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COMFORTABLE



Bright Ideas

Vermont's Hubbardton Forge designs and crafts its timeless light fixtures with an eye toward the future and a nod to the past.

| BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER |



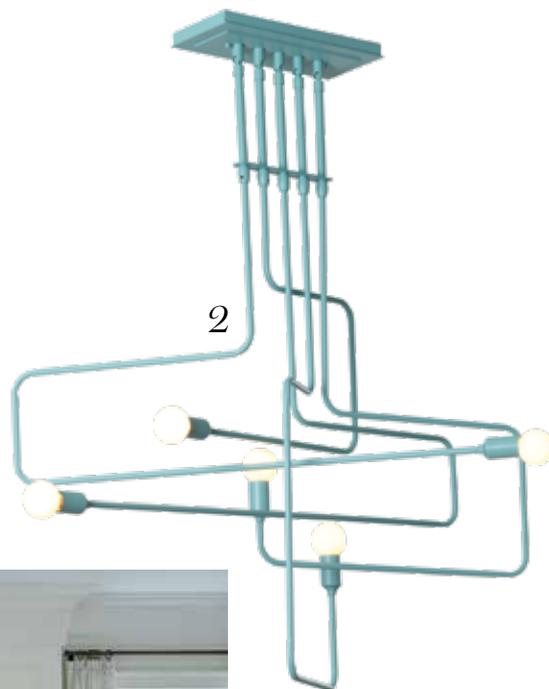
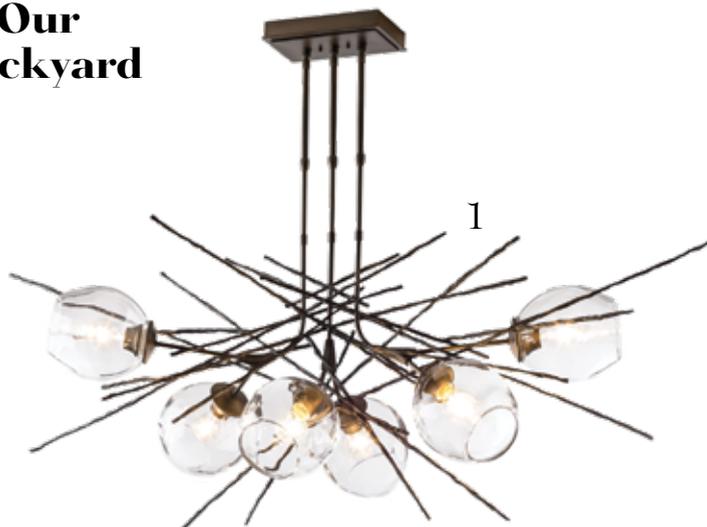
☿ If the name Hubbardton Forge brings to mind a brawny smithy shaping a horseshoe under a spreading chestnut tree, David Kitts would understand. The design director of the Castleton, Vermont-based manufacturer of handcrafted lighting had that same misconception himself before joining the company nearly ten years ago. “I was expecting wagon wheels, antlers—something very traditional,” he says. “And I remember being so pleasantly surprised at the clean, very elegant look of the line.”

Hubbardton's fresh take on handcrafted metalwork may be better known today, but it's no easier to pigeonhole, with designs that range from industrial chic to edgy modernism to retro glam. In the last couple of years, it has launched two distinct new lines: Vermont Modern, targeting a younger, more urban and more price-conscious customer, and Synchronicity, which brings on the bling by pairing the company's signature steel with Swarovski crystals. “If you asked people who know Hubbardton Forge what they consider our core style, you'll get surprisingly different answers,” Kitts says. “What is consistent is we try not to take the easy way out.”

It's been that way since 1974, when University of Vermont students Reed Hampton and George Chandler started hand-forging candlesticks and fireplace irons in a local barn. Now with 235 employees and

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Forge team member Tom DeMatties makes complex welds on a Double Cirque chandelier. Hook, Vine and Sinker is a playfully named trio of pendants, each with a unique hooked design. The Henry sconce also comes in an outdoor version that is dark-sky friendly.

In Our Backyard



1. The Griffin pendant combines bark-like steel rods crafted at the forge with hand-blown artisanal glass from Vermont manufacturer Simon Pearce.

2. Made of steel tubes threading past each other, the Metro pendant is a visual nod to mass transit systems. Its tubes can be independently rotated to customize the design.

3. The stainless-steel spring coil of the Knot mini-pendants can be knotted as their name implies, dangled singularly, or draped together.

