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The Manhattan Collection: A Study on Furniture Design

Gabriel Anderson
Utah State University

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THE MANHATTAN COLLECTION
A STUDY ON FURNITURE DESIGN
by
Gabriel Dean Anderson
A plan B project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF FINE ARTS
In
Interior Design

Approved:

Darrin Brookes
Major Professor

Susan Tibbitts
Committee Member

Ryoichi Suzuki
Committee Member

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copyright</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designer Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Exhibition</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mott Sideboard</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mott Sideboard Details</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wooster Stool</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wooster Stool Details</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Broome Coffee Table</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Broome Coffee Table Details</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prince Dining Table</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prince Dining Table Details</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bowery Bench</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bower Bench Details</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Crosby Coffee Table</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Crosby Coffee Table Details</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Great Jones Side Table 1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Great Jones Side Table 1 Details</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Great Jones Side Table 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Great Jones Side Table 2 Details</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mulberry Console Table</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prince Console Table</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Franklin Chair</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Franklin Sofa</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Walker Dining Table</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Gallery Entry</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Gallery Overview 1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Gallery Overview 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Gallery Overview 3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Wooster Stools</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Bowery Bench</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Crosby Coffee Table</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Broome Coffee Table</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Great Jones Side Table 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Great Jones Side Table 2 - Detail</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Mott Sideboard</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Great Jones Side Table 1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Process Exhibit 1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Thesis Exhibition - Process Exhibit 2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Penny Side Table</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Designer Statement

I have fond memories of my childhood home with its eclectic mix of furniture. My mother is a somewhat eccentric individual and it shows in the way she chose to furnish and decorate her home. I remember racing my matchbox cars over the surface of an antique English burl wood buffet and then jumping them across the room to race over the top of a Danish mid-century modern sideboard. I recall being yelled at for walking along the back of our 1970's sofa with its retro orange fabric, or for dropping toys into the depths of our unique open face grandfather clock that my father brought back from one of his military trips to Austria. As a child I had no notion of how profoundly of an impact this exposure to many different types of beautiful furniture would have on me. However, as I look back on those experiences, I can see that this was the beginning of my infatuation with furniture and how human beings interact with it.

As I now endeavor to design and create furniture of my own, it is important to find others with whom I can identify. I find that I draw inspiration from a wide array of different eras and design movements, however, I don’t necessarily identify with their design philosophies. At one point I was lead to the Pre-Raphaelites and in them found an ideology that struck closer to home than any others. They were a group of artists who had become disenchanted with the contemporary views of art and began to create an aesthetic of beauty for its own sake. They saw that the Industrial Revolution and mass production had created a rift between fine and applied arts and sought to bridge that gap. Through the reintroduction of medieval European workshop practices, they
were able to bring back a sense of craftsmanship and artistic integrity to the decorative arts.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement soon let into the Arts and Crafts movement which championed similar ideologies but had a much greater emphasis on bringing about a social, industrial, and moral reform. While I can identify with the design ideals of these movements, I find it hard to relate to the sense of revolution and social reform that go with them. Luckily, these two movements led to another whose philosophies mirror my own; the American Studio Furniture movement.

The American Studio Furniture movement is a direct descendent of the Arts and Crafts movement and was at odds with the Modern Movement which was concerned with mass production and driving the cost of goods ever downward. Instead, the American Studio Furniture movement focused on the artistic process and a decorative approach to furniture. They created furniture that was built by artists and craftsmen imbuing each piece with a sense of the hand of the maker. This furniture was often highly individualistic and unashamedly decorative.

The American Studio Furniture Movement included designers such as George Nakashima, Paul Evans, Phillip Lloyd Powell, and Tommi Parzinger. I feel a great connection to these designers not because their designs are similar to mine, but because we share an ideology of creating beautiful furniture for the sake of its own
beauty. Furniture that is not constructed in a factory on an assembly line, but instead by skilled craftsmen with an artists touch.

This ideology sets the groundwork for my thesis project. I have designed a series of pieces of furniture that all share some key similarities, not in form or even style (though my personal aesthetic will be seen in all of them), but rather in materials. All of my pieces use a combination of metal, wood, and stone. Obviously, this is not remarkable as these materials have been used to build furniture for as long as furniture has been built. However, I have endeavored to explore how these materials can interact with one another within a piece of furniture. My goal was to create furniture where the materials do not simply coexist with each other, but instead react to one another in ways that are intimate and reflect the material’s purpose and nature. I have created furniture that is beautiful and decorative with an emphasis on artistic craftsmanship.

