



enLIGHTenment
THE LIGHTING CONTENT LEADER

ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING

Stacking A City

Hannah Carroll | March 30, 2018



For the last year, architect and lighting designer Matt Gagnon has been creating towers of light. His latest show *Material Relations* at The New gallery in Los Angeles, features 13 light stacks, playing off one another in unexpected patterns of diffusion, reflection, and color. *enLIGHTenment* magazine's Hannah Rachel Carroll digs deeper to learn the creative process and inspiration behind his latest collection.

By Hannah Rachel Carroll

Hannah Rachel Carroll: When did your passion for architecture and design develop?

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Matt Gagnon: You could say I was that kid who was always playing with LEGO®s or building something. My father had a shop behind our house and I spent most of my childhood helping him with whatever I could.

I've always enjoyed working with my hands. I knew at a very young age I wanted to go to architecture school and that dream never faltered.

HRC: You studied under Frank Gehry. What was that experience like?

MG: I had the privilege of working with Frank from 1999-2002. I learned a lot about his creative process and his teachings have helped shaped my own design journey.



The light stacks are available for purchase at www.artsy.net, ranging from \$14,000-\$20,000.

One of the biggest takeaways was learning how to honor each project. Of course, you need to give the client what they want, but there is more to it. A good architect respects the building he or she is working with, whether it be



a restoration or a new construct. There is intention and an emotional impact that needs to be taken into consideration when it comes to creating.

HRC: Can you tell me how the work done by your design firm, Matt Gagnon Studio, differs from your personal projects?

MG: I opened Matt Gagnon Studio in 2002 and it's been an incredibly humbling and rewarding experience. My studio produces artful furniture and lighting representing movement, adaptability, and material exploration. I've collaborated with a range of clients, from private home owners to real estate developers, to reflect the broader vision of the studio.

My client work is structured with specific goals; it's the bread and butter of what I do. My personal projects, however, are much more laid-back. For example, I had artistic freedom with Material Relations. I was able to let it be whatever it wanted it to be.

HRC: What was the inspiration behind Media Relations?

MG: I've always had a fascination with light and texture, and really ran with that concept for this collection. Media Relations is an exploration of manipulating light among many elements. I guess my inspiration was the seemingly perfect balance of light in urban and rural environments, such as a sunbeam shining through a tree, bouncing off a building, and reflecting in the water. There's no real order, it's unplanned, yet harmonious.

HRC: How does Media Relations compare to past gallery exhibitions you've had, such as Acrylic Lamps?

MG: Both projects mimic the nighttime glow of half-occupied skyscrapers, inspired by evening strolls through my favorite cities.



Acrylic Lamps was well-received, but I was not completely satisfied with it. There were technical problems and I felt rushed to complete it. Media Relations is almost like the marinated revamp, pushing a bold idea even further.

HRC: What was the biggest challenge you faced?

MG: Each lamp took on a life of its own that I wanted to honor. I became obsessed with rearranging and editing each piece because different combinations of the materials completely altered it.

My biggest challenge was knowing when to stop. I think the desire for perfection and finding contentment in one's work will always be a considerable struggle for an artist.



HRC: What materials did you use?

MG: A custom LED stick illuminates each of the 13 lamps – many limited edition – which range from 18 to 74 inches high. The lamps are made of brass, polished aluminum, white oak, yellow pine, concrete, and painted MDF (medium-density fiberboard) that are all locally sourced. Most of the wood even came from a tree that fell by my house after a bad storm. For the next show, whenever that may be, I'd like to incorporate marble and granite into the designs.

Matt Gagnon says the collection of 13 light stacks was just a coincidence. "13 was not intentional," he jokes.



HRC: What type of environments do you envision the lamps in?

MG: These lamps are conversational pieces. I believe they're ideal for several spaces, whether it be a cozy cabin in the woods or a studio apartment in the city. We have a few prototypes in my home that really give the room an extra element of depth. They may not be the lights we live by, but their glow helps create a special atmosphere.

HRC: Like most of your projects, Material Relations seems to push the envelope in terms of innovative design. Where do you see the future of lighting going?

MG: I think there is a lot of interesting things happening right now in terms of lighting. Designers are taking more risks as better technology warrants it. Additionally, people are more willing to invest more in statement pieces, regardless of their functionality.

HRC: Have your kids expressed interest in following in your footsteps? How do you juggle family time and a dynamic career?

MG: It's all a balancing act. Being your own boss certainly helps, and I try to include the kids in my creative process as much as I can. I love having them around and I value their input.

They are interested in my work, although the oldest thinks being a designer for LEGO® would be cooler than one day becoming an architect. We'll see. He's still young.