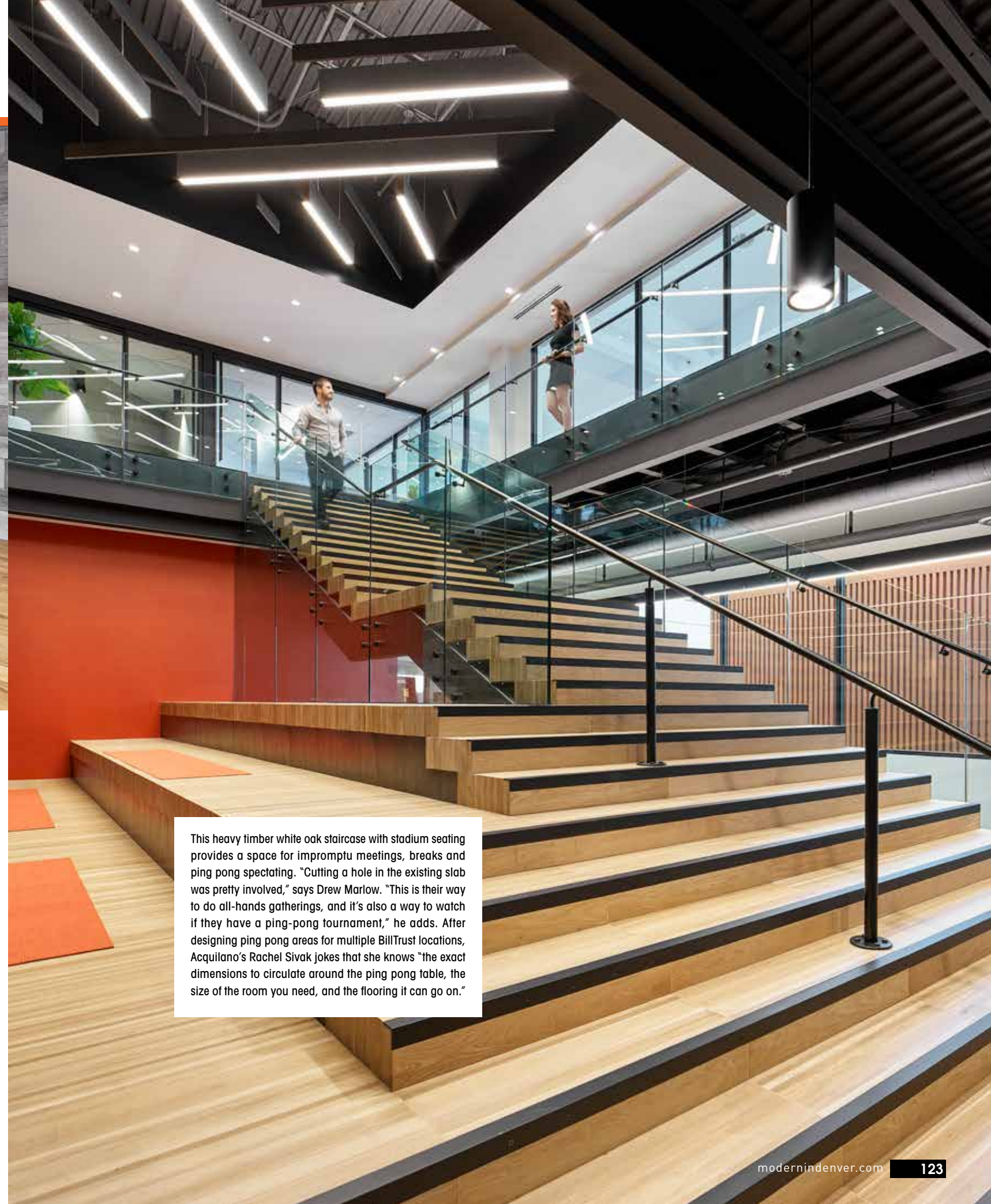
For those sessions Acquilano introduced scrum “pods” — but in true Acquilano fashion, they looked to improve



upon what they had done for the Denver office by asking those scrummers about what had worked and what they'd change. "Then we pinged the New Jersey group," Marlow says, "and gave them a survey about how they wanted to be working. We got a ton of valuable feedback." That feedback led to a row of scrum pods with features like center teaming tables integrated with smart screens — something not present in the Denver office — whiteboard walls and double glass doors that can be slid open or closed depending on the teams' preferences for quiet or a more connected vibe to the area outside the pods.

"Acquilano did a phenomenal job in the construction and design of those, and it's really helped drive the culture," Jordan says.

With such a large space, however, there's of course much more to the design than areas to play, eat and scrum. "When you're talking 90,000 square feet and, especially when it's a little bit circuitous to get through



This heavy timber white oak staircase with stadium seating provides a space for impromptu meetings, breaks and ping pong spectating. "Cutting a hole in the existing slab was pretty involved," says Drew Marlow. "This is their way to do all-hands gatherings, and it's also a way to watch if they have a ping-pong tournament," he adds. After designing ping pong areas for multiple BillTrust locations, Acquilano's Rachel Sivak jokes that she knows "the exact dimensions to circulate around the ping pong table, the size of the room you need, and the flooring it can go on."



the floor plan, you don't want to turn the corner and see a 200-foot straight shot of boring," Marlow says. "We planned the corners and intersections to provide a bit of architectural relief. These points are distributed along the trail, designed as moments of interest. This way, every turn presents a new experience and begins to provide unique character to each of the department's areas."

A lot of that visual intrigue is in the mix of materials, furniture and "all the little artifacts and stuff" scattered throughout the space, Marlow says.

More permanent features such as millwork, flooring and lighting are more neutral, with high-contrast blacks and whites, blackened steel, wood tones and plenty of glass chosen to represent BillTrust's focus on transparency. But Sivak and Marlow also brought in pops of color and whimsy with more transitory items such as furniture and fabrics that can be relocated if the company continues to grow. High-backed, half-circle sofas upholstered in scallop-stitched chartreuse and orange, for instance, or banquet walls lined in a brightly colored orange felt. The combination of neutrality and whimsy was intentional — "we were talking a lot about balance, the

BillTrust's community room is a place where employees take breaks, have lunch and it's also a space where office gatherings, potlucks and parties happen. Above, the open dining area features Andreu World Flex bar chairs, Naughtone Café tables and Hightower BAI chairs for table seating.

OPPOSITE: The asymmetrical booths feature custom banquette seating as well as a custom patterned wallpaper. The orange walls are upholstered in a Knoll Pivot textile that mimics wool and provides acoustical properties, as does the large Muuto Under the Bell pendant fabricated from recycled plastic.



juxtaposition between the bold and neutral elements. Some of the harsher lines are neutralized and softened with some of those finishes," Sivak says.

And then there are the features that she calls the "Easter eggs" — unexpected materials or items that bring a sense of delight when discovered, such as a preserved, textural moss wall behind the front entrance desk. "We've worked closely with Rachel and Drew, and they continue to surprise us on how creative they can be," Jordan notes. "Rachel is wise beyond her years — has great eye and palette. It's been rare that she puts something in front of us that we don't love almost instantly."

In the end, the entire space adds up to a workplace that the BillTrust team is raving about, says Jordan. "I was getting an update recently from our head of development, and he was telling me about being in the cafeteria line and talking to a newer employee who said: 'I love the people here and I love the culture — but I really love the office. It's the best office I've ever worked in.'"

It's also received "high accolades," Jordan notes, "from everybody who should know what they're talking about. We've had quite a few people come through here from the New Jersey real estate community that think it could be the nicest space certainly in central or south Jersey."

Since completing the headquarters, praise like that has brought BillTrust and Acquilano back together to partner on two other company locations and, Jordan adds, "they'll be the first phone call if we do something else at some point.

