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The Maestros



1. Christopher Pagliaro, 2. Melisa Adams, 3. Karen Berkemeyer, 4. Diane Durocher, 5. Charles Hilton, 6. Kate Gelfand, 7. Lauren Vallario, 8. Anthony DeRosa, 9. Diane Rath, 10. Nicky James, 11. Courtney Chessen, 12. Brenda MacLeish, 13. Christopher Shea, 14. Jan Hiltz, 15. Jonathan Gordon, 16. Christine Hiltz, 17. Lisa Davenport, 18. Douglas Graneto, 19. Prudence Bailey.



Photos by: Matthew Cherry ♦ Photo Finishing by: Stuart Taranto

JONATHAN GORDON





D +D: Can you share a bit about the journey that led you here?

Jonathan: Interestingly enough, interior design was not my first career.

I went to school for engineering, with the dream of designing amusement park rides; I succeeded and started a company doing just that. At 30 years old, through a series of unfortunate events, I lost everything. I had my dream career and everything I'd ever wanted, but had to completely reinvent myself. Both my grandmothers said I should go into interior design, and while I thought it was a crazy idea, a career counselor agreed it would be a viable direction for me. I studied for my certification at Fairfield University in Connecticut, and began looking for an internship. This was in 2013, and it was a tough market. The industry hadn't fully recovered from the crash, and I received rejection after rejection, and I didn't understand why. I wasn't even asking for pay—I just wanted experience. One day I was exasperated and asked point blank why I was rejected. The response I received was not about



my skills or education, but about my physical self. Essentially, I didn't fit the mold the industry sought—I didn't "look like" a designer.

This was both defeating and infuriating. Just after that incident, I spoke with my professors about quitting the field completely or starting my own firm. They insisted that some firm would want me, and said that starting my own firm wasn't a good idea with such little experience. Ultimately, I knew this was my life, and I intended to take control of it. In 2014 Design by the Jonathans was established. I'd like to say it was easy, but it was an uphill battle for three years to build a client base and figure out who to talk to and how to make connections that designers need—something you typically learn in an internship.

By 2018, things were looking better, and when 2019 rolled around, we were doing so much work that I had to hire.





The rest is history. Today, we are a thriving team doing work we're proud of and loving what we do every day.

D+D: That's quite the journey. Did that experience shape your core beliefs or principles when it comes to your company or your design?

Jonathan: Certainly. That initial experience seeking an internship, along with all the stereotypical bad boss stories, created a baseline of what I would never want to be or do. I learned from these experiences exactly how I would not want to run my company. At our firm, there is a clear non-bullying mentality that permeates, and we don't tolerate disrespect on any level—whether it be clients or our own team. It seems like common sense, but it's very important. Treat others as you want to be treated.

When it comes to design, it's working hard, doing good work and really listening to the client. Our philosophy is that it's our client's home, and we have the privilege to help them make it into a space that is unique to them and reflects their individuality. We strive to bring that vision to life every time with the quality and detail that our professional expertise allows.

D+D: Looking ahead, are there any particular goals you've set or dreams you'd like to achieve?

Jonathan: Well, interior design was never my path until it suddenly was, so my goals may be a bit more free-form than most people's.

We just accomplished a goal with an office expansion to another state, and we stay very busy. More than anything, being able to grow the business while maintaining the quality of our work is really what I want—it's a simple goal. Perhaps another goal would be finding more opportunities to get our work out there through publications, awards or other means, although it's all in service of the primary goal. We have some truly astonishing projects in the works, and it's nice to share them and contribute to the industry in that way.

D+D: When you look back in 10 years, what would you like to have accomplished?

Jonathan: If we've been able to translate the wants, needs and desires of our clients into spaces that are more than the sum of the parts and serve their lives in a meaningful way, that's an accomplishment in and of itself. We have a hardworking team who take their work seriously and love what they do. It can be a tough industry, but if we look back and know we found joy in the work, delivered high-caliber design solutions and made our clients happy, that's success. Everything else is commentary. ♦

Resource: Design by the Jonathans: Jonathan Gordon, Lead Designer, New Haven, CT, 203.557.3205; thejonathans.com