

Cerno

Merging design experiments with a love of the natural world was a core component of Cerno's founders' friendship before it became an entrepreneurial tenet. Bret Englander, Nick Sheridan, and Daniel Wacholder grew up together in Laguna Beach, California, where their "friendship always revolved around this love of being outside and exploration," Englander recalls. "As we got older and more skilled, that became about building things." Fast-forward to 2009, when after dabbling in furniture, the trio determined that integrating their respective skills—Englander in business development and marketing, Sheridan in architecture, and Wacholder in engineering—would be well matched with a certain fast developing design trade and consumer goods category. "We loved that lighting sits at this intersection of design, utility, sculpture, beauty, and all the other benefits of its ability to transform a space," he adds.

What takes place within Cerno's 20,000-square-foot, solar-powered Orange County headquarters demonstrates how vertical integration and innovation are seamlessly compatible. Even technologically savvy LED lighting fabrication marries multiple time-honored trades, some of which wouldn't be out of place in a medieval guild. Zones on the Cerno factory floor are dedicated to wood, metal, and other specialties, and work cells are organized "so that things are built in a one-piece flow fashion. The same person will take a product as far as they can, from raw materials to actually packaging it themselves," Wacholder explains. The sense of ownership and pride from start to finish also supports Cerno's internal apprenticeship model, intended to nurture talent while valuing all physical and nonmaterial resources the endeavor calls for. "There's a mission in trying to keep the flame lit," Wacholder says.

In 2022, Cerno expanded its toolbox and creative potential with the acquisition of Siemon & Salazar, whose specialty, glass blowing, Wacholder describes as "the most artisan craft." Master glassblowers Caleb Siemon and Carmen Salazar retain the autonomy to create their own goods in a section of the workshop centered around a furnace and other traditional equipment used in Murano, Italy, while collaborating on Cerno products, such as the Invisosconce, which features glass components.

Cerno's aesthetic leans toward contemporary with subtle nods to the past. Hand-finished surfaces bring warmth to delicate profiles and sleek silhouettes, making them well suited to hospitality and multifamily projects, along with individual consumer purchases. Sheridan synthesizes multiple references "in a lot of different directions," citing Scandinavian minimalism and Japanese joinery as examples of generally complementary elements. "We continually improve our process and our product on all levels, but we really want to listen to the marketplace and make decisions based on data and conversations we have with designers," he says.

As part of its sustainability efforts, Cerno actively recycles metals and plastics, offers unused lumber to craftspeople and artists in the area, participates in tree planting programs, and like RAD and Emblem, emphatically stands behind the longevity of products. "Building things that last is important to us," Wacholder states, which means thinking holistically about avoiding consumer culture's dispose-first impulse. The Cerno team strives for "things that can be fixed—and supporting people that want to fix them." ■

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Cerno designs and builds modern lighting with a commitment to craftsmanship and sustainability. By designing, prototyping, and manufacturing in-house, the company ensures quality, reduces waste, and creates timeless pieces meant to last for generations.