"They've got a solid team there. They've become more like family than consultants to us," he adds. "We know a lot about them, and they know a lot about us, and they've done a very good job dancing to the same beat as we go through this process with them." ■

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DESIGNING THE FUTURE

WORDS: Kris Scott • IMAGES: James Florio

CAN DESIGN REVOLUTIONIZE THE WAY BUSINESS IS DONE? ROTH LIVING'S NEW ARCH11-DESIGNED SHOWROOM PROVES NOT ONLY THAT IT CAN, BUT THAT INDUSTRY-CHANGING DESIGN CAN BE BOTH CUTTING-EDGE AND COMFORTABLE AT THE SAME TIME.

Building and designing a new home is a challenging process for most homeowners. Between online and in-store shopping experiences, consumers often are overwhelmed with options. Which is why, around five years ago, Roth Living set out to simplify the process and create a much more personalized experience that would be groundbreaking in the kitchen and bath industry.

Denise Knoblich, Vice President of Corporate Marketing, notes: "Designing a kitchen can become an emotional process and we want consumers to feel brave and confident about their decisions. Our goal is to get closer to the consumer by developing a showroom experience that provides unique value. Roth Living showrooms now offer tools to simplify how clients make appliance selections to meet the needs of their lifestyle."

To that end, Roth Living's president, John Thielen, and Knoblich decided the company's showrooms, located in Kansas City, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, St. Louis and Denver, would undergo dramatic makeovers. The Denver showroom is considered the firm's flagship store, so they knew it in particular had to be a next-level design.

Once a lot was secured, they hit the ground running with design partner Arch11. But — no surprise here for a company as cutting-edge as Roth — the work started long before the design and construction phase.

This second-floor view inside Roth Living's new showroom highlights the breadth of its product line as well as the amount of space and design effort the project devoted to helping Roth's clientele make decisions in a fun, informed and intuitive way.

"WE WANTED SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE IN SOMEONE'S HOME INSTEAD OF A BUILDING ON BROADWAY. AT THE SAME TIME, WE WANTED IT TO HAVE A HIGH LEVEL OF PRESENCE ON THE STREET TO MARKET THE BRAND AND THE KITCHENS INSIDE." - KEN ANDREWS, ARCH 11



ABOVE: The glass used in Roth Living's new showroom façade was a strategic part of the design strategy, meant to draw passersby's attention to the building. "It's almost like a living billboard," says Arch11's Claire Jordan.

RIGHT: Roth says the showroom's product area is meant to be "a place where the clientele can see all types of Sub-Zero, Wolf, Cove and Asko appliances side by side, without ornate finishes to distract the eye." The cabinets used in this area of the showroom were fabricated by VonMod, and the cooktop island is clad in graphite marble from The Stone Collection. Figuring out a way to cleanly and simply showcase all those products together wasn't easy, says Knoblich, who adds: "Engineering this space was almost harder than some of the kitchens."

THE RESEARCH PHASE

It was around five years ago when Knoblich and Thielen knew Roth Living needed an overhaul to support an evolving industry, but they didn't yet know what that looked like. So they took a multi-faceted approach. They enlisted an industrial design company that had helped build successful company products such as the Smart Car and Swatch. Studied brands like Burberry and Tesla. They even delved into scientific approaches, researching left vs. right brain decision-making — both important when it comes to kitchen design, Knoblich notes. And they made multiple trips to luxury kitchen dealers in Germany and Italy as well as visits to the bi-annual EuroCucina in Milan.

It was a lot of work, but in the end, says Arch11's Claire Jordan, who

embarked on much of the journey with Roth, it was worth it. "Europe is much more cutting edge in how they think about kitchen design, how it's evolving and changing. It really informed how we were starting to lay out Denver."

So much so that when Roth Living sat down with the Arch11 team to start sketching out final schematics, the plans came together intuitively, Knoblich says. "If you look at the schematic design compared to what actually got built, it's really close."

THE CORE AND SHELL

The programmatic challenge of the new showroom building, says Arch11's Ken Andrews, AIA, was that "we wanted something that would make you feel like you were in someone's home instead of a building on Broadway. At the same





boffi kitchen / Roth's "Hidden Kitchen," designed by Solesdi's Ann Hofmeister, utilizes boffi's *HIDE* system, a collection that employs modular and customizable bi-folding pocket doors to make appliances and other kitchen features disappear when not in use. The *HIDE* doors shown here are a oak laminate and the island countertop is Carrara Marble. "We were excited to be able to showcase not only the classic side of boffi," Hofmeister says, "but the innovative side as well."

time, we wanted it to have a high level of presence on the street to market the brand and the kitchens inside."

To help realize that vision, the team chose brick to frame the north and south ends of the first floor, while the west-facing front is almost entirely glass, showcasing the designs inside. "It lights up like a jewel box at night," Knoblich says. The upper floors, which house a second area of the showroom, Roth's corporate offices and leasable space on the third level, are an intentional contrast, "as light and airy as they could be — to frame the first-floor showroom," Andrews notes.

To that end, those levels are clad with a flatlock metal shingle, chosen for its mutable nature. "It reflects light differently and has different qualities depending on what angle you're looking at it from," Andrews says. "It also changes throughout the day — if the sky is blue it takes on a much more of a blue hue; if the sun isn't out it takes on more of a titanium champagne hue."

There's a glass section on the north end of the building — Andrews refers to it as a "lantern" — that rises through all three levels, drawing attention from outside to the second-floor showroom's Culinary Kitchen.

OPPOSITE PAGE: This fin-like structure that begins above the product area and twists its way toward the staircase was designed by Arch11 and Roth in collaboration with Denver's VonMod. It was meant to not only draw the eye up to the showroom's second floor, but also to include a more architectural and sculptural detail in the space. It is one of Claire Jordan's favorite parts of the new showroom. "I like that it adds something dynamic to the space," she says.





bulthaup kitchen / The “Modern Kitchen” was designed using only two brands: Sub-Zero/Wolf and bulthaup. “It was important for Roth and bulthaup to make sure that all of the components included in the display, whether it was appliances, cabinetry, fixtures or other details, reflected the purity of each manufacturer,” says

bulthaup Denver’s William Landeros, who co-designed the kitchen with Jed MacKenzie. This space incorporates tall cabinetry in a sand beige anodized aluminum, and island cabinetry in a cashmere-colored lacquer. The island has a raised, integrated table element in natural oak, and a white, quartz stone custom countertop.

“We were looking to the lantern to say ‘look at me,’ drawing attention to the showroom interiors,” says Andrews.

THE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC SHOWROOM

And it is almost impossible not to notice what Roth calls its “Next Generation” showroom. Once inside, there are an impressive number of areas to discover and marvel. A stunning reception area, a brilliantly engineered product area, a video wall that helps consumers and designers make choices.

But it’s the numerous kitchen vignettes that are the real star.

Many have what Knoblich refers to as a “persona” — Urban, Modern, Suburban, Home Chef, Active Family, etc. — that helped drive its design. Others have a specific purpose, like the second-floor Culinary Kitchen — the one visible from the “lantern” — where live cooking demonstrations and “ownership experiences” are held featuring Roth’s in-house chef’s skills. Visitors can watch a gourmet meal being prepared for them while sipping wine and deciding if that convection steam oven is the one they want in their own home.

A number of the kitchens are visible from the street and two — the ➔ 140



William Ohs kitchen / Roth worked with William Ohs designer Linda McClean for the “Home Chef” kitchen, one of the showroom’s working kitchens used as a gathering place for small demonstrations. The custom cabinets are finished in Benjamin Moore’s “Newburg Green” with white oak interior. The countertops are a leathered Taj Mahal natural stone from The Stone Collection. “The entire package of this particular showroom is one of the best I’ve seen executed from the Roth team,” McClean says.



