

VOICES

A Day with Collective Design Founder Steven Learner

The New York–based architect and all-around design aficionado prepares for the city’s coolest fair

TEXT BY ALICIA BRUNKER

Posted October 10, 2017

To say Steven Learner is busy would be an understatement. Ever since he founded Collective Design, a show that highlights extraordinary modern furnishings and objects, in 2013 and made the decision to devote the majority of his focus on the fair, he has become the ultimate man on the move. And the fall presents itself as a particularly action-packed season for the architect, especially now that he plans to present this year’s fair two months ahead of schedule, in March. After a whirlwind week at the London Design Festival, Learner returned home, where he balanced the effects of what he describes as “event lag” with meetings and meditation. *AD* caught up with the on-the-go designer for a day before he jetted off for another round of art and design sightings abroad.

7:00 A.M. Thanks to jet lag, I wake up early with the sun streaming into my bedroom. Before I look at my phone, answer an email, or even have my coffee, I sit down and meditate. I’ve been practicing transcendental meditation for a few years and am working to make it a part of my daily schedule.



Steven Learner.

Photo: Taylor Jewell

8:00 A.M. I take a class at Yoga 216, a semiprivate studio that's just three blocks from my home in Chelsea. The short walk there wakes up my body, while the stroll back cools me down!

9:30 A.M. I have coffee and my favorite combination of scrambled eggs and sliced avocado at home.



Apparatus's booth at this year's Collective Design Fair.

Photo: Courtesy of Collective Design

10:00 A.M. I'm working from home today and have my team join me in the dining room. We go through our immediate and long-term plans for Collective Design Fair. The event's dates recently moved to March. At that time, we'll be the only design event while collectors visit the premier art shows along the West Side of New York, like the Armory Show.

11:30 A.M. First on our to-do list today is the review of RSVPs for an upcoming event. Next week, we're hosting a cocktail party for 150 people from the art, design, and fashion communities, with Calvin Klein at their flagship store on Madison Avenue.

12:00 P.M. We begin to look over the proposals we received for our Collective Concept installations at the fair. In the past, independent designers like Fernando Mastrangelo and Christopher Boots presented immersive environments of their work at the show.

1:00 P.M. My daughter Molly is in town from school in Los Angeles, and we have lunch at abcV. Their green chickpea hummus is beyond belief, garlicky and such an intense color! We had that with avocado lettuce wraps, heirloom tomatoes and ricotta salata, and sautéed baby artichokes.

2:30 P.M. On my way home from the restaurant, I stop by a few nearby galleries to discuss the plans for their installations at Collective. Then I go by to see my old friend Benoist at Maison Gerard, where he's been mixing a collection of classic French Deco with contemporary American design. I had time for just one more stop so popped in to covet the Italian glass at Bernd Goeckler.



Mattia Bonetti work on display at Collective.

Photo: Courtesy of Collective Design

3:30 P.M. Back at home, I have a call with Mimi Jung, a Los Angeles designer who showed with us three years ago. It has been amazing to witness her practice grow and the incredible response to her work. I recently saw her newest collaboration with Kvadrat in London.

7:00 P.M. I head to Brooklyn for Van Alen Institute's annual event. This year it's hosted inside a private home designed by LOT-EK. Within its corner lot, Ada and Giuseppe have stacked and sliced their signature shipping container vocabulary into a series of rooms and terraces that feel very Californian and perfect for a party on a warm fall night.

9:30 P.M. I arrive home for dinner with my girlfriend, Jillian. We try to cook at home as often as possible, and tonight we make roasted acorn squash with stir-fried greens—very healthy.



Galerie Negropontes at Collective in 2016.

Photo: Courtesy of Collective Design

10:30 P.M. We watch the second episode of *The Defiant Ones*, a series on HBO about Dr. Dre and Jimmy Iovine, the founders of Interscope Records and creators of Beats headphones. It's a fascinating story that begins with the birth of rap in Compton and ends with a multibillion-dollar sale to Apple.

11:30 P.M. I send a few texts and emails to my son, Eli, read a bit on my Kindle, and then I'm off to sleep with the window open and the fall breeze coming through the window.