

# SPOTLIGHT

## DESIGN



Lighting designer Michael Anastassiades says he creates to communicate ‘in as pure a way as I see things.’

# Do the light thing

Designer channels his former life as a yoga instructor into his work

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Chatting with designer Michael Anastassiades is as much a lesson in philosophy as in the alchemy for his award-winning lights.

With his distinctive, clean-lined artistic pieces starring in world-wide collections such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum in his home city of London, he could be forgiven for having more than a healthy dose of ego.

Perhaps it’s the laid-back, Namaste-centric West Coast air, but on a recent trip to Vancouver as part of the IDS West interior design show, the Cyprus-born Anastassiades quickly channels less of his high-octane design role and more his former life as a yoga instructor.

“I simply don’t design from greed. I don’t design to become wealthy,” he says in a soft manner, over a San Pellegrino water on a sofa at Gastown’s Inform Interiors, where his String Lights for Italian home decor company FLOS dominate the window display. “I have no ambition to change the world. All I want to do is communicate my ideas in as pure a way as I see things. It’s just important to enjoy what you do and enjoy the process.”

It’s a process often showcasing shimmering patinas and industrial bronze as well as an angular, architectural, geometric esthetic that he’s allowed to evolve organically over the past two decades after graduating with a master’s degree in industrial design from London’s Royal College of Art.

While most of his peers had previous design experience and segued into working for companies or setting up their own practices, he spent a brief time contacting manufacturers before working out how to create his own lighting without relying on others.

“It’s what I was expected to do, but I found rejection a very draining and negative process. I soon realized it was not a personal criticism and from the moment you decide not to make it your problem then you can move on, so this happened partly out of choice and partly out of no choice,” Anastassiades says, adding that his



Michael Anastassiades’ lighting designs appear in the Museum of Modern Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum.



introduction to Ashtanga yoga was perfect timing. “It taught me not to corrupt myself, so I taught yoga and kept my design pure.”

Which meant gravitating to small workshops to create his pieces and practising no matter whether or not anyone was going to see or buy it — just as painters keeps on loading up their canvases.

“As a creative person, it’s incredibly frustrating if you feel you are stuck and you can’t move on in your creative career, but the most important thing is not letting designs remain on paper,” he says. “Whether they sell their work, whether they have a gallery represent them, painters carry on, so this was the way to move forward for me ... I needed to make these

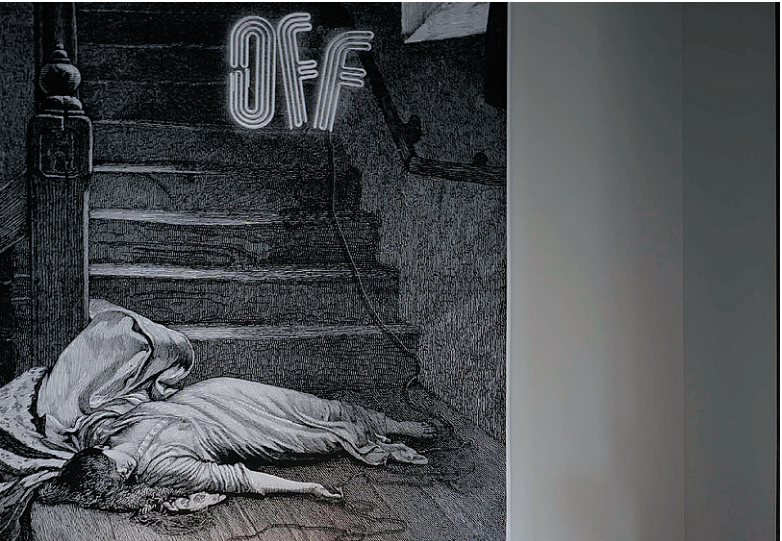
objects and see how they felt and to live with them. I learned through doing things, making things and trying things out.”

This desire to create has driven him to design such masterpieces as the Tip of the Tongue and the Ama, which features 28 mouth-blown opaline spheres.

Only now are his pieces becoming mass-produced — he curated a collection through FLOS, which also boasts Philippe Starck, Patricia Urquiola, Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby on its roster.

The designer has also enjoyed a range of collaborations, working on runway shows for fashion creators such as Hussein Chalayan.

“I like working with others because they open up different



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areas that you never easily have access to and I like to share ideas with people,” he says.

“I love the energy of London ... I like the creativity that exists there. I was intrigued by that and didn’t want to be a big fish in a small pond. Somehow you have to expose yourself and you have to get yourself out there, whether it’s at the beginning or later in your career after you’ve built up a name and confidence.”

Both England, where he first came to study civil engineering at Imperial College in the capital, and Cyprus have a sense of place in his work. He recently returned to his home city of Nicosia for a conceptual show at the Point Centre for Contemporary Art.

“You can’t reject or turn your back on where you have come from,” he says. “Your experiences follow you forever — it’s there in your work.”

Once again, yogic overtures spill out over arguably one of Canada’s most successful contemporary lighting designers, Vancouver’s Omer Arbel. Excitedly declaring that the Bocci mastermind is “doing beautiful work” and Vancouver is “amazing — I could live here,” Anastassiades says the fraternity among designers is extraordinary.

“I never saw this thing as being competitive,” he says. “You are happy within your own skin, but you can allow for other things to exist.”