The back wall, to the left of the staircase, houses the showroom’s 16-by-9 foot digital wall, which helps customers visualize appliances in their own space. “Homeowners can view their curated product selection. The personalized consumer experience is unique in our industry,” Knoblich says. “It’s all life size and they can move it around to see exactly what they’re looking for.”





The 1,140-square-foot “Culinary Kitchen,” located on the showroom’s second floor and designed by EKD, is another of Roth’s working kitchen vignettes. Here they host product demonstrations and “cooking ownership” experiences designed to help consumers decide between appliance options. The Premier cabinets are finished in Paldao wood and the large island/cooking area countertop is Caesarstone in Cosmo White.

first-level boffi and bulthaup kitchens — were conceived as anchors for the north and south sections of the building. Jordan and Knoblich worked collaboratively with designers from those brands as well as William Ohs and EKD, all firms with which they have established relationships.

“The goal was really to not bog down the consumer,” Jordan says. “We wanted to be able to have the consumer come in and not feel overwhelmed by parts and pieces but rather, to be inspired.”

“There isn’t a place in this building that’s not without design intent,” Knoblich says. So, did Roth accomplish its objective of

getting closer to the customer and revolutionizing the consumer experience? Everyone involved thinks so, and the crowd of around 1,000 at the November grand opening seemed to think so, too. “Consumers and the design community are loving the experience. We’ve been shocked at how busy we’ve been out of the gate,” Knoblich says.

Thielen agrees: “It was important to make the design simple, but also create a building that’s interesting while allowing the appliances to speak for themselves. And I think we struck that balance.” ■



PROJECT CREDITS

- EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN: **Arch11**
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: **Civitas**
- STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: **KL&A**
- MEP CONSULTING ENGINEERS: **ME Engineers**
- CIVIL ENGINEERS: **Creative Civil Solutions**
- CONSTRUCTION: **Shaw Construction**
- RECEPTION DESK , CORPORATE KITCHEN, STAIRCASE FIN INSTALLATION: **VonMod**
- WALNUT TABLE NEARDIGITAL WALL: **Brotherton Woodworks**
- KITCHEN VIGNETTE DESIGNERS: **boffi, bulthaup, William Ohs, EKD**
- OUTDOOR KITCHEN STAINLESS STEEL CABINETRY: **Weld Write, Josh Sheldon**

Roth wanted to draw attention to Colorado’s love of the outdoors with its “Outdoor Kitchen.” A large folding glass Nanawall, when opened, creates more than 16 feet of seamless space between the outdoor kitchen and the culinary kitchen that is adjacent to it.

“WELL, WHO ARE YOU? / WHO ARE YOU? WHO, WHO,
WHO, WHO? I REALLY WANNA KNOW / WHO ARE YOU?
WHO, WHO, WHO, WHO? TELL ME, WHO ARE YOU? / WHO
ARE YOU? WHO, WHO, WHO, WHO? / ‘CAUSE I REALLY
WANNA KNOW / WHO ARE YOU? WHO, WHO, WHO, WHO?”

-THE WHO



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THE ART OF WORKING WITH ART

WORDS: Sean O'Keefe
IMAGES: James Florio

WORKPLACE DESIGN

NINE DOT ARTS AND NEOERA TRANSFORM A DARK AND DISMAL FORMER WAREHOUSE INTO A BRIGHT, ECLECTIC AND EXPANSIVE NEW SPACE, WITH PLENTY OF RAW BEAUTY FOR SHOWCASING AND STORING A CURATED COLLECTION OF ART.

Along the walls, around the corners and hanging overhead, today the best commercially designed 21st-century environments seem to be alive with art — literally, in some cases. Part atmosphere, part pleasure, part stimulant, part purpose, thoughtfully selected art finds a place in architecture and interior design that goes well beyond the tired reproductions of elevator-adjacent, watercolored landscapes gathering dust, unnoticed.

“Savvy commercial developers see art as an opportunity to distinguish their project from any other,” says Martha Weidmann, CEO of Nine dot Arts, a Denver-based corporate art advisory practice established in 2009. “A carefully curated art collection can define a brand, support wayfinding and animate users’ experiences with indelible, one-of-a-kind creativity that is simply unforgettable.”

Glancing over the list of commercial spaces in the Denver market that Nine dot Arts has accessorized the last nine years, it seems a more impressive portfolio would be hard to find. From downtown destination hotels like The Crawford at Union Station to mixed-use properties such as The Dairy Block and the quasi-public Student Success Building for Metropolitan State University of Denver, Weidmann and co-founder and “studio chief” Molly Casey have had a hand in some of the most interesting new spaces in the city. “Carpet, chairs, tables, tiles and wallcoverings are all likely to be drawn from a global pool of largely indistinct resources,” says Casey, who grew up around artists in her mother’s ceramics gallery and studio before prowling Denver’s now-defunct Navajo Street Arts District as a teen. “Art, on the other hand, presents an opportunity to affordably purchase original, handmade pieces from emerging local talent. As a bridge between commercial interests and the artist, we strive to enhance environments and support an equitable living wage for the creative class.”



OPPOSITE: Deft juxtaposition defines the experience of space, place and purpose at Nine Dot Arts’ new Denver presentation studio. Art by Daisy Patton is displayed above simple, pragmatic shelving from IKEA, framed by a handcrafted slider and the building’s block and concrete vestiges.

ABOVE: Vestibule art pictured is by Andrew Miller, where the loading dock as lobby opens to art storage via a one-of-a-kind slider, upcycled from shipping crates by artist Robert Weidmann.



TOP: Maximizing existing openings, the democratization of daylight, and views across the office established the design intent. The space is adorned by desks from West Elm, a colorful John Garrett piece, and work by Amanda Marie on the far wall. **LEFT:** The presentation studio features a collaboration table repurposed from a bowling lane, illuminated by dimmable solar tubes that fill the space with diffuse natural light. **RIGHT:** This blue velvet lounger, free on Craigslist, helps comfortably furnish a corner sitting area in Nine dot Arts' space.



When asked what differentiates Nine dot Arts from other art consulting practices, Weidmann and Casey both quickly acknowledge their formative years at McGrath & Braun. Under the tutelage of regionally renowned art curator Yetta Braun, they learned how to find and build creative and professional relationships and understand the nexus between the client's vision and the artist's aesthetic. When McGrath & Braun changed ownership in 2008, Weidmann and Casey recognized their opportunity to blossom. They took hold of their dreams with a scrappy tenacity and a clear vision for how to succeed in a competitive but lucrative market that isn't



"THE VERY CLEAR CLIENT VISION WAS TO USE THE BUILDING AS A VERY FLEXIBLE, WHITE BOX GALLERY FOR THE AMAZING ART THEY SHOWCASE. THE OTHER PRIMARY ASPECT OF THE RESPONSE WAS TO IMBUE THE WORK EXPERIENCE WITH A FUN COMFORT AND EASE OF BEING." - Emily Adams

Art emotes energy, proven so by this Melanie Rothschild piece that hangs above plywood wall base millwork by Freelance Enterprises.

well understood even by its patrons. "The key ingredients are the people we hire and the collaborative atmosphere we work in," says Weidmann of the staff composition and organizational structure that distinguishes Nine dot Arts. She shares that of the estimated 20,000 commercial art curators in the United States, approximately 80 percent of them are sole proprietorships, single individuals advising on their own without any regulatory standards or requirements to consider. "We employ a team of 20 college- and professionally educated curators drawn from museums, galleries and grad schools. We know we have found the most appropriate, impactful pieces we can assemble when we all agree."

