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2020 — Silver Lining's Pandemic Playbook

text by Allen Warren

Well, the sky has officially fallen on 2020, and we all have stories of how we spent our time during quarantine. I have friends who learned a foreign language, cooked more than 100 loaves of bread just because they could and remodeled their entire house. I spent my entire quarantine finally memorizing the words to Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" and "It's the End of the World as we Know it" by REM. If one were to ask me if I felt productive during the pandemic, I would answer emphatically, "YES"... or I may just say, "Rock and roller cola wars, I can't take it anymore."

There are other industry professionals who were clearly much more productive and found the silver lining during the pandemic, and were able to thrive in this atmosphere. Andrew Kotchen, founding principal of Workshop/APD states, "With every challenge comes an opportunity to rethink and revise, and the pandemic is no exception. For Workshop/APD, COVID-19 has been a fast forward button, forcing us to accelerate and adopt changes in a matter of weeks that would otherwise have taken up to a decade to implement. We learned quickly that we could rely on our technological infrastructure and nimble, committed team to sustain incredible productivity and creativity while working remotely. The silver lining there is deeper trust that has helped to shift our mindset from a rigid, in-office schedule to a more flexible, collaborative, task-based approach. And Zoom (or in our case, Teams) has been a great equalizer, forcing everyone to participate in ways they might not have before. We've seen a shift in confidence and maturity in some cases, as younger and quieter staff have grown more vocal in presenting and sharing ideas through a high-tech filter. Most importantly, lessons we learned about diversification in the last downturn, including cultivating a practice and staff that's multidimensional and multi-disciplinary, has allowed us to be nimble enough to pivot into market sectors where we are seeing exponential growth. It has been a conscious decision not to silo our teams within practice verticals, so we can apply diverse cross-category knowledge to the work we have now, and revisit or redouble efforts in other verticals as the balance continues to shift."

In addition to successful interior design firms, architects are also thriving in this environment. Nicole Migeon, of Nicole Migeon Architects, admitted that the pandemic has adversely affected her. She was able to weather the storm post 9/11, the 2008 recession and the blackouts of the past two decades but this is different. She still refuses to be anything other than optimistic.

"I have used the pandemic retreat to put together a comprehensive portfolio of my 25 years in architecture and interior design. The process has been very insightful; it has informed me about the areas of design I enjoy. It has also

informed me about the kind of work I want to focus on for the next 20 years. I have also had more time to think about marketing ideas. Using my marketing experience during this time, I have been able to write and publish articles featuring Nicole Migeon Architect (NMA) projects. Another positive side to this pandemic is that unlike other design sectors, the residential design market has remained strong. NMA has been fortunate to work on several gut renovations and FF&E selections for apartments and houses. We have also had an increase in requests for residential lobby renovations."

I am excited about the future of our design industry after the pandemic. The many retail and office spaces that have sadly been left vacant during this crisis will provide opportunity for all of us to reinvent and redesign retail and offices spaces. In this "new normal," one asks, "What will these empty retail spaces be re-used for?" and "How will we create the new work environments that are suitable for the future?" These types of questions intrigue me.

It isn't just the trade industry that is optimistic about the future. Christopher J Devine, marketing manager for Bang and Olufsen, sees the silver lining in the consumer, "This year, we have seen our customers grow increasingly keen on reinvigorating their homes. The majority of entertainment venues are closed, museums and restaurants are operating at reduced capacity, and many people are still working remotely. During this time, the home has taken on greater significance, and our customers are eager to make the most of this. Fortunately, at Bang & Olufsen we're in a unique position to help. We offer a host of immersive audio and video solutions—from our collection of multiroom-enabled speakers to our home cinematic solutions—all of which enhance the overall designed environment of the home. In the face of the many challenges the world has faced this year, we consider ourselves fortunate to be able to continue working with our customers, doing what Bang & Olufsen has done best for 95 years: filling people's lives with joyful and memorable experiences."

With a contentious election around the corner and no immediate solution to the COVID pandemic, our industry's future has never been more uncertain. Knowing this, how do we find the silver lining during this time? Clearly the interviewees in this article find the silver lining through the value of creativity, positivity and personal style. This leaves me in quite a conundrum because I cannot relate; I am not creative, rarely am I positive, and I have zero personal style. I guess I will seek the silver lining in recognizing that although, "it starts with an earthquake, birds and snakes, an aeroplane", I will also remember that if "Lenny Bruce is not afraid" then I won't be, either. ■