

Making Waves

At the core of Cerno's business is a friendship that dates back to childhood with the three founders growing up in Laguna Beach. **Helen Ankers** spoke with designer and co-founder Nick Sheridan about his passion for modernism and how that plays a role in the studio today.





Cerno is a modern lighting design studio based in southern California. Founded in 2009 by childhood friends Bret Englander, Daniel Wacholder and Nick Sheridan, 2019 marks Cerno's ten-year anniversary.

At the forefront of LED lighting design, the Cerno team always aims to strike a balance between contemporary design and modern craftsmanship, that is forever inspired by their Californian upbringing. Holding true to their design principles of respecting the process and materials, while building a strong manufacturing team, Cerno is vertically integrated - they design and manufacture everything under one roof in Irvine, CA.

Cerno's lead designer Nick Sheridan grew up in a small town of Laguna Beach. Exposed to woodworking from a young age by his father, who was in the construction trade, he tells **darc** how he still remembers the homemade ping-pong table that doubled up as their workbench.

"I was always drawing when I was younger," he says. "Doodles, sketching from observation, but also designing objects. I remember drawing elements of my dad's

projects as early as middle school. I'm not sure I realised then that I was so in love with design, but it's clear now that the passion was already there.

"One of the first projects Daniel, Bret and I worked on together was a small wooden boat we built in my yard at home, when my dad heard about our plan to build a boat from scratch, he simply said, 'well first you need to draw it.' I always remember that moment when I realised the relationship between designing and building. For me, the design is as much about the building of an object as it is composing drawings depicting an object."

Growing up in a craftsman style bungalow Sheridan's father had filled with Greene & Greene detailing and Stickley furniture, instilled an understanding and appreciation of great craftsmanship in Sheridan. Studying architecture at college, a one-year stint in Florence, Italy, was to be a transformative experience.

"Once I was immersed in architecture I fell in love with modernism," he tells **darc**. "I loved the rationality of modern designs and quickly became consumed with the works of

Mies Van Der Rohe and Le Corbusier among others. It is these great modernist architects who continue to be a primary source of inspiration for me.

"While in my heart I feel I am a modernist, as it applies to our designs at Cerno, we do certainly stray into more contemporary designs as well. I strive to design clean and modern fixtures.

"People say certain products in the Cerno line share aspects of Japanese design, while others have mentioned our work has more of a modern Danish aesthetic."

The latest design Penna is influenced by a number of ideas, which all culminate in its final form. For Sheridan, the Penna was a challenge to resolve.

"The leather suspension and brass hardware details are borrowed from old world vernacular and harken back to a time that we find a lot of inspiration from," he says. "The design has a largely utilitarian composition, but through detailing and execution, the fixture exudes a sense of elegance and sophistication. It is in the reconciliation of these contrasting ideas where you find the final fixture - by working



through the design process, with the whole team until it feels just right."

Sheridan tells **darc** that when designing Penna, he wanted to illuminate the wood body of the fixture to showcase the grain with a continuous linear light source that would deliver diffuse ample light.

"The way the sloped wood body emulated the sloped leather strapping used in the fixture's suspension creates harmony and balance in the fixture's silhouette," he says. Their first time using leather in a product, Cerno spent a lot of time finding the right type for the application. Along with sourcing, they also had the challenge of figuring out how the leather interfaced with the fixture body and the suspension cords.

"We wanted to celebrate and expose these connections," continues Sheridan.

"The use of brass and leather together struck a cord from the beginning and helped inform subsequent development. There is a conscious nod to tradition in the Penna, which is balanced with the overall contemporary design of the piece."

A separate challenge for the design team, was creating Penna's faceted diffuser.

Having never produced such a long continuous diffuser, the Cerno team knew they needed to get it right and as such developed a new technique, which will now be used in other fixtures.

Designed for use in myriad applications, the Penna collection is made up of a sconce and pendant. The pendant is ideal over kitchen islands, dining room tables and in conference rooms, while the sconce is easily applied to large-scale spaces.

With the Penna range launching at this year's ICF New York; a new outdoor lighting range in the pipeline; and a vanity light fixture soon to be released, Cerno is continuing to make waves in the lighting scene and they're certainly ones to look out for moving forward.

Concluding Sheridan tells **darc**: "I'm so appreciative of our entire team that works so hard day in, day out to help realise our designs. Being a vertically integrated manufacturer with everything designed and made under one roof is core to who we are."

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Opening spread Left to right Cerno founders Daniel Wacholder, Bret Englander and Nick Sheridan. *Previous page* The childhood friends' first project together was a small wooden boat built in Nick's yard at home. When his dad heard about their plan to build a boat from scratch, he pointed out they needed to draw it first. This was the first time Sheridan realised the relationship between designing and building.

This page Cerno's latest design Penna is influenced by a number of ideas, which all culminate in its final form. The body of the fixture is illuminated with a continuous linear light source in order to showcase the grain of the wood. This is also the first time Cerno has used leather in a product and the team spent a lot of time finding the right type for the application.