As Nine dot Arts celebrates their ninth year in business, they take residence in a new office tailored to their long-range vision and outfitted in an eclectic tapestry of found

comfort. Located a half-block from the raw edge of 38th and Osage, their new home's story begins with a stout set of bones built around 1956 as a food distribution warehouse. Expanded ad hoc in the '70s and '80s, when Weidmann and Casey found it, the space was dark and harshly segmented, having long been converted from warehouse to offices. Inside, light was sequestered to executives, and the open volume was severely truncated by a drop ceiling and crudely constructed raised-floor system that echoed hollow underfoot. The building had hidden potential, however, and Neoera was the design practice chosen to uncover it.

"The very clear client vision was to use the building as a very flexible, white box gallery for the amazing art they showcase," says Neoera owner Emily Adams, who developed an early-sense kinship and synergy ➔150

“RESEARCH SHOWS THAT, VERY MUCH LIKE GOOD DESIGN, GOOD WORKPLACE ART ENHANCES CREATIVITY AND PRODUCTIVITY, AND IS AN EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE TOOL IN INCREASING EMPLOYEE RETENTION OF BRAND VALUES. FORGET CHEAP REPRODUCTIONS THAT DON'T ENGAGE. HIGH-IMPACT, MEANINGFUL, MEMORABLE WORK IS AVAILABLE, AFFORDABLE AND EASIER TO FIND THAN EVER BEFORE. EVERY SPACE THAT DESERVES ART, DESERVES GREAT ART.” - Molly Casey



ABOVE: Along with the reuse of existing cabinetry as the kitchen's upper storage, cost-conscious choices include pendant light fixtures from IKEA and a Noguchi coffee table and other pieces from the Mid Mod Mall. TOP RIGHT: In the small conference room, art by Bruce Price (left), Collin Parson (center) and Joshua Wiener (sculpture) are accompanied by a felt shade pendant light by Tom Dixon. BOTTOM RIGHT: A sculpture of folded felt by artist Derrick Velasquez hangs on the far wall. OPPOSITE: Dip-dyed felt panels macro-knit by Studio TJOA surround 'The Nest,' a totally chill decompression zone.



with her ambitious, energetic clients. Improving functionality was as simple as eliminating the floor and ceiling, returning three feet of obstructed volume to use and allowing art of almost any size to be displayed, stored, moved and easily shipped. Aesthetically, the design restores a sense of purpose and pride to the forgotten structure by celebrating the space's raw, unrefined reality.

“The other primary aspect of the response was to imbue the work experience with a fun comfort and ease of being,” continues Adams. Like her clients, Adams also takes pride in fostering relationships with artisans, craftspeople, makers and doers across the creative class. She called upon just such a resource in Studio TJOA, who used strips of dip-dyed, micro-knit felt to create a unique visual and textural cocoon around a chill-out nest podium.

“Research shows that, very much like good design, good workplace art enhances creativity and productivity, and is an extremely effective tool in increasing employee retention of brand values,” says Casey. “Forget cheap reproductions that don’t engage. High-impact, meaningful, memorable work is available, affordable and easier to find than ever before. Every space that deserves art, deserves great art.” ■

In the art storage room, a piece by artist Laura Guese finds its spot among many others, waiting for just the right client and just the right wall to call its name.





TRAVEL BY DESIGN — ✈️

HOUSTON

WORDS: Caroline Joan Peixoto • IMAGES: James Florio

Rothko! Van der Rohe! Piano! If you've never thought of Houston as an art and architectural travel destination, think again — this growing culturally diverse city is well worth the journey south.





With Houston on the verge of eclipsing Chicago as the nation’s third largest city, it is to be expected that its meteoric growth results in new works almost daily. Yet the city actually has a long, progressive history of supporting seminal works by some of the greatest architects of the 20th century. For decades, Houston has been a welcoming home to new expressions of form and structure.

Houston sprawls over 600 square miles and is the most culturally diverse city in America. As a result, neighborhoods take form in unique voices that bring food, music and the arts to the forefront. “It has all of the things in it you’d expect a city of its size to have, but then another two or three versions of that same thing, in a format you’d never imagine,” says Troy Schaum, co-founder of Schaum/Shieh Architects, which has offices in Houston and New York. “It is constantly challenging your understanding of what makes a city. As a designer, this is always intriguing.”

This always-innovative and continually thriving creative atmosphere culminates in Houston’s Museum District, where the work of Mies van der Rohe, Steven Holl and Renzo Piano is beautifully represented. The district is home to 19 museums, galleries, cultural centers and community organizations. In the late 1970s, a progressive

urban plan was enacted to make the district more pedestrian friendly. Today, the neighborhood is a pleasure to walk, with old antebellum-style houses and large oak trees lining streets as you move from museum to gallery to restaurant and back.

Finally, it’s impossible to talk about the arts in Houston without mentioning Dominique and John de Menil. Originally from France, the philanthropic couple moved to Houston in the late 1940s. While amassing their art collection, which consisted of 17,000 pieces at the time of Dominique’s death in 1997, they commissioned premier local and international architects to build unique spaces, thus setting the stage for architecture and design to flourish into the 21st century.

ABOVE: The Menil Drawing Institute’s ‘Living Room,’ of which co-architect Sharon Johnston has said: “I think the shape of the ceiling — the way light comes into it — gives it a sort of strength that (makes) you know you’ve arrived, but it’s not hitting you over the head with a sense of monumentality. There’s a sort of intimacy about all the spaces that I think you don’t see that often in institutional buildings.”



THE MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE

The fifth building in The Menil Collection and the first in the world dedicated to the support of modern and contemporary drawing, the Menil Drawing Institute opened in November of 2018. Seeking to mimic the sleek lines the Institute supports in drawing, the Menil board of trustees chose Los Angeles-based architecture firm Johnston

Marklee, whose design for the 30,146-square-foot building. The building had to address specific requirements and challenges, incorporating exhibition space as well as archival, conservation, study and studio spaces. Moreover, it was necessary for light to be modulated throughout in order to illuminate works but not

damage them. The single-story building rose to the challenge in a seemingly effortless way, with long halls and three spacious courtyards that bring in soft light. Large angular cuts scaled to the building’s height were made into the structure itself and the windows, softening corners and allowing visitors a view into the space beyond.



TOP: An untitled sculptural piece by late California artist Ruth Asawa is on view during the Menil Drawing Institute’s inaugural year. Created with thin metal threads woven into a vertical sequence of teardrop and orb-like forms, Asawa said it was evocative of “the economy of a line, making something in space, enclosing it without blocking it out.”

ABOVE: Surrounded by three treed gravel courtyards, Johnston notes that “trees are germane to the way that light will work in the building,” providing natural but diffused light inside the galleries. Her co-designer, Mark Lee, notes in a discussion of the Institute that the building’s roof lines are done in the language of both modern and traditional architecture, “in a way recalling and relating to many of these gable-roof pre-war houses that surround the neighborhood.”



THE MENIL COLLECTION

Dominique's original vision for her contemporary art museum was to have Louis Kahn design the space. When he passed away, less than a year after the death of her husband John, the idea was put back on the shelf. In the mid-1980s, Italian-born Renzo Piano came to her attention, and she ultimately tapped him to create a museum in the midst of a quiet residential area. Perhaps most striking in Piano's design is its understated intimacy. The single-floor building doesn't surpass the local 1920s bungalows in height, and its serene and elegant lines allow the entire structure to blend in with the neighborhood. Inside, the space feels large, airy and bright, with natural light flooding in through curved ferrocement leaves.



The Menil campus's main building houses much of the modern and contemporary art collection. At top, in the foreground, is a 1951 untitled Mark Rothko oil on canvas. Behind that piece are a number of Barnett Newman works.