4. Steel and glass "berries" create the Sprig chandelier, which can be hung individually or in groupings.

5. Glass crystals, steel framing, and LED illumination come together in the Solitude Circular LED pendant. Its low-voltage power cables are designed to disappear, making the light appear to float in air.

owned by Boston-based Bunker Hill Capital, Hubbardton Forge still makes its products one at a time. That includes its 800 standard designs (available in some 40,000 configurations) and its custom work. "When we get an order, the piece is truly being made for that person," explains vice president of marketing Jeanne-Marie Gand. Hubbardton distributes its products through 900 showrooms, a few select online retailers, and roughly 460 individual designers in the company's expanding trade program. "We've started to aggressively reach out to designers," explains Ray Langton, who joined as CEO last year.

This reaching out is done from the company's 162,000-square-foot headquarters. Planning, designing, forging, welding, finishing, packaging, shipping—it's all done there. "I can literally be in the factory in forty seconds," says Langton. The brevity of that walk sums up the company's edge against global manufacturers: the ability to

deliver its made-to-order lighting in under four weeks, and its custom work in ten.

The company adds some eighty new designs a year, conjured up by a design team schooled in graphic design, architecture, engineering, sculpture, and jewelry design. Their creative journey might begin with a request for a particular type of product, but it's just as likely to evolve along what Kitts calls "the I'm-just-going-to-try-to-come-up-with-something-interesting route." In that case, he admits, "I don't know where I'm going or if this is a table lamp or a chandelier, but I have an interesting thought and

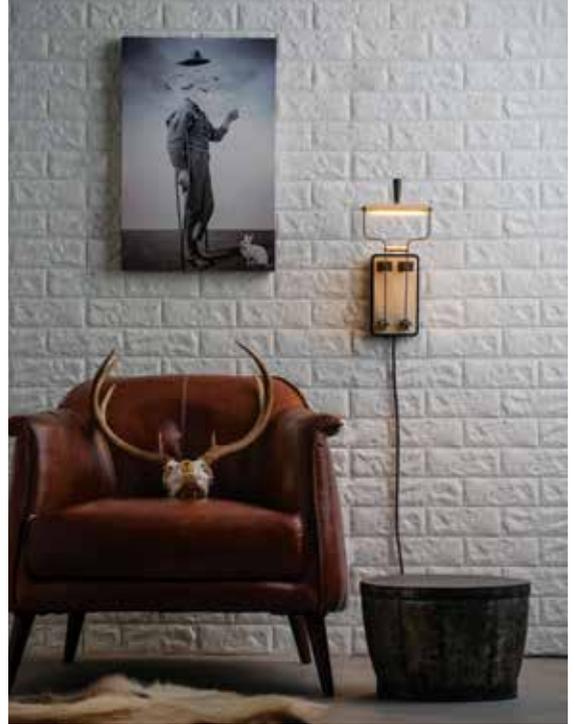
Good Bones

“We know we’ve hit the mark when six or seven of us look at it and think, ‘I could put that in my house.’” says David Kitts.



I’m going to run with it.”

In responding to trends, the focus is less on copying a style than teasing out its appeal. Reflecting on the interest in Edison-style light bulbs a few years ago, Kitts surmised that it was the vintage bulbs’ warm glow that drew new fans. “We started developing some glass that could do that, a thick glass that would have a nice glow, that of a firefly caught in a



bottle.” The vessel became the basis for the Erlenmeyer line, named for the laboratory flask it emulates, and it quickly became a bestseller. “We know we’ve hit the mark when six or seven of us look at it and think, ‘I could put that in my house.’” Kitts says.

While a fixture’s style might reflect the broader design world, it’s likely that at least some of its parts are homegrown. Hubbardton Forge sources many of



FROM FACING PAGE, FAR LEFT: The Erlenmeyer sconce was inspired by the popularity of Edison-style light bulbs. The Old Sparky sconce recalls a vintage double pole knife switch. The idea for the Dahlia chandelier came not from the flower, but from a piece of jewelry designed by Harry Bertoia. Atlas pendants feature the company's new Opaline glass option.

its LEDs from LEDdynamics in Randolph, as well as artisanal glass from A.O. Glass in Burlington and Simon Pearce in Quechee, and wood from Maple Landmark Woodcraft in Middlebury.

Embracing its Vermont identity is a source of pride that extends from the company's commitment to eco-friendly manufacturing practices to its near-obsessive approach to craftsmanship. It's something

of a Yankee mindset, says Gand. "We hide every weld," she says. "We care about those things, and our customers care about those things."

Quality control occurs spontaneously through the process as a piece is passed from hand to hand to hand. "We realize it is becoming part of someone's life, and that's important to us," Gand says. "There's a lot of pride in that building." ■

Hubbardton Forge
Castleton, Vt.
hubbardtonforge.com