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FRED R. CONRAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Brad Ascalon with the Peg table by Nendo, in two sizes at Cappellini in New York's SoHo neighborhood; 212-620-7953, cappellini.it. Mr. Ascalon noted the table's simplicity and use of negative space.

Percolating From Ideas

There are as many ways to make a coffee table as there are to brew the beverage itself.

FOR MANY DESIGNERS, the chair is the ultimate challenge, the tabula rasa on which they aspire to make their creative mark. Not for Brad Ascalon.

Mr. Ascalon, 37, is a product designer with an impressive portfolio of work to his name — lighting, seating, storage. But there is one piece of furniture he is particularly drawn to: the coffee table.

"With tables you have a little more leeway to create something beautiful without the limitations of ergonomics," he said. "You get to make them an exclamation point."

One of his first major table commissions was the 2008 Spindle for Ligne Roset, and since then he has produced one after another, in a variety of shapes, styles and materials. Recent examples include two faceted tables for Holly Hunt and a round one with multiple tops for Design Within Reach. All three are walnut, Mr. Ascalon's material of choice, because "it's the most beautiful, natural and sustainably harvested American wood," he said.

"I was always taught to respect traditional materials," he said, crediting his sense of materiality to his father, David Ascalon, an artist whose site-specific installations are often architecturally inspired. "I grew up around metals and glass. My fa-

ther's studio never used synthetic materials."

At the Cappellini showroom in SoHo, Mr. Ascalon pointed out the clever design of the Peg tables from Nendo, a Japanese studio. "They're very simple," he said, showing a reporter how the joinery was concealed. "The top's surface is broken up a little bit to add some negative space."

At Cassina, he praised the "great balance of materiality" in Luca Nichetto's Torei collection, more than a dozen tables in different shapes and sizes that can be mixed and matched with tops in ash and marble. "It's almost a sculpture that you create on your own," he said.

He's starting to see a lot of this: mixing and matching components to create a personalized piece of furniture. Another favorite of his, the Range Life II table by Jonah Takagi, for instance, is made up of a cluster of distinctive smaller tables. At more than \$6,000, it isn't cheap, he said, but: "It's such an unusual piece. It feels like a piece of micro-architecture."

Online, he found more-affordable options like the Lollygagger table from Loll Designs (\$268), which comes in a range of colors. And if your budget is even tighter than that, he said, D.I.Y. is always an option — and not one that he, as a designer, looks down on.

When it comes to a coffee table, the only real limitation is your imagination. "Functionally, it can be anything," he said. "The only detail a coffee table needs is a horizontal surface." DAN RUBINSTEIN

SHOPPING WITH BRAD ASCALON



The Peg table by Nendo, \$1,960 for the smaller table, at Cappellini. 212-620-7953, cappellini.it.

Lythos by Toni Grilo for Haymann Editions at Property; from \$18,700, 917-237-0123, propertyfurniture.com.

Lollygagger by Loll; \$268, 877-740-3387, lolldesigns.com.



Pig Table by Front for Moooi; \$2,636 at Lumens, 877-445-4486, lumens.com.



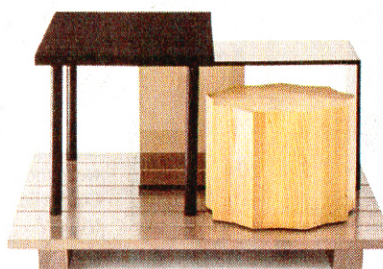
Range Life II by Jonah Takagi for Matter-Made; \$6,080 at Matter, 212-343-2600, mattermatters.com.



Periodic Table by One & Co for Council; \$44,000, 415-550-1750, councildesign.com.



Around in large by Thomas Bentzen for Muuto at YLiving; \$699, 800-236-9100, yliving.com.



Torei by Cassina; from \$1,335, 212-228-8186, cassina.com.