TOP: Joan Miró's 1930 Painting *The Magic of Color* is flanked by a 1960 sheet metal, paint and steel wire sculpture by Alexander Calder titled *The Y*. ABOVE LEFT: A three-dimensional piece made with dry pigment, synthetic resin and wood by Yves Klein titled *Blue Rain*, from 1961. ABOVE RIGHT: A Barnett Newman 1952 oil on canvas titled *Ulysses*.

THE CY TWOMBLY GALLERY

Across from the Menil Collection's main building sits another of Renzo Piano's work, the Cy Twombly Gallery, the eponymous house for more than 30 works of the influential American painter and sculptor. Opened in 1995, the building is the perfect backdrop for the artists' large-scale and brazen splashes of color on an otherwise muted canvas. A structure of contradictions, it is a stout and heavy block of a building with an airy and louvered roof that allows natural light to interact with the art.





**ROTHKO CHAPEL**

Across from The Menil Collection sits the Rothko Chapel, a truly stunning commission of the de Menil's that opened in 1971. An intimate collaboration between the de Menils and modernist painter Mark Rothko, the trio sought to create an open space for interfaith gathering and communing, blurring the lines between architecture and art. Philip Johnson, Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubry were hired to design the austere, unassuming brick chapel, which challenged existing conceptions of holy space. "There's no traditional religious architecture, there are no steps and no altars. The idea is that you're invited in to this conversation, with the divine, with that which is ultimate. It is there to be what you need in the moment," shares executive director David Leslie. Rothko spent six years creating the 14 murals that line the interior walls before committing suicide in 1970. The subtleties of his black and purple paintings speak to inner turmoil, peace and transcendence.





TRANSART FOUNDATION

Around the corner from the Rothko Chapel sits a brand new work from Schaum/Shieh, the Transart Foundation. Commissioned by artist and curator Surpik Angelini, the striking building is almost more like a home than a gallery. “We designed this space with our hands,” explains Schaum, who, with cofounder Roselyn Shieh, was recently lauded with the Architectural League’s annual Emerging Voices honor. Schaum, who is a professor of architecture at nearby Rice University, notes that none of the geometries are exactly “right — these are walls and lines made by craftspeople, not computers. We chose these elevations by tracing projections on the wall. We like to call it a handmade house.”

This handmade quality brings a magical dynamism to the space that most are not used to seeing in today’s technological age. On the ground level, a gallery and events space open to high ceilings, allowing light to come in through the six windows. These soft, angular cutouts light the entire space. The core of the structure holds dining and conference rooms, a private office, bathrooms and a rooftop deck. The Transart Foundation has an artists’ residency program, hosts events and curates art shows in its gallery space.

Houston-based firm Schaum/Shieh placed Transart on an unassuming residential plot in the city’s progressive Montrose neighborhood. Its white stucco exterior and nonconformist design easily catch the eye when juxtaposed with the surrounding bungalows and cottages prevalent in the area. In addition to sweeping organic lines that have been compared to the curled pages of a book, another defining feature of the structure is the way light comes to life when filtered through its

six small, triangular windows. “It makes you want to move around,” Surpik Angelini, Transart’s founder, told the Houston Chronicle last year. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a repeat performance from the light. Every day it’s like a different spectacle.” A quick walk from the Menil campus, Transart is the perfect testament to Houston’s receptiveness to new, individual and small-scale works.





GLASSELL SCHOOL OF ART

“I love the possibility that you could go into a museum and not turn the lights on at all,” says Steven Holl of when he began working with the Museum of Fine Arts Houston on one of two new buildings he was commissioned to design. The first to be finished, the Glassell School of Art, is an impressive structure of sleek concrete and imposing lines intersected by 170 windows that help fill the structure with natural light. This structure features concrete stairwells suspended overhead that branch off into classrooms, theaters and studio space. The L-shaped building also frames the Brown Foundation Plaza, a large public greenspace that adjoins the Glassell’s sloped, walkable roofline, which leads to a garden and sitting area with a 360-degree view of the sprawling city.



CULLEN SCULPTURE GARDEN

Houston’s Museum of Fine Arts campus spans 14 acres, and serving as a bridge between Holl’s Glassell School of Art and van der Rohe’s Cullinan Hall — his only U.S.-based museum — is the small and pristine Cullen Sculpture Garden, curated by Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Twenty-five pieces play a game of hide and reveal as they’re found behind trees, in between low walls and alongside pathways. Welcoming visitors is Anish Kapoor’s impressive Cloud Column — Kapoor’s famous sister sculpture, Cloud Gate, resides in Chicago. With the welcome shade of the oak trees and the works of Alexander Calder, Henri Matisse and Louise Bourgeois, this outdoor gallery offers tranquility in effortless design.

WHERE TO GO

A walking tour of Houston’s Museum District is entirely doable and makes for a lovely few days. There are 19 museums in four unique zones, with plenty of food and shops in between. Head to www.houmuse.org to plan your trip around special exhibits and events.

WHERE TO STAY

Sonder in the Museum District
Gorgeously redone condos with full amenities available for those who like feeling at home. sonder.com

The Lancaster
A historic building houses this small luxury boutique hotel in downtown Houston, full of eclectic art and charm. thelancaster.com

Hotel Zaza Museum District
Situated in the heart of the Museum District, this bold boutique hotel offers elaborate suites in a funky environment. hotelzaza.com

WHERE TO EAT

To say Houston is a food town is an understatement. This diverse and vibrant city brings with it every morsel of good food the stomach could crave. Always ask a local what their recommendations are, and watch their face light up as they share more than a few faves. Here are ours:

Hugo’s
Authentic Mexican cuisine by award-winning chef Hugo Ortega, hand-shaken margaritas and a festive atmosphere. hugosrestaurant.net

Laredo Taqueria
Popular (and often crowded) low-key spot offering tacos, frijoles, tamales, menudo and more. laredotaqueria.com

Common Bond
A cafe & bakery with acclaimed chefs cranking out pastries and seasonal savory dishes. commonbondcafe.com

Nancy’s Hustle
A modern bistro and wine bar that likes “butter, natural wine, cider and cocktails that pair well with food.” nancyshustle.com

Ramen Tatsu-ya
Trendy spot for inspired ramen bowls and sides as well as sake and Japanese coffee served at communal tables. ramen-tatsuya.com

SCALING UP ON SUSTAINABILITY

From business practice to sustenance to design, Bamboo Sushi employs sustainability across the (sushi) board



Fish is the most widely consumed animal protein on the planet, and the United Nations asserts that 76 percent of the world's ocean fisheries are either overfished or entirely depleted. Because of this, some businesses, including restaurants, are driving a sustainability narrative told with equal parts grace and gusto to both educate their patrons and make a meaningful difference.

Among them — perhaps even leading the pack — is Denver restaurant Bamboo Sushi. “Sustainable sushi is new for most people around the country,” says Blayne Ochoa, chef de cuisine at Bamboo Sushi. “So, we have a lot of people coming into the restaurant that need some guidance on the menu to understand what we’re trying to do, and what makes us different from other spots in town.”

Bamboo parent company Sustainable Restaurant Group has built a supply chain that requires transparency and traceability of industry fishing practices and excludes severely overfished oceans and the mislabeling of fish. Bamboo Sushi also became the world's first restaurant to analyze and define its carbon footprint down to a single menu item. “Whenever I’m thinking about adding dishes to our menu, I have to start with

WORDS: Gigi Sukin
IMAGES: James Florio





sourcing,” says Ochoa. “Thinking about the sustainability story of every dish is important — and then building the flavors from there.”

