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Q+A with Cerno



Laguna Beach isn't the most obvious place to find a trio of minimalists looking to redefine the way people view modern lighting design. Yet the coastal southern California surfing town is where Cerno founders Nick Sheridan, Bret Englander, and Dan Wacholder met as children and turned a common love of modern design into a crusade to create energy-efficient lighting solutions that verge on art.

"Growing up we were surrounded by a lot of artists and entrepreneurs, which inevitably inspired us," says Englander, who heads up sales and marketing. Sheridan's background in architecture informs prototypes and Wacholder oversees engineering. Working almost exclusively in LED, Cerno marries form and function through a bond that's so intuitive, it's practically psychic. "Daniel and Nick have been building and creating things together for more than 20 years and often they appear to be communicating via telepathy," says Englander. "It's a beautiful thing to watch." YLighting caught up with Englander to talk about LEDs, heirloom design, and some of their favorite pieces.

What's it like to work with your childhood mates and how does your relationship affect your design?

Bret Englander: Working with friends presents obvious challenges and our relationship has definitely evolved, but for Cerno it has been a really positive influence on the product and the company culture. We have defined roles and know when to defer to one another, which eliminates the "too many cooks in the

kitchen” problem.



(<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-levo-bedside-light.html>)

Levo LED Bedside Sconce and Reading Light (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-levo-bedside-light.html>) from Cerno
(https://www.ylighting.com/brand/Cerno/_/N-1sbd0)

How would you describe your aesthetic?

BE: The forms are driven by function, and the rationale is informed by modernism. We pair black walnut wood with recyclable aluminum and light-diffusing polymer and it strikes a great aesthetic balance in mood and tone, but the design is dictated by its duty as opposed to some notion of fashion. It’s a cohesive line of fixtures with a concise palette that embodies great modern restraint.

You’ve said that your work is “heirloom design.” Can you explain that?

BE: We handcraft each fixture here at Cerno, taking care to not cut any corners. The result is fixtures that can be handed down from generation to generation. In today’s culture where everything is viewed as disposable—too often at the expense of the environment—we believe in building things to last.



(<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-claudo-pendant-light.html>)

Claudo LED Accent Pendant Light (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-claudo-pendant-light.html>) from Cerno (https://www.ylighting.com/brand/Cerno/_/N-1sbd0)

How did you first get into LEDs at a time when the focus was on the Edison bulb?

BE: When we started Cerno the majority of the industry was still designing fixtures around the Edison bulb and we saw LEDs as liberating the design process. They are so small that you can create really thin profiles, as well as integrate functionality into fixtures that was not possible before. Our Cubo (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-cubo-bedside-light.html>) is a great example of a fixture that would not exist without LEDs.

What about Cerno using recycled wood?

BE: We use sustainably harvested black walnut grown in the U.S. The walnut delivers myriad patterns and colors that make each design unique, as seen in the Claudo Pendant (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-claudo-pendant-light.html>). We apply a natural Danish oil to enrich and protect the wood, which is very forgiving and easy to maintain.



(<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-valeo-floor-lamp.html>)

Valeo LED Floor Lamp (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-valeo-floor-lamp.html>)
from Cerno (https://www.ylighting.com/brand/Cerno/_/N-1sbd0)

Tell me about your remarkable sconces.

BE: Before we design anything we try to understand how people will interact with it. All of our articulated sconces showcase a creative solution where neither form nor function is compromised—but this is a loaded question because if we didn't love them, we wouldn't bring them to market! I especially love the Levo (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-levo-bedside-light.html>), and the Acuo (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-acuo-wall-sconce.html>).

What was the idea behind the chic Valeo floor lamp?

BE: Lighting is an amazing opportunity to make a statement and the Valeo (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-valeo-floor-lamp.html>) can make a statement in any space. It's bold and huge, but also clean, simple, and modern.

What's your process for new designs?

BE: The three of us will identify products we want to create and Nick works his magic. His background in architecture coupled with Daniel's incredible engineering skills promotes a very liberated design process. Too often designers neglect to understand how an end-user will interact with a product; we strive to never make that mistake.

What are some of your favorite modern lighting pieces?

BE: I love all our lights. Right now the Libri (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-libri-hardwired-led-wall-sconce.html>) is my favorite; it's a quintessential example of stripping away everything that is not absolutely necessary to the performance of the product. It automatically turns on when you take it out of its stowed position and is incredibly articulated to accommodate different reading positions in bed. It also emits an amazing amount of light—it's hard to believe that it's just 2 watts.



(<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-silva-table-light.html>)

Silva LED Table Lamp (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-silva-table-light.html>)
from Cerno (https://www.ylighting.com/brand/Cerno/_/N-1sbd0)

How would I use some of your modern lighting designs in a traditional setting?

BE: We aim to create timeless forms that can transcend different design movements. Our Forma (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-forma-floor-lamp.html>) is the best example of a Cerno fixture that can complement an extremely traditional environment or a very contemporary space. Recently, a customer was telling us about how they placed a Silva Table Lamp (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-silva-table-light.html>) on a 300-year-old traditional French credenza and how well they worked together.

Where do you find inspiration?

BE: Architecture school inspired Nick, who subscribes to the rigorous modern language of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. It is incredible to think that the idea of shedding all ornamentation in buildings and design is relatively new. We typically adhere to modernist logic, but occasionally some artistry and sculpture is allowed into the equation. Fixtures like the Vix (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-vix-5-light-led-linear-pendant-light.html>) and the Brevis (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-brevis-linear-pendant-light.html>) showcase that pure modern restraint and rigor, while fixtures like the Acuo (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-acuo-wall-sconce.html>) and Oris (<https://www.ylighting.com/cerno-oris-wall-sconce.html>) wall sconces are a bit more indulgent.

By Ashlee Coogan (<https://www.ylighting.com/blog/author/ashleecoogan/>) 0 Comments
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Ashlee Coogan

Ashlee Coogan is a Site Merchandiser for YLighting. Ashlee calls the East Bay home and is usually found in the California sun enjoying brunch with her schnoodle. With a great appreciation for glamorous, modern design, she continues on her forever pursuit of perfect gold accent pieces to incorporate into her home décor or fashion.

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