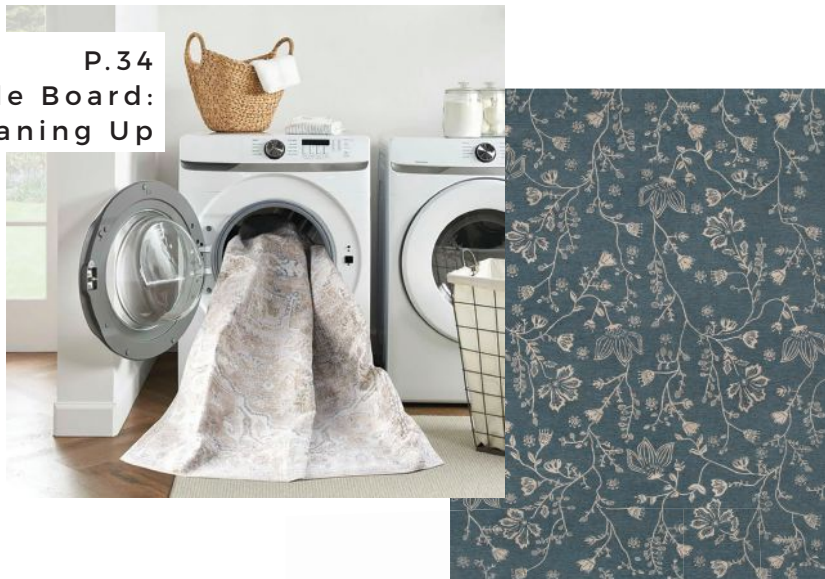


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**Garcia looks for alignment not only in design goals, but in cultural values when choosing a partnership.**



quality standards while seeking input from manufacturers regarding feasibility and cost optimization.

“Ultimately, these conversations aim to establish a mutual understanding and foster a partnership that brings our design to fruition efficiently and effectively,” she says.

For designer Libby Langdon, inspiration often strikes from a need that arises in her interior design firm and client projects. Unable to find specific products or styles, she takes it upon herself to create them. Her designs are guided by her clients’ lifestyles and preferences, eschewing trends for enduring style, substance and comfort. Langdon’s goal is to design products that will stand the test of time, ensuring their longevity in the marketplace.

“The factors I consider are mostly how I see my clients living and what they are looking for,” she says. “I don’t really design a hot pink tet-a-tet sofa because my clients don’t really want to live with something like that — they want style, substance and comfort. I stay away from trends most of the time. I want to design products that will stay out in the marketplace and continue to be manufactured for years to come. When they get dropped or discontinued I lose that chance for revenue, and that defeats the whole purpose of licensing.”

Langdon’s design process begins with a sketch, meticulously detailing every aspect to avoid leaving anything to chance. The sketches are then transformed into CAD designs by her team.

“A lot goes into it,” she says. “The wattage and size of the bulbs and how can it be broken down for shipping, all has to be considered in the initial design. For my Fairfield furniture they do the CAD off my sketches and then I work with them to tweak it before production.”

When approaching potential partners or manufacturers, Langdon emphasizes the need for a collaborative and proactive approach. She looks for partners that complement her design aesthetic and have a wide reach in various retail outlets, ensuring maximum exposure for her designs.

“Paragon Wall Decor was very up front on my first call to explore the partnership that I would be responsible 100 percent

for bringing them artwork content; otherwise why would they need to partner with me, they have teams of artists already,” she says. “We collaborate now more on the processes like over painting and discussing different material base mediums. I also develop and design way more when I’m presenting my initial ideas because I never know what they might already have in the pipeline that looks like what I’m bringing them — and I want to have as much product come to market as possible.”

Collaboration is key in ensuring a successful partnership. Langdon believes in open communication and mutual respect, valuing input from



**Langdon looks for partners that compliment her design aesthetic and have a wide reach in various retail outlets, ensuring maximum exposure for her designs.**

manufacturers and collaborators.

"I think one of the first things a potential manufacturer wants to see and hear is that you feel that you will not only be able to design great products that will sell, but you will also help get out there and sell it!" she says. "There's a lot of noise now in the licensing space, and just designing the product is not enough. You have to carve out ways to tell the story of what you are doing and why, where the inspiration is coming from and how what you will design will be different from what the company is currently offering."

Langdon's future projects include new artwork ideas for Paragon, new collections with Crystorama and more than 20 new SKUs of casegoods and upholstery for Fairfield Chair coming to this month's High Point Market. She encourages designers who are hoping to enter a partnership to know what they want to get out of them.

"For me, it's a financial choice," she says. "I'm not ashamed to say that, and I work really hard to make it happen! I let my partners know I'm in it for the money up front, and usually, they like to hear it. If I'm making money, it means they are making money!"



**At Cyan Design, the team hones in on design relationships that have developed organically when seeking partnerships (above). Partnerships have resulted in a collection of accent pieces for Howard Elliott, such as this golden-accented mirror (left).**

## Partnering for Success

Designer collaborations also greatly impact the manufacturing side. At Howard Elliott, the team aligns itself with designers who are active in product development and share similar aesthetics with the brand identity and values. This ensures a cohesive partnership and a collection that resonates with its audience. Chemistry and collaboration are key criteria.

"Experience and a proven ability to create unique and marketable designs are important," says Brian

Berk, President of Howard Elliott. "We value designers who are collaborative and open to working closely with our team throughout the development process."