Bamboo Sushi’s menu reflects the team’s deep dedication to sustainability. Care of products is evidenced by the detail with which they are brought to Bamboo diners. In collaboration with Ocean Harvest Sea Vegetable Company, the restaurant sources rich sea vegetables from tidal pools on the Mendocino coast of California. The harvesting methods – which take place every new and full moon – ensure continued growth of the seaweeds while maintaining the surrounding ecosystem. Meanwhile, Blue Ocean Mariculture — another partner specifically in the aquaculture space — provides sustainably raised Hawaiian Kanpachi using open water net pens engineered to eliminate unintentional wildlife entanglement. As the Bamboo Sushi footprint expands, it continues to increase its support of sustainable aquaculture operations across North America.

Indeed, the team behind the scenes of Portland-based SRG is betting on mindfulness as more than a fleeting trend, coining the phrase “conscious hospitality” to describe their business. And that mantra extends beyond the zero-waste menu to the form and function of Bamboo Sushi’s 122-seat physical space at 2715 17th Street.

“When designing our first restaurant in Denver, we wanted our team members to have a robust story to



An intimate series from Portland-based photographer Corey Arnold dons a wall near Bamboo Sushi’s reception area and snakes its way across the space, greeting guests with the unvarnished moment-to-moment experience of a commercial fishing operation.



“Whenever I’m thinking about adding dishes to our menu, I have to start with sourcing,” says Ochoa. “Thinking about the sustainability story of every dish is important — and then building the flavors from there.”



ABOVE: Bamboo Sushi's interior aesthetic is warm and dim, and its radiant anchor bar simultaneously sensual and sustainable. The bar is finished in beetle kill white ash wood that frames the gem-like spirited bottles and glassware as well as the action in the thoughtful space. **BELOW:** One of two collections featuring Japanese textiles from Portland-based Kiriko Made adorns the dining room's pearly walls. The piece is meant to embrace the juxtaposition of old and new, much like the restaurant's modern take on the traditional art of sushi.



tell that is an extension of our mission," says Kristofor Lofgren, Bamboo Sushi's founder and the CEO of SRG. "Whether that's how something was produced sustainably with a low-carbon footprint or featuring artwork that connects our guests to the sourcing of our fish, there are moments all over the restaurant that are conversation starters."

One such conversation starter is evident immediately upon crossing the threshold of the 3,000-square-foot culinary space — an intimate series from Portland photographer Corey Arnold snakes the wall and entryway, greeting guests with scenes from the experiences of commercial fishing. "(It) really showcases commercial fishing, but also responsible fishing practices like catching Coho salmon with nets in Alaska," says Cory Schisler, creative director at SRG. "There are also some really fun shots throughout that collage that give guests a glimpse into the life of commercial fishers; candid and lighthearted moments on these boats where sometimes they can be out at sea for weeks at a time." The pictures on the walls, Schisler adds, "are meant to show a true-life depiction of the fish trade."

Owner, designer and builder Evan Jones of Denver-based LVT Design completed some of Bamboo's millwork using treated wood from sustainably managed forests, and that includes the secluded booths near the front alongside the glowing bar. "Those wood slats in the bar area are inspired by Japanese izakayas" — informal Japanese pubs — "that allow for a more intimate bar experience," says Schisler.

Further touches of sustainability aren't quite as obvious. Guests are provided Ironwood chopsticks, sourced from responsibly managed forests, and plastics have been eliminated from the guest experience. Cleaning supplies are derived from depleted vegetable oil and refined biofuel. And, from the dishwasher to the ice machines, fryers to exhaust hoods, each appliance is Energy Star-rated.

According to Lofgren, Bamboo Sushi has big plans for Denver, growing the brand into the 9+CO development next year and expanding its fast-casual sister restaurant, QuickFish. The team will also bring Bamboo to the San Francisco Bay area this year.

As the restaurant group matures and flourishes, mindfulness grows only more important. "I think some things are more challenging the more we grow," Schisler says. "But sustainability is always our first step. It's a red light, green light for us." ■



Bamboo Sushi — which originally entered the Mile High market in 2016 as one of seven stalls in nearby Avantii Food & Beverage — offers guests a variety of seating styles to accommodate any occasion. The patio embraces Denver's 300 days of sunshine each year, and beckons guests to soak up the natural elements that are celebrated within the eatery's walls.



**NATURALLY
MODERN**

The Unlikely Bond Between Modern
Architecture and our National Parks

WORDS: Atom Stevens
IMAGES: David Lauer



COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT

Designed by National Park Service architect Cecil Doty and built in 1963, the Colorado National Monument visitor center is an exemplar of modernist Mission 66 planning and design. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 along with the Book Cliffs Shelter (top) and Canyon Rim Trail, which are part of the same Mission 66 complex. This dual-function building serves as both a public interpretive space and an administrative headquarters for the park. The building utilizes sandstone to complement the stone formations in Wedding Canyon, visible through curtainwall glass in the lobby and the exterior patio beyond.

In the post-World War II era, Americans were ready to play again, and one way they exhibited that thirst for fun was through record-breaking visits to the national parks. Crowds of nearly 30 million people visited the parks annually in the late 1940s — almost 10 times the number of visitors before the war. But this increased popularity shone a spotlight on a pressing problem — roads were overcrowded, unsupervised park sites were being destroyed, trash and litter were everywhere and wildlife was at risk. Yet the National Park Service found itself underfunded, underdeveloped and understaffed to handle these calamities.

The challenges didn't last long, however. In 1953, when Eisenhower was elected president, there was an opportunity to fix the many problems facing the parks. The director of the National Park Service assembled a highly detailed proposal of a program coined "Mission 66," which the president and Congress accepted both in reaction to the negative press that the NPS was receiving and an increased interest in the creation of public works projects by the government to stem the possibility of a recession as war spending receded.

Fast forward more than six decades, and the national park experience that visitors know today was part of this enormous capital program. Congress approved the investment of approximately \$1 billion over 10 years aimed at improving the national parks with the goal of completing the project in time for the National Park Services' 50th anniversary in 1966. During that time, the NPS built roads, signs, overlooks, parking lots, trails, utilities, service buildings, campgrounds, villages, stores and visitor centers — much of which we still experience today.

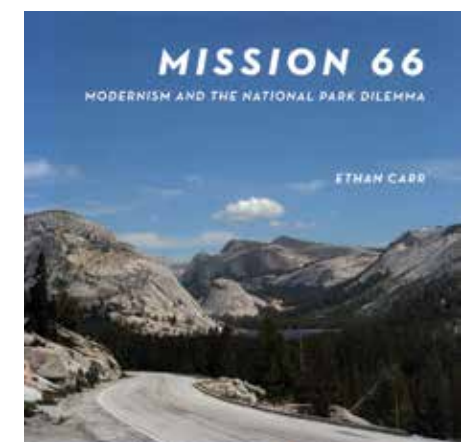
COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN AND THE VISITOR CENTER

From a design perspective, Mission 66 is notable for its comprehensive design of every aspect of the national



park experience. Standards were developed for buildings, signage, colors, architecture, roads, exhibits and more, which made the national park experience highly consistent and well-conceived from park to park.

Central to the experience was the creation of a new type of building called the visitor center. Visitor centers were envisioned as a way of controlling traffic in the park, while also providing a base camp for park visitors to receive information, view interpretive programs and exhibits, interact with rangers and other staff and plan their stay. Typically, back-of-house functions were also incorporated in the same building — sometimes including offices, maintenance facilities, research facilities, limited housing and more — acting as a base camp for park staff as well. Because the needs of each visitor center varied from park to park, the design of visitor centers was not standardized in the same way that other park buildings were. ➔181



Learn about the history and legacy of the Mission 66 program across the country. "Mission 66" by Ethan Carr. Published 2007 by University of Massachusetts Press

DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

A new visitor center, designed by Denver's Barker Rinker Seacat Architecture was constructed in 2011 to replace the demolished portion of the original Quarry Visitor Center by renovating and expanding an existing structure in the park which now features a butterfly roof similar to the that of the restored 1950s exhibit hall. **BELOW RIGHT:** Signage and color standards were a component of the Mission 66 program.



