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SWEETS NEWS AND PRODUCTS

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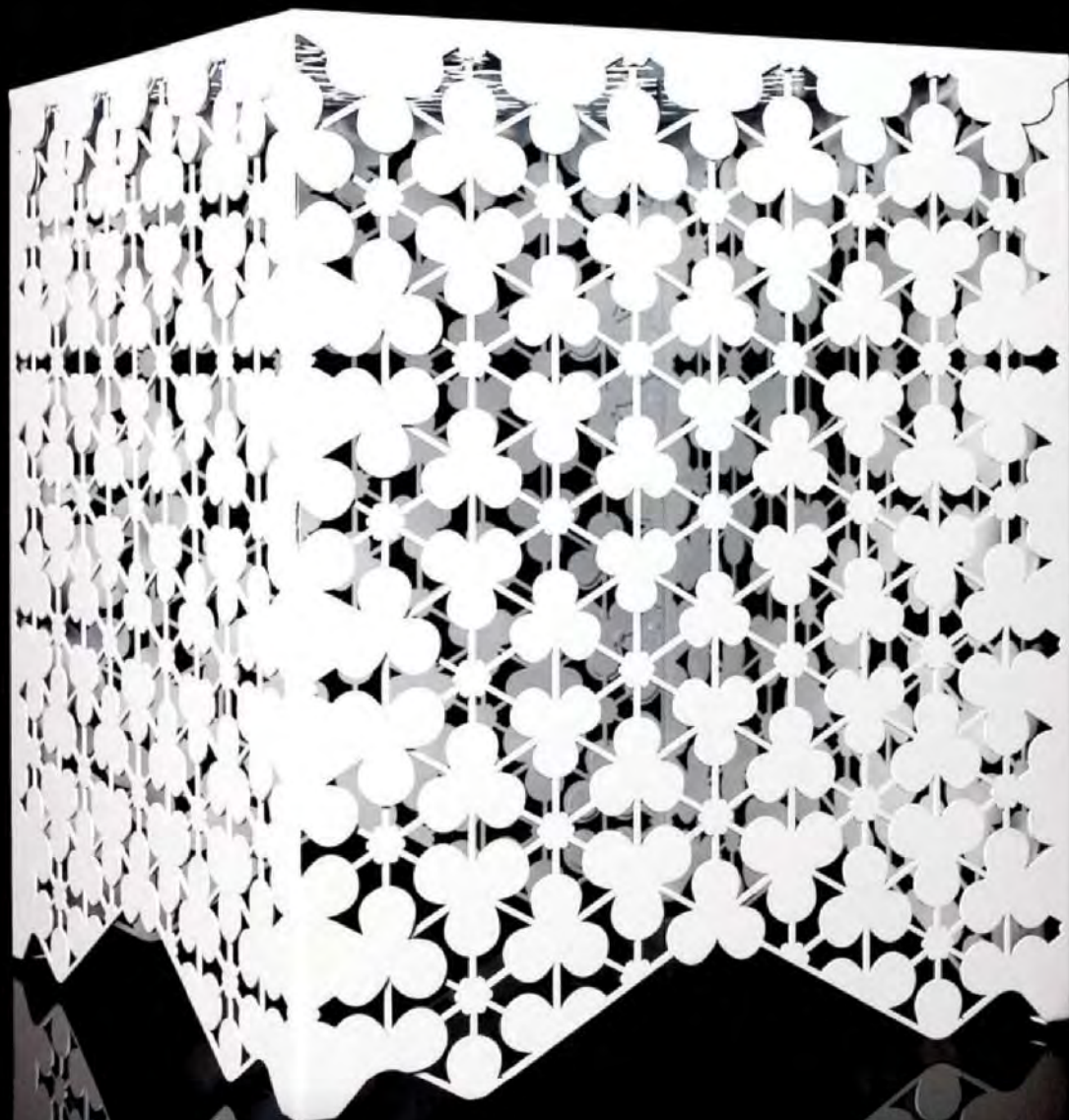
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## Smarter Sunshades

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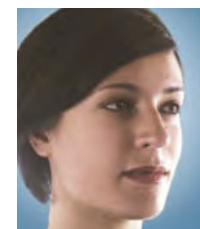
# One Thing Leads to Another

*From furniture to lighting to wall coverings, these designers are using their training as architects to create beautiful and practical product design solutions* BY INGRID SPENCER

**CALLED RICAMI,** after the Italian name for embroidery, the line of laser-cut metal stools that Elena Manferdini designed for Arktura, above, are part of her research on the relationship between fashion and architecture.



**FROM VITRUVIUS AND HIS CATAPULTS,** sundials, and water clocks in the first century B.C., to Zaha Hadid and her recent tea service and centerpiece for Alessi, trained architects have been designing products. For some, it's a scale thing — their real love is building design, but creating something small, useful, and beautiful is a nice break from the intensity of the architectural process. For others, it's all about making things with their hands — architectural design can mean a lot of computer time, drawing time, managing time, and creative mental time, but not always hands-on experience. Regardless, most architects say they turn to product design because it's an obvious course: One thing leads to another, whether it begins with the exploration of a particular material, a practical solution that could work for more than the current custom application, or a need to see something put out there in the world that can be produced in a fraction of the time it takes to make architecture happen. For the following three emerging companies, it's a little of all of the above, and more.



