

Philipp Weber interviewed by Adrian Madlener

German creative Philipp Weber's holistic methodology melds his keen craft-led sensibility and affinity for humanism. Unaffected by the saturated trends that drive the design industry, the young designer delves deep into different subject matter. He approaches each topic from a comprehensive set of vantage points: the history and analysis of established manufacturing processes to the integration of seemingly disparate yet surprisingly appropriate associations.

The Design Academy Eindhoven and University of Arts Berlin graduate can anchor and translate his unhurried, discursive explorations into tangible concepts and functional forms. These accessible applications push beyond the previously accepted limitations of age-old techniques and in turn, suggest ways in which to ensure their survival. It's no wonder that his chosen mediums have been glass, coal byproduct, cork, and textile. Though the designer frames his projects as thought-provoking referential, experimental, and expressive statement pieces, the new material properties they introduce have the most impact.

As the co-founder and creative director of Analog, a commercial venture developed through Berlin Glassworks, the talent has been able to put this unique praxis-based approach to good use. His interest in subverting traditional modes of production and research, now also incorporates a desire to explore new unconventional business models. In the following Q&A, Weber shares his vision for a lighting brand that looks to the past to inform its future.

Adrian Madlener: What was the initial idea behind Analog?

Philipp Weber: In 2015, Berlin Glassworks founder Nadania Idriss expanded the educational platform and workshop with a new commercial wing that could incorporate artist residency programmes and product manufacturing. In 2018, I was asked to come on board as a partner with the goal of established a lighting brand. I had worked with Berlin Glassworks in past while I was researching glassblowing; an ongoing investigation that I conducted for almost a decade.

Through previous projects like *A Strange Symphony* (2012) and *On Colours* (2014), I engineered a tool that associates the craft and physical with music and draws attention to the performative value of the making process. It only made sense for me to translate this process into the production of luminaires and establish Analog as a lighting brand accordingly.

We wanted to create a company that would question the value of craftsmanship in an increasingly digital world but also engender a renewed human-centric value in production and consumption. Our aim was not to be nostalgic or to romanticize the past but rather, to formulate a new futuristic vision that would draw on the best elements of history. At the centre of this mission is the idea of making functional handcrafted objects.

How does craft—perhaps more in terms of methodology than style—factor into this ethos?

To formulate this approach, I drew a lot of inspiration from Richard Sennett's books *The Craftsman* and *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation*. In his

profound assessment, the American sociologist defends craft and the ability of craftspeople to maintain control over every step of the making process.

What interested me most from his overall argument is the idea of implicit knowledge. He explains that one can master skills through repetition and eventually exercise them as second nature. This phenomenon perfectly describes how glassblowers operate, which is what I wanted to express in the inaugural Of Movement and Material lighting series. The bespoke lamps translate the actual physical process in solid form.

Sennett claims that because these processes become so intrinsic to what craftspeople accomplish, they should have equal footing with other intellectual pursuits. Society should consider that these procedures are as necessary as the initial planning and design of an object. For this first collection, we allowed the making process to determine the outcome.

Though we've established a contemporary lighting brand, we want to hold on established practises, especially as digital programs and devices continue to replace most manual skill sets and techniques. However, part of bringing this approach into the future is knowing how to balance age-old handcraft traditions with new technologies.

The new Of Movement and Material Black series coincides with the Tacit Dialogue research project. Last year, digital artist Andrea Familiari and I began exploring how much of a given craft could actually be digitized and how much of it could only be understood as implicit knowledge. We sought out to built a digital archive of different glassblowing choreographies. These resulting objects were then translated into 3D-scans. Analog is forged on these types of collaborations.

Talk about the new type of business model you're hoping to establish with Analog.

We're not just interested in producing economically-viable high-end products but, and perhaps more importantly, promoting knowledge and skill. In that respect, we've incorporated a merit-based exchange system within our business model. Though we still focus on selling our luminaires to our customers through the traditional channels, we also swap the designs for other services from time to time.

Like so many creatives who start out with limited funds, the ability to trade services can be a lifeline. As a young brand, we've relied on these type of exchanges to get started, especially when it comes to the production of our showcases, website, and other collateral. We've come to realize that these soft transactions can add value to what we do and help build stronger relationships.

For us, this model expands on the principle of preserving the crafts. Though we might depend more heavily on our immediate community in Berlin, digital and virtual tools allow us to also work with likeminded creatives and professionals abroad. Analog is a type of investigation in this regard. It's an experiment into how we might move away from the standard economic model that can sometimes skew the notion of genuine value when it comes to skilled labour and well-crafted objects.