

# HOWL

Inspiration for Creatives  
from *Wolf-Gordon*

Issue 08, 2023 — Quarterly  
Curated by David Sokol



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Centuries of  
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## Check, Please

Over a 400-year history, gingham has become the pattern of the people.



J. M. Tracy

*Untitled—Picnic Scene* (ca. 1870)

Oil on canvas. 16 x 24-1/8 inches

Photo: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mary Glancy Bragg, made available via CC0 license



Manchester, New Hampshire, follows in the cotton-manufacturing footsteps of the English city of the same name.

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS NH.6-MANCH.2-50

Today it is the pattern of American picnic blankets and restaurant tablecloths, of prairie dresses and button-downs. Yet gingham wasn't always so thoroughly engrained in American culture. Nor was it even a three-toned check. As culture historian Jude Stewart explains in the 2015 book *Patternalia*, "Gingham was first named for the weave, a simple twill [that] produced no 'right' or 'wrong' side." The weave also was likely invented in India, as most scholars point to the Malay word *genggang* for gingham's root. The term literally translates to "striped" and indeed, the cotton cloth featured stripes when Dutch merchants first imported it to Europe in the 17th century.

How did this metaphorical leopard change its spots? Gingham's visual evolution to a checkered pattern



Historically, gingham has been associated with outdoor labor.

Photo: Woman picking citrus - Eastpoint, Florida, 1900 (circa).  
State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, accessed 29 August 2023.

coincided with its shift to Western production, as seen in artifacts and images from the Georgian and Victorian eras. Industrial production of textiles has its roots in Manchester, England, thanks to the wool and fustian weavers who had called the city home since the 1500s. When the British empire outlawed cotton manufacturing in India after colonization in 1757, production of the cloth centered in Manchester, where 99 cotton-spinning enterprises had sprouted by 1830. Supplied by cotton plantations in the South, American textile industrialization had begun to soar at approximately the same time, while taking its style cues from the British. On both sides of the Atlantic, gingham check rung in the 19th century.

While striped gingham, not to mention the occasional plaid, did not disappear overnight, a glimpse of the 1897 Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog explains why those other patterns faded from popularity. The so-called Book of Bargains featured only one striped gingham, and the yardage cost a multiplier more than the “apron checks” and “dress gingham” that Sears, Roebuck had stocked. Simply put, check was cheap, and consumers voted for it with their wallets.

Checkered gingham was an affordable long-term investment, too. It could take a beating and conceal stains and wrinkles or be reversed for a do-over. It is little wonder, then, that it became the textile of American work.

But popular culture in late-Victorian-era America did more than bear witness to checkered gingham’s place in the lives of laborers and housewives. It also worked mightily to enshrine the textile as a symbol of productivity, optimism, and wholesomeness—“redolent of summertime and the prairies,” as Stewart phrased it in *Patternalia*. In 1915, Dorothy Donnell Calhoun introduced readers to a loving retired couple in *Blue Gingham Folks*, and two years prior the musical theater composer Manuel Klein gushed over the girl in a gingham gown whose “grace and dignity” outshone “city girls with silks and laces.” And, of course, there’s Dorothy Gale, who dreams of returning from Oz to her family and home in Kansas. “Dorothy had only one other dress, but that happened to be clean, and was hanging on a peg beside her bed. It was gingham, with checks of white and blue; and although the blue was somewhat faded with many washings, it was still a pretty frock,” L. Frank Baum wrote of the morning his *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* heroine would take her first steps along the yellow brick road.



A Dorothy Gale illustration by W.W. Denslow presages Judy Garland’s famous costume by almost four decades. (1900)

Photo: George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library.  
“The wonderful Wizard of Oz” [The New York Public Library Digital Collections](#).



Toni Frissell  
*Picnics Around the World* (ca. 1970)

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Toni Frissell Photograph Collection, [reproduction number LC-DIG-tofr-14051]



*Two little girls in a park near Union Station, Washington, D.C.* (ca. 1943)

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [reproduction number LC-USW361-746]

Gingham was simultaneously changing with the times, too. In 1916, Kansas City designer Nelly Don introduced a mass-produced housedress in pink gingham, selling 216 of them at Peck's Dry Goods Company on day one. According to scholars Mikyoung Whang and Sherry Haar, "the grand lady of the garment industry" was one of the most successful female entrepreneurs in early-20th-century America and her product freed buyers from making their wardrobe from patterns, intimating a new role for middle-class women in American society. New interpretations of gingham became more visible thereafter. Journalist Mark Dent observed that gingham outfits helped define Doris Day's alluring persona. The pattern became part of 1960s British youth culture when rebellious fashion designer Barbara Hulanicki published a gingham shift dress in *The Daily Mirror*, and Comme des Garçons designer Rei Kawakubo's lumpy gingham dresses for spring/summer 1997 ignited conversations about feminism, gender, and body image that are ongoing. Fast forward to now, and gingham is adorning campsites and campuses, hanging in lockers as well as boutiques, expressing nostalgia or subversion. It adapts, therefore it is indispensable.