LEFT AND ABOVE: With its dramatic butterfly roof, the Quarry Visitor Center was built in 1958 and features an exhibit hall to both protect and display more than 1,500 fossils "relieved in situ" in a layer of sandstone acting as the north wall of the building. Designed by architect Richard Hein of San Francisco's Anshen & Allen, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 and made

a National Historic Landmark in 2001 for its exceptionally unique design and significance to the Mission 66 program. The building was condemned in 2006 due to structural deterioration resulting from an unstable foundation and, in 2010 and 2011, it was carefully rehabilitated, keeping the glass enclosed exhibit hall and demolishing an adjacent cylindrical brutalist building.



MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

Mesa Verde's Far View Visitor Center was built in 1968 as part of the Mission 66 program. Designed by Denver husband and wife team Joseph and Louise Marlow, it was inspired by the round kivas found in the park's nearby Pueblo cliff dwellings. In 2013, Far View was replaced by a new visitor and research

center near the park entrance, leaving the building obsolete and abandoned. The park is currently seeking new uses for Far View, and as yet has no plans to demolish it; still, preservationists are keeping a close eye on the fate of this architecturally significant modernist building.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

One of three Mission 66 Visitor Centers in Rocky Mountain National Park, the Beaver Meadows Headquarters near Estes Park is the most architecturally significant building in Colorado's national park lands. Acting as both an interpretive space and park headquarters, the stone and Cor-ten steel building was designed by Taliesin Associated Architects and built in 1967. Taliesin, based at Taliesin West in Arizona, was founded by Frank Lloyd Wright to carry on his architectural legacy after his death in 1959. Beaver Meadows was one of the firm's first major commissions, and the influence of Wright's ideas on the design is unmistakable. Beaver Meadows was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

Since the program of every visitor center was unique, the architecture of each was unique, too, with one unifying factor — all of the visitor centers built during Mission 66 were modern in design. Although there was resistance to this architectural choice, National Park Service architect Cecil J. Doty argued that the “park service rustic style” of stones and logs that was prevalent before the war was unable to meet the new needs of the national parks, and was no longer economically viable to build anyway. The choice of modern architecture stemmed from not only its affordability and ease of construction, embracing steel and concrete as viable building materials, but also because modernism was in vogue at the time, and architects were immersed in the ideas of modern architecture.

Modern architecture also lent itself well to the programmatic needs of the visitor center, creating large, open, multi-functional indoor spaces, often with giant walls of glass positioned to take advantage of panoramic

views of park features. Because the National Park Services' in-house design team's ability was too limited to work on all of the more than 200 visitor centers being built nationwide, private architecture firms were brought in to contribute to the design of some centers. This led to some well-known modern masters like Richard Neutra having a hand at designing visitor centers. Here in Colorado, local architects such as William Muchow, Joseph and Louise Marlow and Anderson Barker Rinker contributed to visitor center designs. Rocky Mountain National Park's Beaver Meadows Headquarters was designed by Taliesin Associated Architects, Ltd., which was well known for embracing Frank Lloyd Wright's design philosophies.

THE FUTURE OF MODERNISM IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Ultimately, Mission 66 was seen as a great success in balancing access to and protection of the national parks. As the National Park Service passed the 100 year mark



GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK

The visitor center at Great Sand Dunes National Park, built in 1961 and designed by the National Park Services’ Western Office of Design and Construction, did not stand the test of time. The modest building with a butterfly roof, masonry block construction and undulating patio with a grand view of the Great Sand Dunes and Sangre de Cristo Mountains, was expanded and renovated in 1998 to accommodate growing park visitation. The renovation gave the building a complete facelift designed by Colorado architect Morey Bean, transforming it into a pueblo revival style building with hints of modernism in the form of glass walls and overlapping planes. The building was further expanded in 2004.



in 2016, national park popularity both in Colorado and across the country has been booming and, in some ways, the National Park Service is again finding itself overwhelmed and underfunded. There are questions about whether or not the parks should be expanding infrastructure to accommodate larger crowds. At the same time, many of the Mission 66 structures are over 50 years old.

Although the modern buildings, particularly visitor centers, were affordable to build, they have not necessarily been affordable to maintain through the years, and many are suffering from deferred maintenance and functional obsolescence. Some visitor centers are being replaced due to maintenance expenses and changes to the overall visitor experience of some parks. For example, Mesa Verde National Park’s Far View Visitor Center, designed by Joseph and Louise Marlow, has sat empty for several years for this reason and may someday be demolished. This raises questions about whether certain structures should be preserved for their own architectural history and merit, even if they are functionally obsolete. There is a chance that the bond of the national parks and modern architecture may be coming to an end, as new buildings are programmed for more durability and less influence of modernist ideas.

For now, though, a visit to Colorado’s national parks is both a great opportunity to interact with nature and appreciate the unique mid-century modern architecture of the visitor centers and the holistically designed park experience that was created during Mission 66. ■

PARKITECTURE TOURISM

Come for the architecture, stay for the natural beauty! There are seven Mission 66 visitor centers around Colorado that continue to be mostly true to their original mid-century modern designs. For architecture tourists, there is more to see in our national parks than nature! Explore the Mission 66 visitor centers and other modernist buildings on your next adventure.

[A] : COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT

Colorado National Monument Visitor Center
Built 1963 near Grand Junction, CO
Designed by Cecil Doty, National Park Service Architect
Approx. 260 mile/4½ hour drive from Denver
National Register of Historic Places

[B] : CURECANTI NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Elk Creek Visitor Center
Built 1968 near Gunnison, CO
Designed by Anderson Barker Rinker Architects, Denver
Approx. 215 mile/4 hour drive from Denver

[C] : GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK

Great Sand Dunes National Park Visitor Center
Built 1961 near Alamosa, CO; renovated and expanded in 1998 and 2004
Designed by NPS Western Office of Design & Construction, 1998 renovation and expansion by Morey Bean, AIA
Approx. 225 mile/4 hour drive from Denver
Renovated and expanded in 1998 beyond recognition of the original design.

[D] : MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

Far View Visitor Center (closed to the public)
Built 1968 near Cortez, CO
Designed by Joseph & Louise Marlow, Denver
Approx. 385 mile/7¼ hour drive from Denver

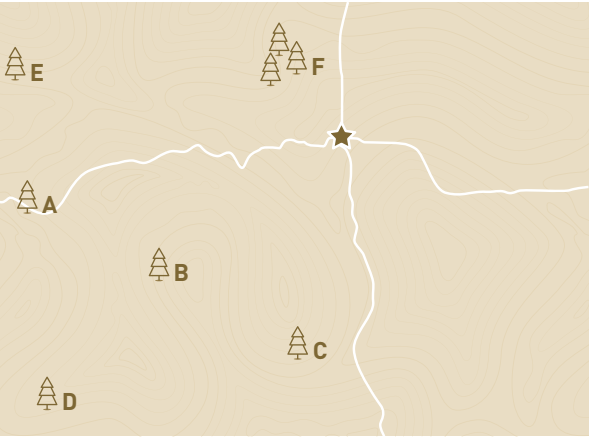
[E] : DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

Canyon Visitor Center Built 1965 near Dinosaur, CO Designed by Arthur K. Olsen & Associates, Salt Lake City Approx. 285 mile/5 hour drive from Denver	Quarry Visitor Center Built 1958 near Vernal, UT Designed by Anshen & Allen Architects, San Francisco Approx. 310 mile/5½ hour drive from Denver
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[F] : ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

Beaver Meadows Headquarters Built 1967 near Estes Park, CO Designed by Taliesin Associated Architects Approx. 70 mile/90 minute drive from Denver National Register of Historic Places	Kawuneeche Visitor Center Built 1968 near Grand Lake, CO Designed by NPS Western Office of Design & Construction Approx. 100 mile/2¼ hour drive from Denver
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Alpine Visitor Center
Built 1965 on Trail Ridge Road
Designed by William C. Muchow, Denver
Approx. 90 mile/2¼ hour drive from Denver



ONE LAST THING

A Person, Place or Object we **LOVE**

JOY RIDE

WORDS: Kris Scott

Germany-based Mika Amaro brings its meticulously designed urban bikes to Denver



Last spring, Studio 2b's Allen Bales was at the International Contemporary Fine Furniture Fair in New York City when his wife Samantha, who was in an area of the exhibition space focused on the wares of German craftspeople, called him.

