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Six designers share what it's like to design with RH

Posted on Wednesday, June 22, 2016.

By [Katy B. Olson](#)

Does design change when created for large-scale retailers? Yes and no. The answer isn't so black-and-white, according to interior designers **Kerry Joyce**, **Ben Soleimani**, **Ann Marie Vering**, **Jonathan Browning** and brothers-and-design-duo **Harrison and Nicholas Condos**, who have all recently premiered collaborations with [Restoration Hardware](#). The designers discuss their offerings—think au courant summertime collections including Joyce's graphic outdoor textiles and pillows, Soleimani's outdoor rugs, Vering's pool-ready Paros seating, the Condos' outdoor line, as well as an [RH Modern](#) lighting collection from Browning—and share insights on designing on a grander scale (among the lessons: Obsess over details, avoid cheap materials, prepare for a painstaking design process, and work smarter, not harder!).



Clockwise top left: Harrison and Nicholas Condos (courtesy Architectural Digest); Ann Marie Vertig; Kerry Joyce; Jonathan Browning

EAL: Tell us about your process designing for RH. How does it change when creating a large-scale collection?

Condos Brothers: Due to the design and scale of our work with RH, we follow an in-depth process to create new collections each season. The first requires months of research: We delve deep into an inspiration phase, researching designs in the current marketplace and what materials we can work with. Our designs need to be relevant and aspirational, so this is an integral step to the creation of RH collections.

We flesh out anywhere between 20 to 30 design concepts, presenting product ideas in many material options, proportion and detail variations. Once we decide on a strong palette of designs, we present them to the RH team, who select the top designs they think are a fit for their audience that year. Feedback from RH is taken on board and top-tier designs are tweaked to suit their specifications. Once the final concepts are approved by RH, we quickly draw up technical drawings ready for the final manufacture and distribution stage.

When working with a large-scale retailer like RH, the process of design changes for us in many ways. The volume of designs is scaled up because of the broad needs of the RH audience; specifically, we end up creating many more sectionals than normal. Technical specifications are tweaked to ensure we can maintain workmanship for mass manufacture. Also, the factory demands are a whole different ballgame. Many more hands are at work to meet production deadlines and ensure highest quality of production is not lost. At the very root of successful large-scale manufacture is communication and a close-knit relationship with the factory and the RH team.



Kerry Joyce's Dayo and Endra pillow collections draw inspiration from geometric African Kuba cloth.

Vering: The Paros Collection was already designed by the time I partnered with RH. I worked with them to incorporate more pieces and sizes into the collection. The process for a large-scale collection takes a more thorough approach to complete than small-scale collections. When designing, you must make sure the overall concept vision and the design aesthetic flows collectively throughout the line and that each piece correlates to one another. When you have up to 15 pieces in a collection, from lounging to dining, this can be challenging.

Joyce: For the collaboration, I was inspired to do something different and a bit bolder and more graphic from the aesthetic signature of my [trade collection](#). I consider the throw pillow collections I created as diminutive pieces of art. They are the perfect finishing touch, making a sofa or chair complete.

I was selected by RH because they loved my Kerry Joyce Performance Textile Collection that I had recently introduced; they loved the fact that the collection could be mistaken for indoor fabric, yet it was made of a new, durable outdoor [Sunbrella](#) fiber.



Mustique Teak collection by the Condos Brothers

Soleimani: I stay true to my process and my signature look. This carries through all of my product, whether it is indoor or outdoor; I always produce the same quality for all designs: You can see my rugs for indoor or outdoor have my look. I streamline outdoor to be simpler but the process does not change.





Aegean Teak collection by the Condos Brothers

Browning: Designing for RH is essentially the same process as designing for my own line. The initial idea or inspiration for each line has to be strong—big enough to stand alone as a great piece—a beautiful chandelier or a gorgeous sconce. But the idea itself almost always comes from identifying some object or some piece of a larger whole, which has nothing to do with lighting.

Very often, it is a detail of some industrial object or machine or fixture which I find beautiful, even if what it is attached to is mundane or unattractive. I use that detail as a launching point for the whole line, and I transform it into an elegant composition. When the line is complete, I may be the only one who understands the genesis of the design, but by then it is irrelevant, because the line must stand on its own aesthetic merits.

So, whether I am designing for [Jonathan Browning Studios](#) or RH, the goal is always the same: to design something truly new and fresh and elegant that will blend beautifully in a good interior.



Paros chaise and lounge chairs by Ann Marie Vering

Share some advice for designers seeking to design a retail collection. What were the steps you took?

