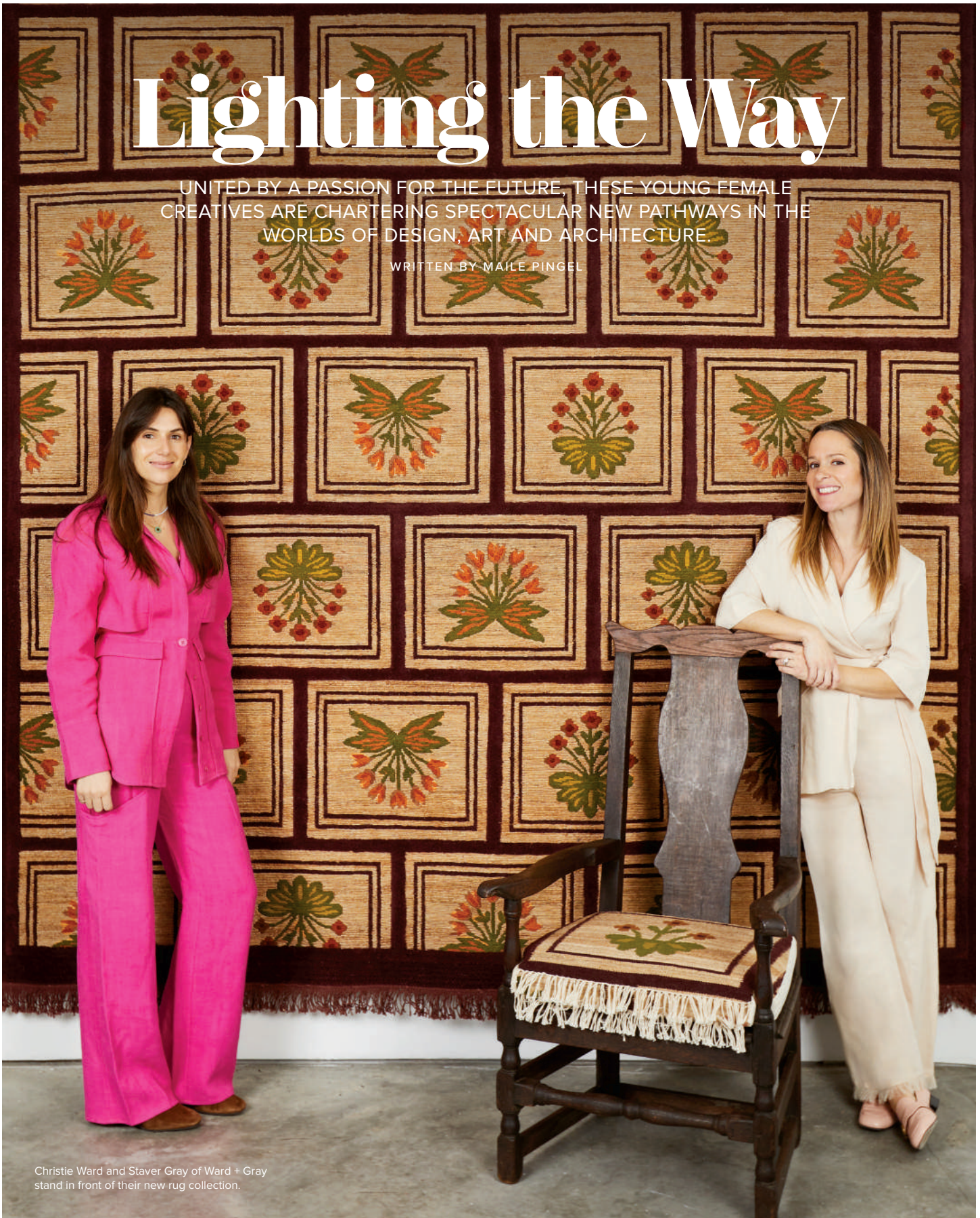


# Lighting the Way

UNITED BY A PASSION FOR THE FUTURE, THESE YOUNG FEMALE CREATIVES ARE CHARTERING SPECTACULAR NEW PATHWAYS IN THE WORLDS OF DESIGN, ART AND ARCHITECTURE.

WRITTEN BY MALE PINGEL



Christie Ward and Staver Gray of Ward + Gray stand in front of their new rug collection.