"She says, 'Allen, oh my God, you have to get over here right now. There's a German bike maker over here and people are just stopping in their tracks looking at these bikes. They're just amazing.'"

And that's how Studio 2b — a Denver design firm known more for its deft handling of high-end European furnishings and accessories than its embrace of Gates Carbon Drive belt systems — came to be the U.S.'s sole Mika Amaro Urban Bikes distributor.

The bikes are handmade in Cologne, Germany, by Mika Amaro founder Michael Nagler. He founded his company in 2009 and has since focused on making cycling machines that scream of quality, design and innovation. Nagler employs Brooks leather components in his bikes, which come in classic colors such as sapphire black and pearly white and more vibrant colors like avid blue and dressy pink. But it's his

commitment to hand-crafted and obsessively sourced materials that really sets Mika Amaro apart. For example, rather than a bulky chain that has to shift through 27 gears, his bikes employ a maintenance-free internal gear hub system with the aforementioned belt drive, which not only makes for a quiet and smooth ride, but also means they're virtually maintenance-free. This embrace of simplicity and quality over bells and whistles also helps emphasize the minimal form and clean lines that define the Mika Amaro bike. "They're like mid-century architecture almost, like a mid-century home with clean, simple, pure and elegant lines," Bales says. "It's just a beautiful, beautiful bike."

It might seem odd for a design firm known for luxury furnishings to put bikes into its retail repertoire

"WE FIND BEAUTY IN CLEAR AND HARMONIOUS FORMS AS WELL AS IN ELABORATE DETAILS. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BUILD A BICYCLE THAT IS FAST, LIGHT, THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED AND PROVIDES JOY TO OUR CUSTOMERS, AND THE USE OF HIGH-QUALITY MATERIALS IS THE PREREQUISITE FOR LONG CYCLING JOY." — Michael Nagler

— Bales, an avid cyclist and former racer, knows this. "I have an affinity for things that are finely crafted at a higher level and, when I saw these bikes it was just kind of ... 'Wow, these guys know what they're doing,'" he notes.

Mika Amaro bikes are made in limited editions — only 111 of each model is produced. Bales has had two of those models, a one-speed and an eight-speed, in his RiNo-based display window since late last year. And if he ever had any doubt about putting them there, he doesn't now. He says he sees people taking photos of the bikes through the window about 10 to 15 times a day. And then there's the interest of those who know an incredible design when they see it.

"In our area of RiNo, we have a lot of architecture firms," Bales says, "and I have architects constantly stopping and looking, and then coming in to ask about it. When that started happening, I knew I made the right decision to bring them in. If it stops architects, I know I made a good decision in a handmade, well-crafted product." ■



Mika Amaro urban bikes are constructed of very light steel, similar to aluminum in weight but "more robust and with a longer lifespan," says founder Michael Nagler. The bike's other design components include a Gates belt drive system with a life expectancy of around 12,000 miles, custom pedals machined and logo-stamped by Nagler, and quality Brooks leather components. The bikes, he notes, are "100 percent handcrafted and tested to the smallest detail before every delivery."



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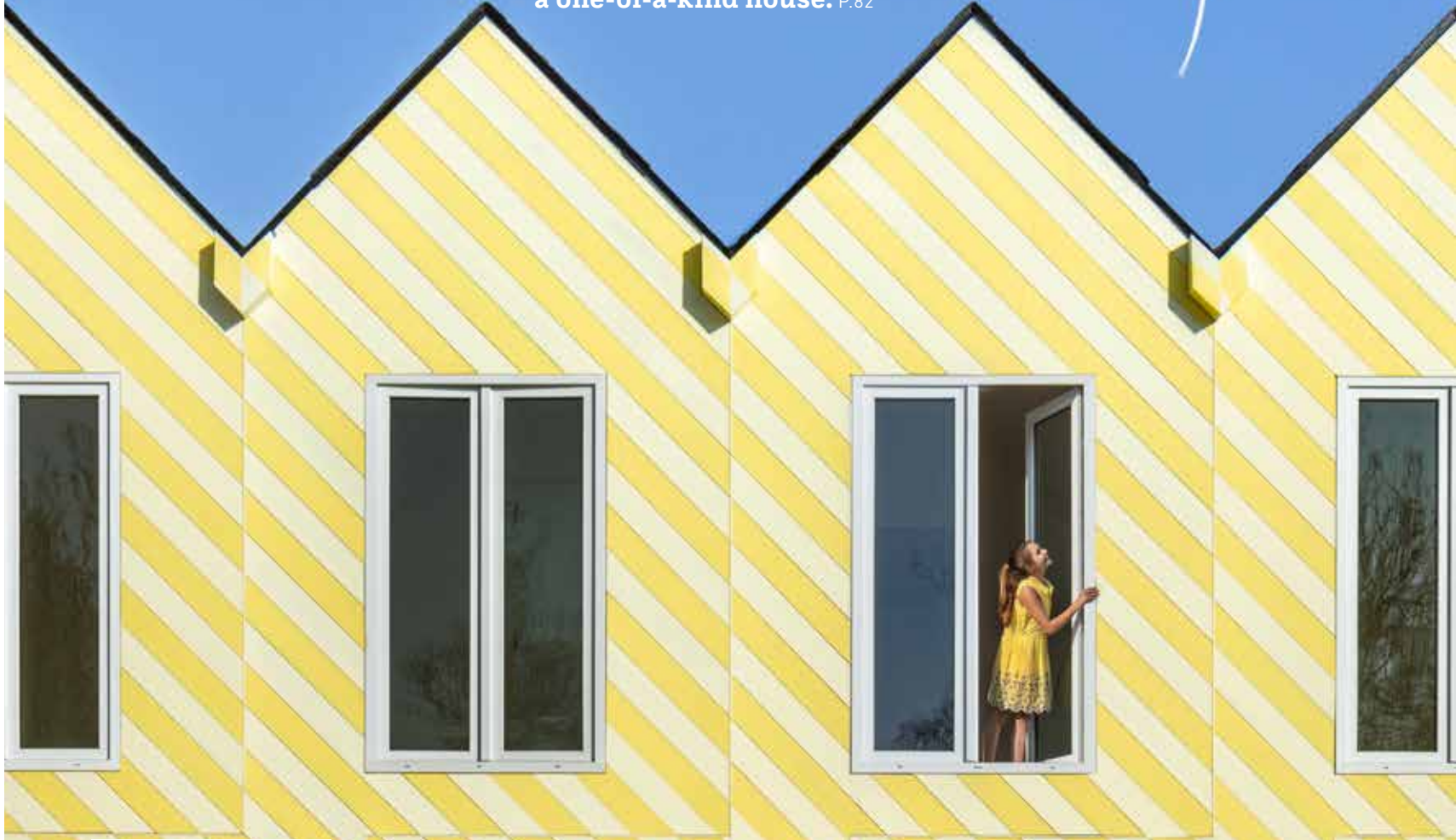


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