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THIS PICTURE, WORKSTEAD FOUNDERS STEFANIE BRECHBUEHLER, ROBERT HIGHSMITH AND RYAN MAHONEY IN THEIR HUDSON STUDIO

BELOW, THE BLOCK WALL SCONCE, PART OF THE ARCHETYPE COLLECTION, \$1,250, BY WORKSTEAD

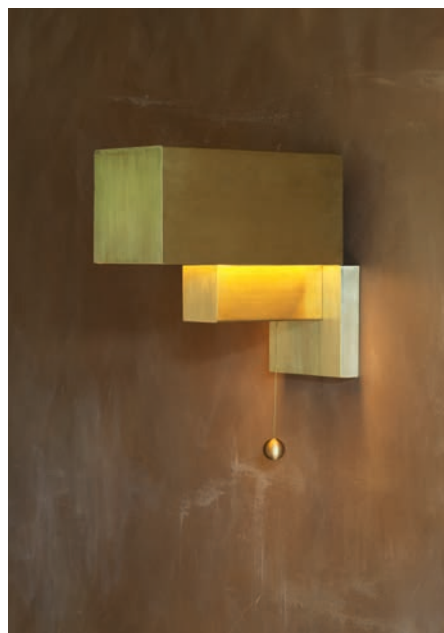
Brooklyn bridge

New York studio Workstead fuses the gap between disciplines and designs

In recent years, the pervading American design aesthetic has been dominated by acres of reclaimed wood flooring, tarnished brass hardware and a reappropriated school chair or two. Somehow cutting through that predictably nostalgic offering is the sharp creative output of Workstead, a Brooklyn-based interdisciplinary studio that has worked across product and interior design since it was established in 2009.

Founded by Stefanie Brechbuehler, Ryan Mahoney and Robert Highsmith, who met while studying for a masters in architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, Workstead has built a reputation for its one-of-a-kind approach towards residential and commercial projects, as well as its beautifully functional product and lighting collection.

It's a sensibility that has clearly resonated. From its early interior design projects, such as the public spaces and bar of Brooklyn's Wythe Hotel, to recent successes that include carving out a bakery from the



alcoves of a historic office building in Tribeca, transforming a former motel and movie theatre into the Rivertown Lodge in Hudson, New York, and filling a restored carriage house in Charleston, North Carolina, with custom cane cabinetry, the studio shows an unwavering attention to detail.

The product arm of the firm is equally successful. Initially developed for the founders' own homes and for private clients, before expanding into designs created for general sale, Workstead's luminaire offering now consists of seven collections, with its latest, Archetype, being unveiled this month.

It's been ten years since we founded the company and there's been quite a dialogue between the products and the interiors studio, Highsmith says. It was definitely the goal all along to have these two aspects of the company. This really stems from Stefanie's time at Michael Graves, where she worked between undergrad and grad school. People either know us as an all-products >>



We celebrate the new for what is new, and restore the old when and wherever possible

studio or an interiors studio. We're actively trying to fuse the two together while still creating distinct output. It was always the vision to design across all scales.

He adds, "While our studio originated during the heritage-themed Brooklyn moment, we've always been drawn towards the essence of a material, rather than an application, in our work. The spirit of nostalgia is still there in that we sometimes look to history to inform the ideas behind a given product or interior, but we are keenly aware of the line between replica and restoration. We celebrate the new for what is new, and restore the old when and wherever possible."

Today, Workstead operates studio spaces in both Brooklyn and Hudson, where Brechbuehler and Highsmith live. The Hudson studio, which was set up in May, occupies a historic Queen Anne-style building and houses both a showroom and design studio devoted to the products arm. The studio is overseen by Highsmith, while Mahoney supervises the interiors projects in Brooklyn, with Brechbuehler serving as a bridge between the two as special projects

director. With its red bricks, carved sandstone facade, coffered ceilings and period details dating back to the 1880s, the Hudson space is an evocative representation of the company's own philosophy of mixing historic and contemporary elements.

Its newest lighting collection, Archetype, draws inspiration from the modernist and post-modern architectural lighting forms created by the likes of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn, Philip Johnson and Alvar Aalto. This collection was about these very geometric typologies—the vault, the gable and the block, explains Highsmith. "I wanted to create pieces that were more monumental and more architectural in scale. Made from brass, nickel and bronze, the geometric elements that define the collection have been adapted into three typologies: chandeliers, floor lamps and sconces."

This month also sees the firm reveal the fruits of its first developer-led project in

THE VAULT SCONCE, ABOVE LEFT, AND GABLE SCONCE, ABOVE RIGHT, BOTH PART OF THE ARCHETYPE COLLECTION, \$1,250 EACH, BY WORKSTEAD

Brooklyn, One Prospect Park West, a 56-unit high-rise residential building. Workstead oversaw the interiors and drew up floor plans for the whole development, its largest undertaking to date. With the structure dating back to 1925, but never landmarked, there wasn't much to preserve from the interior. But Workstead infused some essence of the building's history into each of the units with simple crown mouldings, thinner boards of reclaimed heart pine flooring, and custom-made porcelain handles for the kitchen, which together evoke a sense of the pre-war era without seeming literal.

"We always consider the context and try to be very sensitive in the spaces that we're working in. Even our ground-up projects still require this sensitivity and ability to distill something down to its essential qualities, and really celebrate those things, reflects Mahoney. "We want to capture some of those beautiful ideas or be inspired by how things were made. It's not about historic recreation. We still want to add our take on a lot of it. ★ *The Archetype collection is available from 1 November, workstead.com*