Soleimani: Stay true to who you are, stay true to your own design. It is challenging to do collections in big numbers, but never give up the look or quality. Keep things as you would. How do you design something that can be mass-produced, amazing and unique? If you can do it in larger numbers, don't compromise.

Browning: Work at the highest level of quality. Aesthetics are personal. The style you give something is totally personal and subjective. But quality is its own animal. Even the most beautiful design constructed cheaply looks bad. Only use the best materials and the best manufacturers. And obsess over the details. People see everything.

In terms of my own process, I studied architecture in graduate school, then I worked in store design for many huge fashion brands, and finally I was named EVP of design for [Starwood Hotels Worldwide](https://www.starwoodhotels.com), where

I oversaw the design of hundreds of properties. This long career in both retail and hospitality design taught me very well, so that once I started designing lighting, I was quite familiar with both design and building.

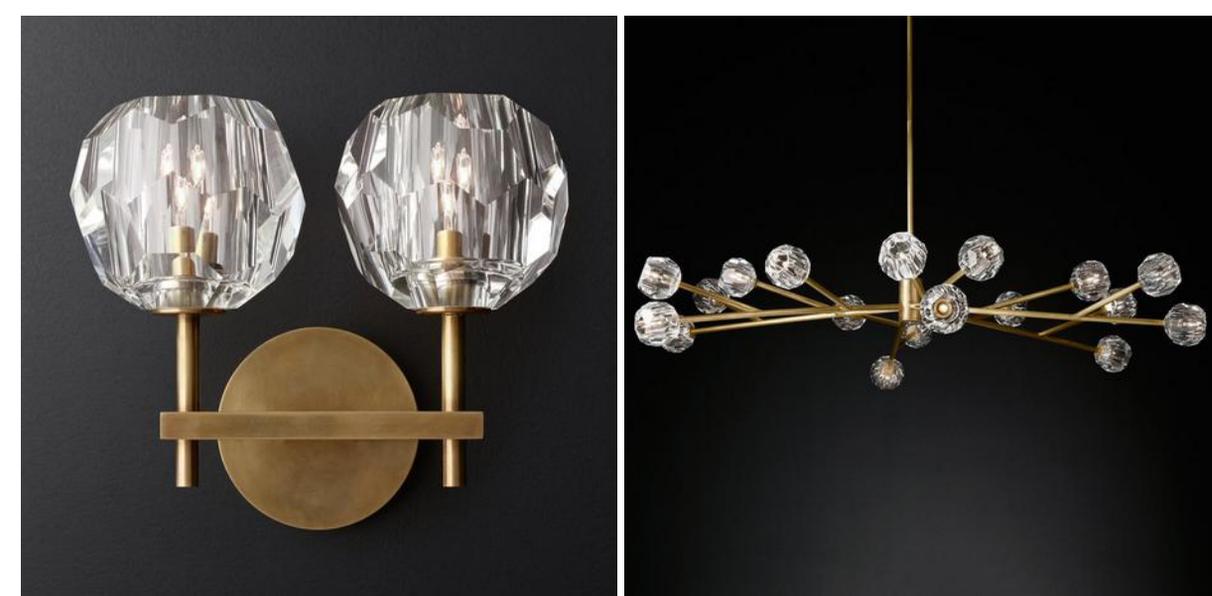


Braided Diamante Outdoor Rug in Navy and Diamante Outdoor Rug in Grey/Blue, by Ben Soleimani

Condos Brothers: The key ingredients to a retail collection include research; having a good eye for detail; strong design that is unique, relevant, functional and appropriately priced. For us, the steps begin with an inspiration phase. We collate and review our favorite designs from trade shows, blogs and magazines and pull together a curation of our style direction.

Our signature aesthetic is based on clean, minimalist design, which remains timeless—a key factor for retail success. Each year, we focus on design detail, as this, in our opinion, is what helps a retail product to stand out from the pack. It could include slight changes in material mix, and our design process involves mixing fabrication in distinguished ways.

When it comes to retail design, one must consider practicality. The regular customer usually appreciates simple but unique design that is practical. You can create the most stunning design, but if the product doesn't stand up to its promise of function, retail failure is not far behind you. Here in our design team, we also think of ways our furniture should marry function and form. And in keeping with practical design, we take critical steps in the fabrication process to keep our price down.



Boule De Cristal Double Sconce and Boule De Cristal Round Chandelier by Jonathan Browning

Vering: I was at the [Venice Biennale](#) in 2008 and there was a small sign in one of the street installations that I remember extremely well. It read, “Everyone can be a designer, but not everyone can be a smart designer.” So, beyond being creative and making beautiful collections, design wisely.

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