**ELENA MANFERDINI**

Elena Manferdini's Gem line of outdoor tables, above, are explorations in folded triangularity. The anodized-aluminum, octagonal tables can be used singularly or grouped together. Each one features intricate laser-cut flower patterns that reveal Manferdini's interest in lace as a point of inspiration in her work.

## **ATELIER MANFERDINI:**

"There's a language that goes from one project to another," says Los Angeles-based architect, engineer, product designer, fashion designer, artist, and teacher Elena Manferdini about her ability to switch hats and go fluidly from one role to another. "Right now I'm designing a house that uses the same principles of interlocking spaces as my latest furniture project. I'm interested in all the different scales." That latest furniture project is Gem, a line of outdoor tables for furniture manufacturer and distributor Lervial (the company's tag line is "Furniture by Architects"). With their delicate laser-cut patterns of flowers, the geometric tables, made of anodized aluminum, continue the themes of lace and cutouts and delicate-versus-fortified that Manferdini has long been exploring in her work. Those themes are also evident in her Ricami line of powder-coated steel stools and tables for furniture manufacturer Arktura (the line is part of

PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY OF ATELIER MANFERDINI

the permanent collection at LACMA), and have shown up in her work since her 2008 installation at SCI-Arc in 2008 called *Merletti* (from the Italian word for lace), which featured a lacelike structure made of plastic and wire that was meant to top a fortress or defensive building. Manfredini admits she likes to push boundaries, including during the manufacturing process, which she says she enjoys more than the designing process. “Working with manufacturers is always intriguing to me,” she says. “I love to see what they are able to do and, yes, even push them to do more.”

## GRAYPANTS

The principals at Graypants, Jonathan Junker and Seth Grizzle, have their own unique manufacturing process — which entails making all of their products, including lampshades and furniture, by hand. Everything they make is made out of discarded material, and every lampshade is made in the Graypants studio in Seattle, where the two also live. Junker and Grizzle left their jobs as architects to focus on doing what they loved best — making things. “It’s the craft of it,” says Junker. “To get your eyes off a computer screen and use your hands, it gives you the chance to see

it happen in a bustling, artistic environment.” Graypants began as a hobby to supplement their jobs with architecture firms, when the lads began collecting discarded cardboard boxes and wood in their spare time. For the Slice Café Chair, three chairs can be produced from a single sheet of discarded plywood, with no waste except for sawdust. To make their Scraplights, Grizzle and Junker collect cardboard from a slew of cooperating industrial businesses in Seattle every week. Even with customers like Aveda and Starbucks (Scraplights can be found in at least 200 Starbucks stores), Graypants are adamant about keeping the production local. “There will never be a Scraplight made from new cardboard,” promises Junker. They also plan to keep their chairs manufactured locally, as well as their latest product venture, a new brand called “Where it’s @” that launched late last year and will produce a line of goods ranging from children’s toys to hanging art to apparel, “to who knows what,” says Junker.

## ISSSSTUDIO

For architect Igor Siddiqui, principal of ISSSStudio, the impulse to focus on product design was both pragmatic and conceptual. With his architectural practice based in



Brooklyn and his teaching appointments literally all over the U.S. map — from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia to the California College of the Arts in San Francisco to the University of Texas in Austin — designing something that was not bound to a specific site made sense. Also, “their schedules and scope are more contained, making them far more manageable than conventional architectural projects,” says Siddiqui. Furthermore, after over a decade of practice in New York City, where Siddiqui worked primarily on interiors and small buildings, he was getting an increasing sense that most of the creative energy in projects of such scale came from the products used. “I wanted to design them,” he says. He has. His Tessellated Floorscape, developed as a flooring prototype for Aronson’s Floorcovering in New York, uses digital fabrication as a means of introducing custom patterning to leftover carpet tile material. The prototype, about 12’ in diameter, is digitally designed as a true jigsaw puzzle — each component is unique and produced using waterjet cutting technology. His Ceramic Tesseltile, designed for Pollack Architects in San Francisco, is a ceramic tile system digitally designed to provide an alternative to hexagonal or square patterns, while having limited seams. The tile was industrially produced in a New Hampshire factory through Stone Source. Finally, Calystegia and Bougainvillea are two fabric prototypes produced by Siddiqui’s studio in Austin. They are a wall/curtain hybrid, “an opportunity to take tessellated patterns and give them greater volumetric character.” For Siddiqui, this product, because of its component-based, digitally fabricated nature, provides a “nice connection between my commercial practice and teaching”



**IGOR SIDDIQUI**  
Experimenting with various materials and assembly investigations for his architecture clients led Igor Siddiqui to develop two fabric prototypes, Calystegia and Bougainvillea, (above, top) that serve as a wall/curtain hybrid. Siddiqui’s Ceramic Tesseltile (above, center), designed for Pollack Architects in San Francisco, is digitally designed so that each material order produces a unique pattern, while maintaining the same seaming logic.



**SETH GRIZZLE** (left)  
**JONATHAN JUNKER** (right)

**TOP:** Every week, the Graypants team rents a truck (Grizzle and Junker don’t own cars) and drives to a number of cooperating industrial and retail businesses to pick up stacks of discarded corrugated cardboard. Back at the studio the cardboard is cut and assembled into the lampshades.

**BOTTOM:** Grizzle and Junker’s latest version of the Slice Chair is constructed from plywood. Three chairs are made from one sheet of plywood, with no waste but the sawdust.

