

SURFACE

DESIGNER OF THE DAY

Designer of the Day: Douglas Fanning

Douglas Fanning often taps into his formal architecture training to render structural concepts into physical form, creating richly layered pieces of sculptural furniture that hinge on the intersection of balance, proportion, and beauty. The Brooklyn local describes his practice as “tough beauty”—a raw art in which elements of metal are exposed to create fluid, organic shapes—that’s perhaps best exemplified in two monumental lighting fixtures and one-of-a-kind tables that recently debuted at Maison Gerard.

BY RYAN WADDOUPS
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Here, we ask designers to take a selfie and give us an inside look at their life.

Age: 54

Occupation: Furniture and lighting designer, architect, and father.

Instagram: @douglas.fanning

Hometown: Frederick, Maryland.

Studio location: Red Hook, Brooklyn. Red Hook is a small waterfront manufacturing area of Brooklyn just across the river from Manhattan. There’s a different energy here, being surrounded by so many artists, each in their own form of craft, gives way for a creative space that’s unlike any other I’ve felt before. Walking through the neighborhood you’ll see many shops that look like ours, with heavy machinery and metal scraps outside. One of my favorite things is to lift the garage door and reveal another level of beauty. Raw beauty

Describe what you make: We make tough, pretty. Twenty years ago I made lights too big for most homes but caught the eye of a few influential patrons. I've never been afraid of risks. Today we make furniture pieces that interlock many unique shapes that individually are the size of a standard coffee table into massive landscapes. The outcome is work that is organic in expression. I like to think we make things most people would second guess or are afraid to make, just by their material, weight, and structure.



Archipeligo Table



Archipeligo Table

The most important thing you've designed to date: A large landscape-like bronze table we call the Outcrop. It has become a breakout piece of furniture/sculpture for me both professionally and personally just by the sheer scale and magnitude of work that goes into the piece. Like its name, which means the visible exposure of bedrock, the Outcrop holds a room and captures the eye. Even sitting in a white cyc studio the piece commands attention. It's something words and images can't really grasp—you have to see it.

Describe the problem your work solves: All our work is functional first married with beauty of material and attention to structure and detail.

Describe the project you are working on now: Over the last two years, I've been learning and experimenting with a new CNC milling center, and born from that experimentation came The Till. Its golden shimmer is created by thousands of small cuts on solid brass bars. The carving starts only after the blade is painstakingly finished with its dark bronze patina, and at this point a mistake is not acceptable. That's the level of trust, precision, and risk we take, pushing something far enough to achieve the look but not too far where the whole piece and work falls apart.

A new or forthcoming project we should know about: We're constantly working on new and exciting projects. An exhibition featuring my newest works has just been unveiled at Maison Gerard and I recently completed several site-specific pieces for their installation at 40 East End, a new condominium building on the Upper East Side. We're currently finishing our largest Outcrop two-level bronze coffee table for a home in California, but that's all I can say about the project other than it will be nearly ten by six feet. We're also just starting a new one for a penthouse in New York.



Outcrop Table

What you absolutely must have in your studio: A quiet place to sketch; my welding table is my meditative place. Welding is perfect solitude for me.

What you do when you're not working: Spend time with my wife and children enjoying everything NYC has to offer.

Sources of creative envy: Carlo Scarpa, George Nakashima, Eero Saarinen.



Trefle Table

Concrete or marble? Love both but must say I lean toward concrete for its sculptural, structural, and cantilevering properties.

High-rise or townhouse? Townhouse.

Remember or forget? Remember.

Aliens or ghosts? Ghosts.

Dark or light? Both are beautiful and necessary.