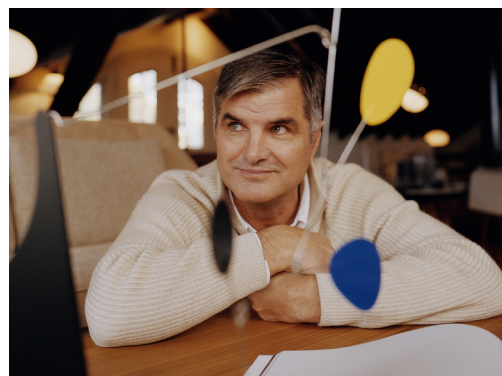


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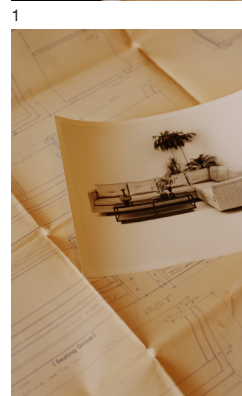
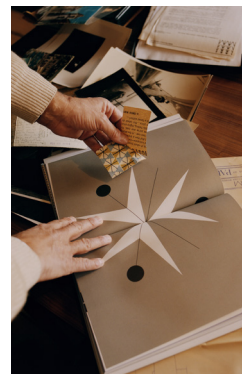
# Just preserve Rhode Island

One man is on a mission to protect the legacy of great designers as they retire or die. Mark Masiello helps the estates and families of once star names revive work and find new fans.

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3



2

For creatives, securing a legacy is a natural concern and something that varies from industry to industry. Research libraries might acquire writers' papers, sometimes negotiating terms with living authors decades before they have written their final book. Successful visual artists might redirect their work away from wealthy private buyers and towards the permanent collections of public institutions. But the pathway to longevity for furniture or industrial designers is not so obvious.

There are very few ways for contemporary creatives to ensure the posterity of their work. And for families of deceased design greats, it can be hard to know exactly who to turn to when looking to safeguard, or even gain access to, their archive. It's something that design enthusiast Mark Masiello observed 11 years ago on a visit to Hans J Wegner's studio in Copenhagen. "I was sitting at his drafting table, holding a scale model of his Wishbone Chair," says Masiello. "I knew that Wegner's designs were made by five or six different manufacturers. I was curious how it all worked."

Masiello learned that Wegner had licensed his designs to several furniture producers and was entitled to royalties for his lifetime plus 70 years. "Songwriters are entitled to similar royalties," he says. "So I asked myself, 'Who is managing design rights in the way that music rights are managed?' The answer was no one. The industry didn't exist."

Masiello responded by establishing Form Portfolios in 2016, which owns and licenses



4

"Many designers or their heirs care deeply about the work that they are responsible for but they lack the resources or expertise to bring it into the present"

1. Matching fabric samples to shapes
2. Design archive
3. Mark Masiello
4. Interiors of Masiello's carriage house
5. Bodil Kjaer's Office Desk in front of the window

the work of historic and contemporary designers. "Our mission is to elevate their legacies," he says. "We take a holistic approach to our work with them. We do a deep dive into their archives, searching not only for specific pieces but also for the inspiration and ethos behind the work. We then aim to bring this to the world through various channels."

One way that Form Portfolios does this is by resurrecting furniture that has fallen out of production. This is what the firm achieved with its first client – and Wegner's compatriot – Bodil Kjaer. Kjaer's Office Desk, designed in 1959, was made in the US and Denmark for several years before manufacturing ceased in the mid-1970s. "The desk became famous because it was featured in three James Bond films," says Masiello. "It was collected and revered but you could only find one second-hand." Form Portfolios, working with the now 92-year-old Kjaer, brought the piece back into production – and it is now available through Danish design brand Karakter.

"The story of this desk and Bodil Kjaer is now much more well-known," says Masiello. In 2019, Kjaer received the Honorary Award at the Danish Design Awards, followed by the prestigious Thorvald Bindesbøll Medal from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.

In addition to reviving classic designs, Form Portfolios also develops furniture from previously unrealised blueprints. When the company began collaborating with the office of Charles and Ray Eames, whose archive of

work is managed by the family of the late US designers, Masiello was surprised to discover that no lighting fixture developed by the duo had ever been made.

In 1949 the Eameses created the Galaxy Light for a showcase titled *An Exhibition for Modern Living* at the Detroit Institute of Arts. "We found letters sent by Charles in the archives, pleading with Howard Miller to put this light into production," says Masiello. Despite a favourable early reception from architects such as Marcel Breuer and Philip Johnson, the light was never manufactured. Thanks to Form Portfolios' efforts, however, the piece was finally produced by Italian manufacturer Cassina in 2024.

Kjaer and the Eameses aren't the only blue-chip designers on the firm's roster, which includes the likes of Alberto Rosselli, Gianfranco Frattini and Jens Risom. "Many creatives or their heirs care deeply about the work that they are responsible for but they lack the resources or expertise to bring it into the present," says Masiello. "How do you put an archive piece into production? Designers or families might know of a manufacturer but it might not necessarily be the best fit. We have dozens of relationships with brands, allowing us to find not just a producer but an ideal partner to honour a designer's legacy."

During the most recent edition of 3 Days of Design, an annual industry festival in Copenhagen, Form Portfolios created an exhibition highlighting the work of another Dane, Jens Quitsgaard. "The family had dreamed of an exhibition for years but was unable to make it happen," says Masiello. "These are the types of aspirations that we help to bring to life."

Masiello conducts business from his office in a refurbished carriage house in Rhode Island, surrounded by the fruits of Form Portfolios' labours (he works from one of the Bodil Kjaer desks that he helped to revive). This year the company will showcase the work of one of the 20th century's most famous architects, Louis Kahn. "He's a legend in the architecture world but few people know about the furniture and lighting that he designed for his buildings," says Masiello. "These pieces are crucial in creating the human connection that you feel inside a Kahn building – and they will finally be produced. I couldn't be more excited to add another layer to his legacy and share it with the world to enjoy."

Other designers, or families with impressive design pedigrees, would do well to follow Khan, Kjaer and the Eameses in finding a way to safeguard their work for future generations. Masiello and company might just be the solution. — M formportfolios.com



5