## SIDE-BY-SIDE

Christie Ward and Staver Gray founded their Manhattan-based interior design firm, Ward + Gray, in 2020, and have been buzzing ever since. The duo, who met at Parsons School of Design, take a research-driven approach to design, especially their hospitality projects. A distinct, singular aesthetic has garnered them national and international clientele, as well as a dazzling new product line.

**Hyper-local:** Identifying the four pillars, or themes, of a project is where we begin. From there we research the buildings and locations so that each one has a clear sense of place and history. **Case studies:** A Florida hotel designed by a female architect is currently in progress and reading about her work has really influenced our vision. As for Wildflower Farms, an Auberge Resorts Collection property we recently completed in Upstate New York, we wanted to make something detailed and funky. You can also see a lot of Arts and Crafts references, which has a foothold up there. **Homey spaces:** Hotels are a big focus for us, but we look to give them a residential feel: collected, contextual and authentic. Hospitality experiences are temporal, so you want it to feel super immersive, a little bold, or even shocking. **DIY:** We put so much love and energy into creating custom rug designs that it was sad to see them installed and never used again. Hence, our new line was born! We hope to have smaller furnishings and lighting follow soon. [wardandgray.com](http://wardandgray.com)



## ARTFUL IDEAS

In 2019, Abby Bangser, former Artistic Director of Frieze for the Americas and Asia, launched Object & Thing, a roving exhibition concept where site-specific installations are held at historically significant homes across the country. By curating each event with hand-picked pieces, she created a new gallery model where the physical encounter is critical.

**Origin story:** Our first exhibition was at architect Eliot Noyes's home in New Canaan, Connecticut. His family keeps the residence as a time capsule of sorts and I thought a show with contemporary art and design would introduce the house to a new audience. We were appointment only and had a waitlist of more than a thousand people. When we closed, everyone said, 'Where's the next one?' **House party:** Historic artists' and architects' homes already have a creative presence. When we add thoughtfully considered contemporary pieces, a dialogue between past and present is created. **Giving back:** We've partnered with nonprofits and given them a percentage of our sales so that the exhibition doubles as a fundraiser. **Shop talk:** The forthcoming permanent home of Object & Thing will be at a historic destination and represent multiple artists—including Johnny Ortiz-Concha and Frances Palmer—as a traditional gallery would. We will be able to display their work with greater frequency. [object-thing.com](http://object-thing.com)



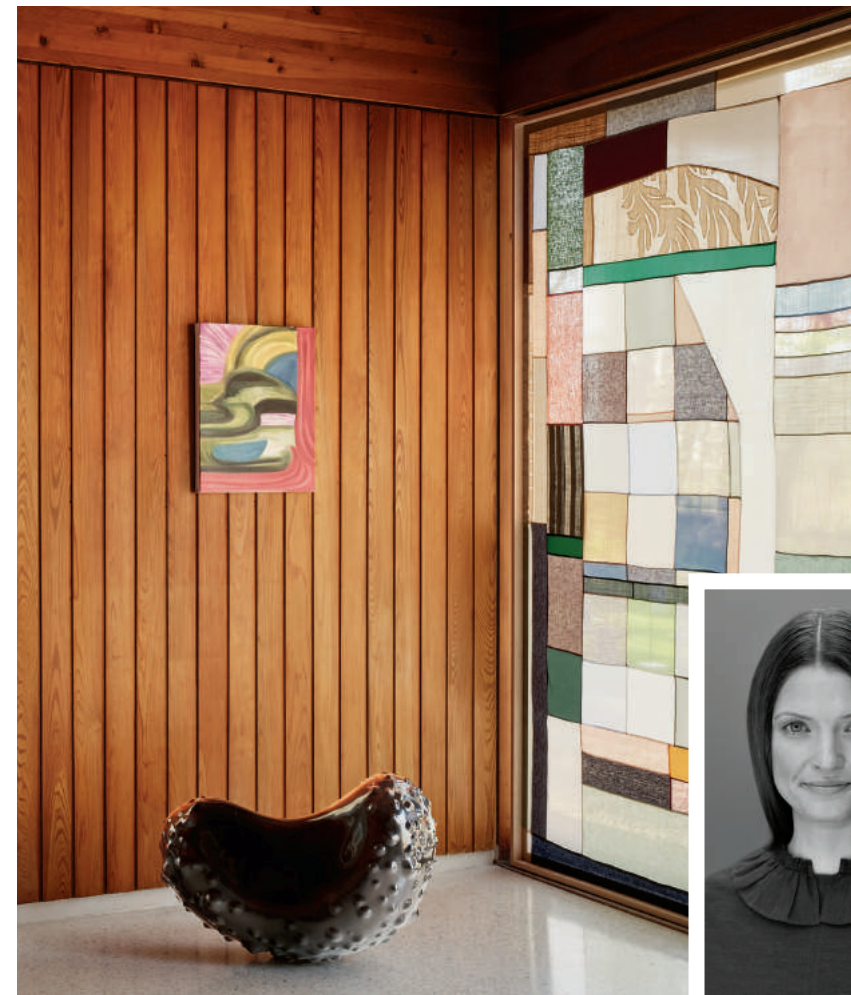
THIS PAGE PHOTOS: WARD + GRAY; READ MCKENDREE / JBSA; OBJECT & THING; MICHAEL BIONDO, PORTRAIT: GENEVIEVE HANSON. OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTOS: LANCE GERBER, PORTRAIT: YE RIN MOK.

