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THE FALL HOME ISSUE

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MODERN
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THE **ULTIMATE**
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WELLBEING



AN
INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER
TAKES THE
SLOW LANE

THE NORTH FORK HAS INSPIRED **BRAD ASCALON** IN HIS WORK.
HIS VISION MIGHT SHIFT YOUR THOUGHTS ON INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

BY **LEE MEYER**

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID BENTHAL



Industrial design isn't something that immediately comes to mind when one thinks of the North Fork. As a rural community with entire organizations dedicated to maintaining century-old character and charm, the word "industrial" doesn't really factor in.

But for Brad Ascalon, a Laurel resident and award-winning industrial designer, the beauty and lovely peace of the North Fork has become a source of inspiration and inspired him to think about the word "industrial" in a whole new way.

"Working out here is such a different thing," said Ascalon, who first started visiting the North Fork as a kid with family before moving full-time during the pandemic. "In the city, I was constantly running around, hopping back and forth. It was so hard to find time to pause and really focus on letting the surroundings kind of embrace you. Here, the solitude, the quiet, it allows me to clear my head. Not only [has it changed] what I was designing, but how I was designing."

Ascalon comes from a family of creatives. His grandfather, Maurice Ascalon, was a sculptor and jeweler. His father, David, is an artist who focuses on large-scale installations. Ascalon started his professional life in the music industry, which he found to be disappointing.

"It wasn't everything I thought it was cracked up to be," he said. "In fact, it was really just a negative industry and I decided I couldn't do it anymore."

As Ascalon puts it, a quarter-life crisis led to a rare heart-to-heart with his father, who suggested he look into architecture.

"As I researched [studying] architecture, I discovered industrial design and just realized it's this industry we take for granted," he said. "The things we buy, shop for, have around us — the furniture, lighting, technology, stuff we take for granted — we don't know, nor do we care where it comes from. I thought that was just crazy."

After studying at Pratt, Ascalon founded his own studio in 2006, rather than joining an established firm.

"I figured, either I'm going to sink or I'm going to swim," he recalled. "I'm going to learn to do it, learn the business side, the creative side and really work to make it happen."

The hard work clearly paid off, but Ascalon still has to hustle.

"I've been at it for 17 years," he said, "and I still get rejections. It's always an uphill battle to get the next project."



Rethinking the ubiquitous Adirondack chair was a goal of Brad Ascalon's. He found his solution by minimizing the form to a few simple gestures of line and plane.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID BENTHAL (THIS PAGE)



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A surprising early client for Ascalon was L’Oreal. He worked on concepts for the cosmetics company to help them rethink their packaging. Such a large client so early in his career allowed Ascalon to focus on his real passion: furniture.

Ascalon’s portfolio — which includes brands like Restoration Hardware, Design Within Reach and Stylex — has been focused on furniture for office spaces. He’s also worked on smaller projects — you may have enjoyed a cocktail in his glassware at The Halyard. But with the pandemic, and so many people working from home, Ascalon has started to rethink what office furniture entails.

“The problem with [office furniture] is that it often feels very technical,” he explained, adding that even working at home, most furniture is heavy and functional but not necessarily aesthetically pleasing.

“It’s not just, ‘Let’s go to Crate & Barrel and get a desk,’” he said. “How do we take the environment, work better in it but also turn it off at the end of the day? When your laptop is there 24/7, your inclination is that you’re always at work.”

Ascalon is currently working on solutions that will help people rethink home offices.

“I used to call myself a reductivist,” he said. “But now I’ve sort of reworded it as an essentialist. If it’s not there because it needs to be, either functionally or from a manufacturing standpoint, then we can eliminate it — with some poetic license.”

Perhaps living on the North Fork is what made Ascalon think about the essentials, as he and his wife, Amy, love the outdoors, cooking, enjoying the wineries and playing with their dog, Norman.

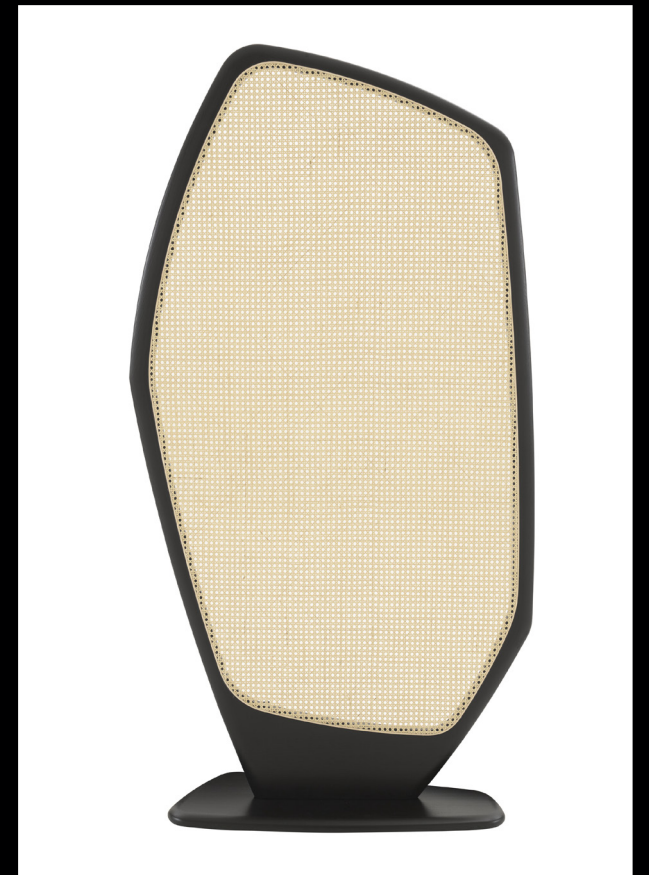
“My priorities have definitely shifted,” he said. “The little things are, to me, what’s exciting. We bike ride, we go on walks, and hike. It’s just a feeling — I mean, look at the views.”

So, what does Ascalon think the North Fork’s aesthetic should be?

“It goes back to the ‘discovery of the North Fork,’” said Ascalon. “It was engineered to just be a bunch of folding beach chairs. The fear for so many people, myself included, is that it’s going to turn into the Hamptons. I don’t know what the aesthetic should be on the North Fork. It’s so varied. It’s New Yorkers, it’s creatives, it’s winemakers, it’s farmers. It really should just be a homogeneity of all of them.”

As the pandemic subsides, Ascalon doesn’t plan on returning to the city full-time.

“I’m not going back,” he said. “I’m here, I want to stay here.”



The Gemstone privacy screen features hand woven cane surrounded by stained white ash. Below, the Nestle Chair fuses midcentury and contemporary elements.