The group's partnership with designer Jody Ossman, for example, has resulted in a collection of accent furniture, original artwork, mirrors and more. This partnership has been integral in Howard Elliott's evolution.

"We also recently partnered with Robin Baron, with the initial collection debuting this Spring at High Point Market," he says. "This partnership not only brought fresh design to our product lineup, but is also expected to attract a new demographic of customers who are drawn to Robin's aesthetic."

When considering a partnership, Howard Elliott looks for designers who resonate with the brand's aesthetics and inject a fresh perspective into collections.

"We seek designers who can seamlessly align their work with our brand's identity while simultaneously introducing innovative ideas and pushing the boundaries of home decor. Versatility is key, as we value designers who can cater to a diverse range of tastes while maintaining a cohesive and distinctive aesthetic that complements our brand," Berk says.

At Cyan Design, the team does not actively seek out designers to partner with. Instead, they look for relationships that develop organically. They consider the creative energy and depth of experience of the designer, as well as their creative point of view. "An important question to ask is, 'will their work uniquely compliment and enhance Cyan's assortment of products?'" notes Mary Wilson, Cyan Director of Design. A recent successful partnership for Cyan Design was with Thom Filicia, resulting in a capsule collection of accessories. "Thom's aesthetic aligned well with Cyan's brand transformation into design-driven products. "He is beloved in the industry and draws customers into the showrooms who we might otherwise not see," she says. "Look for a major launch of Thom's inspiring accessories at the October 2024 High Point Market!"

When considering a partnership, Cyan Design looks for designers whose body of work reflects their strengths and style. They consider whether the designer has an eclectic or purist style, which materials they gravitate toward, and whether they are continually evolving in their designs.

"If a designer is creating accessories, they provide the initial inspiration concepts," she says. "Together, we flesh out material, finish and scale to produce a first sample."

Ensuring that the designer's vision aligns with Cyan's brand identity and values is a nuanced process.

"Partnering with a designer is a serious relationship," Wilson says. "When a company commits to a licensed designer, it includes a multi-faceted commitment to many things —

for instance, a marketing package, appearances and expensive product development. If the designer does not have much experience, industry following, or product development knowledge, it's a one-sided street for the company. These pieces are critical to ensuring the relationship will be mutually beneficial." **FLD**



**"EXPERIENCE AND A PROVEN ABILITY TO CREATE UNIQUE, MARKETABLE DESIGNS ARE IMPORTANT."**

**- Brian Berk,  
Howard Elliott**

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**Color, warm gold and curvilinear LED are trending. L to R: Hinkley blue beaded chandelier; Crystorama warm gold chandelier; Currey green organic lamp; WAC Marguerite LED pendant.**



comfortable with. The difference is that LED lends itself to different bulb styles and light-emitting options, while staying cooler and with a longer lifespan.

This can lead to more artistic lighting design and the resurgence of such elements as shades.

"Currey reinvented the chandelier shade program because we felt like it was time for a more decorative moment," says Adams. "This is an easy way to add to decor, similar to pillows and table lamps and brings a touch of whimsy." He attributes a desire for these more decorative moments to the way overall design style is trending. "I believe we will enter a time of more decorative interiors and move away from the black and white farmhouse to more of a cozy cottage feeling," he says. "While you can see this happening in some places, it will grow into a larger trend moving into the late 2020s. Natural materials and sustainability will continue to be strong drivers for the rest of the decade."

Natural and other unique materials, as well as color, have been trending in lighting this year with vibrant pops seen on everything from lamps — an easy place to bring in color — to larger statement pieces that include colored glass and finishes. Again, the uptick in natural materials such as rattan, bamboo, leather and even felt accents on light fixtures is made possible by LED light sources that won't heat up and burn through those materials.

As for color, he adds that Currey is noticing more color, whether standalone or mixed with metals and other finishes. "Table lamps are a great place to have color and we are seeing every shade of blue, white and recently a lot of green coming into the category," Adams says. "There's also a real mix of materials. For fixtures, color comes from the decoration for Currey, along with our metallic finishes. A green recycled glass chandelier with a gold leaf frame is one of our bestselling items."

Black is still a staple, even as lighting industry insiders are beginning to see the dark hue wane a bit. They're also seeing more white coming in, which Adams feels is a variation on silver tones. In metallics, warm golds are holding their ground, but softer tones are starting to emerge in that area as well. Warm silvers, such as brushed

pewter and nickel are more prevalent than they were a couple of years ago, and a number of lighting suppliers have introduced softer finishes, such as champagne, which works with a variety of other metallic finishes. "We see champagne as a chameleon that will reflect gold or silver depending on the surrounding color in a room, and that makes it quite useful," Adams says. "It's also a softer tone."

### **Size Matters**

At the recent Lightovation show in Dallas, oversized decorative lighting fixtures were in abundance. From oversized pendants and chandelier to grouping of smaller pendants pulled together to make a statement, downsizing lighting fixtures doesn't appear to be where lighting design is headed. As "functional art" for the home, these pieces are making a statement in the right design environment.

With oversized pieces, Whitehead has noticed the emergence of pendants over more elaborate chandelier designs, but those are trending larger as well. "Bigger is better, that's the trend," he says. "We're not seeing tiny pendants unless they're grouped. Large fixtures in a loft-like space can humanize that space when you add scale to it."

As with other categories, there are overarching trends that we see from year to year. However, if you want that polished chrome fixture or a classic chandelier, it is available. Trends are subjective and having options helps to meet the customers where they are with what they need. **FLD**