## GOLDEN STATE OF MIND

Nature and place are the guiding forces behind the work of Rachel Bullock and Molly Purnell, partners at the Los Angeles design firm Laun. Bullock, an architect, and Purnell, a designer, not only have a successful furniture line (expect new materials and colors in the near future) but they also have several home renovations and new builds underway in the L.A. area and beyond.

**Eyes open:** We love the built environment in Los Angeles—it's liberating and fun—but we're also influenced by art, fashion and photography. We think about form and color in all aspects. You can't get stuck in a feedback loop of contemporary architecture. **Guilty pleasure:** Collecting vintage architecture books for our office library! It's important to look at a wide array of references for every project. For a new build in Vermont, the client recommended *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* to learn more about New England's heritage. **Artful touches:** Connecting clients with local artists to create custom elements is important. We recently commissioned a beautiful shower tile mural by artist Sara Bright for a project in Los Angeles' Silver Lake neighborhood.

**State of affairs:** People aren't as interested in the idea of "starchitects" anymore. Today, it's about real people and real budgets. In the past, spaces were often built in service to the vision, not to the user. [launlosangeles.com](http://launlosangeles.com)





## TURNING POINT

Aspen Golann's passion for woodworking was cemented after completing a two-year traditional trade program at Boston's North Bennet Street School.

Today her furnishings, made by hand in her New Hampshire studio, are prized by collectors and will even be on view at Winterthur's spring show, *Transformations*, alongside contemporary works. Furthermore, through her teachings at Rhode Island School of Design and founding of The Chairmaker's Toolbox, Golann is committed to championing equity in the industry.

**Getting started:** I was always a crafty person and eventually decided, I am interested in expressing my artistic instincts. The trade program gave me the technical mastery to tell my story. **All are welcome:** I started The Chairmaker's Toolbox to provide educational opportunities for learning traditional, sustainable techniques which have been removed from mainstream furniture production.

We're growing the future of green woodworking (the practice of using unseasoned wood) and seeing a lot of interest in workshops that teach classic methods. Our hope is to create a place for everyone, including historically excluded makers. **Good will:** Our teachers are volunteers, and our classes are free. We aren't grant funded, so we've relied on educational partners like Winterthur, who have given us teaching space. **Roll call:** Alumni of the project include Fernanda Barretto, Audi Culver, Katrina Tompkins, Wu Hanyen, Charles Thompson and Chelsea Witt. [aspengolann.com](http://aspengolann.com), [thechairmakerstoolbox.com](http://thechairmakerstoolbox.com)



THIS PAGE PHOTOS: LOAM MARKETING. OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTOS: MATTAFORMA; RONALD YOUNG. DESIGN SOCIAL POP-UP: SABRINA HOUNSELL, PORTRAIT: CHRISTY FIAS.

## FRESH OUTLOOK

Architectural firm Mattaforma, founded by Lindsey Wikstrom and Jean Suh, is focused on creating a future in which buildings are designed in an ethical and equitable manner—from material choices to planning for deconstruction. Last spring, Wikstrom, who has taught at Columbia and Yale, published *Designing the Forest and Other Mass Timber Futures*, which explores the history and new possibilities of wood.