In addition to creating the furniture itself, I endeavored to develop the branding that would be required to bring a collection of furniture to the high end furniture market. This includes a logo and tearsheets for each piece in the collection (see figures 1-23). Armed with a catalogue of the tearsheets I could approach prospective showrooms to propose a partnership and officially launch a high end furniture company.
Manhattan Collection
Mott Sideboard - 5001

w 60”  d 20”  h 30”
w 152.4  d 50.8  h 76.2 cm
Manhattan Collection
Wooster Stool - 1003

w 27”  d 17”  h 18”
w 68.6  d 43.2  h 45.7 cm
Figure 4
Manhattan Collection
Broome Coffee Table - 4002

w 57”  d 27”  h 18”
w 144.8  d 68.6  h 45.7 cm

Figure 5
Figure 6
Manhattan Collection
Prince Dining Table - 2001

w 96"  d 42"  h 30"
243.8 106.7 76.2 cm

Figure 7
Manhattan Collection
Bowery Bench - 1004

w 68" d 22" h 17"
w 172.7 d 58.9 h 43.2 cm
Figure 10
Manhattan Collection
Crosby Coffee Table - 4001

w 49.5"  
d 37"  
h 17"  
w 125.7  
d 94  
h 43.2 cm
Manhattan Collection
Great Jones Side Table 1 - 6001
Manhattan Collection
Great Jones Side Table 2 - 6002

w 20”  d 18”  h 18”
w 50.8  d 45.7  h 45.7 cm
Manhattan Collection
Mulberry Console Table - 3002

w 72"  d 16"  h 30"
w 182.9  d 40.6  h 76.2 cm
Manhattan Collection
Prince Console Table - 3001

w 81”  d 16”  h 30”
w 205.7  d 40.6  h 76.2 cm
Manhattan Collection
Franklin Chair - 1002

w 39”
d 38”
h 31”
w 99.1
d 96.5
h 78.7 cm
Manhattan Collection
Franklin Sofa - 1001

w 98"
d 38"
h 31"
w 248.9 d 96.5 h 78.7 cm

Figure 20
Manhattan Collection
Walker Dining Table - 2002

w 96”  d 42”  h 30”
w 243.8  d 106.7  h 76.2 cm
Exhibition

On March 27th, 2015 the Caine College of the Arts hosted an exhibition of The Manhattan Collection: A Study on Furniture Design by Gabriel Anderson. The exhibition included images and drawings of 14 pieces of furniture of which there were 8 fully constructed pieces. In addition, there was a section chronicling the design process for this collection. Images of the Exhibition can be seen in figures 22-35.

Figure 22

Figure 23
Figure 24

Figure 25

Figure 26
Post Exhibition

The Ultimate goal of this thesis has always been to bring these pieces of furniture to market. In the months following the exhibition, steps were taken to officially launch Gabriel Dean Designs as a business entity. With the goal of entering into the high end residential furniture market, Gabriel approached the owner of the showroom Profiles in the New York Design center who agreed to represent Gabriel Dean Design. The Manhattan Collection was officially introduced to the market at the event ‘What’s New What’s Next’ on September 17, 2015. Since then, Gabriel Dean Design has been picked up by three more furniture showrooms including, Hewn X in San Francisco, Una Malan in Los Angeles, and Martin Nash in Atlanta.

Gabriel Dean Design now takes and fulfills orders from across the United States but primarily in New York and California. Gabriel and his wife (and business partner) oversee the construction of each piece by local craftsman. This process is complicated by the complex designs and high standards of excellence each piece is held to. In some instances a piece of furniture may have to go through as many as six different workshops, all specializing in different processes, to achieve the final product.

Gabriel is now working on his second line called The Fable Collection. In this line Gabriel is dispensing with the hard lines and visual weight seen in The Manhattan Collection. Instead, this new line employs designs that are softer and more whimsical in nature. Much of this line makes use of artisan glass work and cast bronze to achieve this look. Figure 36 shows a small table titled The Penny Side Table and is the first piece in The Fable Collection.
Fable Collection
Penny Side Table - 4003

Low:
w 13”
d 13”
h 18”

High:
w 13”
d 13”
h 22”