



HOME+DESIGN



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DESIGN AWARDS

Ted Boerner

By Lindsey Shook
Photos courtesy of Ted Boerner

"CAN DIVORCE BE an inspiration for design?" asks prolific designer Ted Boerner. "My mother divorced and married and divorced a few times (what can I say, I was a child of the late '50s and '60s), so we moved a lot in my early years, forcing me to grapple with the notion of 'home,' not as a specific place but a feeling." And it's this exceptional, intuitive feeling that Boerner possesses when designing an object or piece of furniture that has helped guide his business for over 30 years.

Known for crafting evolving collections of subtle yet striking modern furnishings, he doesn't approach his work with a specific philosophy but with a solution-driven spirit of improving life. "I try to respond to the needs of a situation and attempt to make things better, whether by function, appearance or emotion and hopefully a combination of all three," Boerner says. "Each piece is an idea, and everything has a certain story behind it, a certain character, an essence."

The process begins by analyzing the very essence and function of a piece, followed by exhausting all potential problems that might arise. "When I think I've squeezed all I can out of the notion of a table or whatever, I find something new and relevant," he notes. "I can say that I hope our designs project a sense of ease and comfort and that they are even familiar while still being fresh."

Upon arriving in California over 35 years ago, courtesy of New York and Wisconsin, he gravitated toward the pioneering innovation and natural landscape. "I think there has always been an openness here for a fresh take on things that's less constrained by tradition," he says. "This suits me and allows me to create feely, as I am not much for adhering to traditional style based on the classic antiques like they tend to be on the East Coast."

It is evident that the local landscape has made a lasting impression upon Boerner's work. From the nuanced scale to the tone of materials, maximized function and handcrafted quality, many pieces have defined California style globally. He notes, "The scale of Big Sur or Yosemite; the colors of the coastal hills in August; the order of vineyards responding to the shapes of mountains and valleys. All this stays in my mind and shows up in my work in subtle ways."

Another notable ingredient in the recipe for Boerner's strong foundation is his business partner Frank Pontes, who he credits with being "the single most important person who has shaped my work and our business." Having worked together for 28 years now, Pontes does not design but has a great eye and a deep love for their designer clientele. "I applaud his stamina and unflappable energy to keep me on my toes and moving forward," says Boerner. "His initial reaction to my rough sketches can derail an idea or turn it in a better direction...if I listen."

He is currently designing pieces by exploring unexpected functionality as well as embracing more comfortable and welcoming forms.



clockwise: Ted Boerner in his studio; from Boerner's collections, the new Monocle mirror series; the Thicket Etagere; the beautiful, expansive Regatta sectional.

"We are just finishing up the design development of a new bed with a sofa-like back to lean against with a ledge to rest your arms and place a teacup or a book or a clock," he says. "There are nightstands with similar curves and some pockets for charging devices, and we're considering covering them in felt or leather to absorb light and sound. We also have a new desk in the works that is intended for the home. It has a bookshelf on the face, because books often reflect who we are or aspire to be. Why not put them in front?"

Boerner's profound self-awareness, intellect and humility are just a few reasons he is so beloved by so many in the industry and why his iconic work will be studied for years to come. He closed out the interview with this: "Something Martha Graham said stays with me always:

"There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and there is only one of you in all time. This expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how it compares with other expression. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open."

"I always have to keep that energy afloat so that my work stays true to me. We have to design for the time we live in now, with respect for where we come from. Simple! Ha! Simple is never easy, but it's worth it."