**Going forward:** Our firm is only a couple of years old, but we've already worked across all scales, from a 400-square-foot bar to a 33-acre Rhode Island community. We want to keep challenging ourselves with diverse projects. **Guiding ethos:** We take our role in climate change seriously. The way we can make an impact is by lowering buildings' energy usage, the energy required to make materials, and the energy used during a space's lifetime. **End game:** We design with deconstruction in mind, too. In thinking about 100 percent circularity (a means of lessening waste and emissions from demolition), there's a new sense of planning for the end life of a structure. **Broad spectrum:** Our portfolio includes neurodivergent classrooms for a high school in Queens; a New Jersey craftsman-style home where the idea of traditional layouts was rethought, and a mountain retreat for artists, writers and musicians in Park City, Utah. [mattaforma.com](http://mattaforma.com)



## ALL TOGETHER NOW

There's an adage: find a void and fill it. And Brooks Morrison has done precisely that. While working for Moore & Giles, the Virginia native realized that many boutique textile makers were being overlooked. With her knack for marketing and merchandising, she launched The Design Social Pop-Up in 2019, which allows interior designers to connect with makers behind boutique brands. And despite the pandemic causing her to hit pause, she has turned the gatherings into some of the industry's most anticipated events.

**Smart thinking:** The old way for small businesses to get their products out there was by going door to door, but that isn't time efficient. I thought, 'how can I create a model that supports every brand and every sales strategy?' By establishing a collective and holding events in relevant, inspiring places, it also became fun. It was that simple. **Location, location:** In the beginning, I looked at tertiary communities with growing interior design practices that didn't have immediate access to design centers. We now have a footprint across the country, but I still look for evolving markets. **Why it works:** This idea isn't unique, but it used to be done by company reps, not the creatives themselves. For small businesses, personal connections are invaluable. **New this year:** Along with events in Palm Beach, Denver, East Hampton, Darien, Connecticut, and Charlotte, we'll be building on educational and mentorship opportunities. **Happiest moment:** When I hear participants say, 'You've moved the needle for me.' Sharing their work is a privilege. [thedesignsocialpopup.com](http://thedesignsocialpopup.com)



## VISION FOR CHANGE

Baltimore native Alex Delotch Davis, the new executive director of SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion + Film in Atlanta and Lacoste, France, has carved a dynamic path as a leading arts strategist. Her successes have been many—founding cultural media company Gallerie 88 and producing the Driskell Prize gala during her tenure at the High Museum of Art, both of which celebrate Black creative excellence—but for Delotch Davis, this is just the beginning.

**Lifelong pursuit:** What I love about art in all forms is that you can never know it all. There's always a new thing to learn about: an artist, technique, style or trend. As soon as you become the expert, something else comes along and you must start all over again. **Higher learning:** My role at SCAD FASH is to develop programming that will enhance the relationship between Atlanta and the university by presenting modern material culture in a way that is visually captivating and inspiring. The opportunity to bring together the realms that interest me—fashion, art, design—in an organization driven by innovation is a remarkable stroke of fate. I am an alumna of SCAD, myself! **NextGen:** Motherhood is the driving force in every decision I make. I want to show my daughters what passionate work looks like. **Ones to watch:** Fashion designer Manish Arora, designer Bradley L. Bowers and artist Awol Erizku. **Booklist:** Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind*, which talks about the importance of creative thinking in the future economy. The human ability to imagine what could be and then laying out the mechanics to make it happen is what lies ahead. [scadfash.org](http://scadfash.org)



## DREAM WEAVER

Textile designer Esha Ahmed may have honed her passion for design while working for architect Peter Marino, but it was her mother's wardrobe of saris that first sparked her creative inclinations. Born in Bangladesh, Ahmed moved to the United States with her family as a child, retaining a global outlook that continues to inform her textile studio, Makrosha, today.

**Natural instinct:** I come from a unique upbringing and culture where fabrics are revered. In Bangladesh, bright, warm patterns are a part of daily life. **Past perspective:** My background is in textile conservation and history, and I've loved studying the impact of textiles across the globe. Traditionally, they were the ultimate luxury and I want to bring that back. **Well made:** I collaborate with hand weavers all over the world. It's important that I work with mills that compensate and celebrate their craftspeople, and that artisans get a say in what they're making. Creativity needs to be constantly fostered. **Family matters:** I'm lucky that I've gotten to make this my career, but I've also worked hard. It's important for my daughter to see someone who looks like me in charge and creating opportunities for people. **What's next:** Last year, I went to Italy to visit new mills that I hadn't worked with before and who have the capabilities to reproduce my collection of beautiful antique remnants. I can't wait to see them come to life in a modern way. [makrosha.com](http://makrosha.com)