Russell Lee  
*Picnic on the Fourth of July, Vale, Oregon* (1941)

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [reproduction number LC-DIG-fsa-8a30267]



Feature

## A Common for All of Boston

Just as Boston City Hall heralded the future of architecture in 1968, the remaking of its plaza represents the cutting edge of contemporary landscape and urban design.

Newly planted perennials frame Boston City Hall's iconic west elevation.

Photo: Matthew Arielly

“Boston can celebrate with the knowledge that it has produced...a tough and complex building for a tough and complex age, a structure of dignity, humanism and power. It mixes strengths with subtleties. It will outlast the last hurrah.” So wrote Ada Louise Huxtable of the new Boston City Hall shortly after its 1968 opening.

The legendary *New York Times* architecture critic was not making a proclamation from on high. Rather, hers was one voice in a chorus of supporters. In an episode of the local television program *Michael Ambrosino's Show*, its host enthused, “Boston gambled, and they won.” While the intricate arrangement of brick and concrete was greeted by confusion as well as praise—attendees of the design’s 1962 unveiling say that Mayor John Collins was startled by the scheme, for instance—the largely positive reception amounted to multiple awards and a burgeoning of Brutalist-style government buildings worldwide.

Boston City Hall’s surrounding plaza didn’t fare with public opinion nearly as well. The outdoor space, a tapestry of brick covering 8 acres, formed the heart of I.M. Pei & Associates’ Government Center Urban Renewal



This 1969 photograph of the west elevation reveals the original design intent for Boston City Hall Plaza.

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS MASS.13-BOST.71-

Plan, which proposed 30 public buildings in the former Scollay Square neighborhood. Inspired by the Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy, Pei determined the plaza's fan-shaped plan as well as its slopes and terraces over a 25-foot grade change, while City Hall architects Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles are credited with the final design. Because it was not fully complete when *The New York Times* published her review, critic Huxtable withheld a detailed commentary about the plaza. Yet a famous rebuttal to that essay, written by Ellen Perry Berkeley, documented what most people felt about the city's backyard from its inception: the terms "wasted space" and "red tundra" would haunt Boston City Hall Plaza for almost five decades thereafter.

In 2015, city officials decided to turn its urban desert into a destination, commissioning a new direction for the plaza as part of a master plan by Reed Hilderbrand and Utile. And in 2020, a team of landscape and urban design experts from the global design studio Sasaki began renovating the plaza according to the master plan's vision of a sustainable, accessible public space. Crews put the finishing touches on that effort this past summer.

The original plaza was expansive and unscripted for a philosophical reason. Democracy, both I.M. Pei and Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles reasoned, meant allowing people to use and move through the physical environment as they saw fit. The reinvented plaza is full of programming, including a new Civic Pavilion and a 12,000-square-foot playground, yet still very much democratic: these and other amenities were conceived in response to extensive feedback gathered from Bostonians. The participants also reported a desire for a park-like atmosphere, to which Sasaki responded with 250 new trees, 27,000 square feet of garden beds filled with native plants, and a Fountain Terrace whose waterfall configuration evokes an ancient spring that once flowed on site. Residents who experience limited mobility are equally welcome to the interventions, thanks to the plaza's new ADA-compliant Hanover Walk promenade, inclusion of accessible companion perches among the project's 3,000 new seats, and gentle angles throughout the site.

In a testament to the scale of the original open plaza, today there is still plenty of room to spare. As many as 25,000 people can flock to their chief municipal building to celebrate the next New England Patriots triumph or take part in a city-sponsored boogie-down.



Another contemporary view of the west plaza, where the original water feature was turned off in 1977 due to its leaking into subway tunnels.

Photo: Matthew Arielly



Huxtable probably was not imagining climate change when she implored her readers to consider Boston City Hall’s persisting beyond “the last hurrah.” Yet threats of extreme weather and urban flooding were too palpable to ignore for the plaza’s second chance. The plantings selected for the project largely tolerate dry spells as well as downpours, and foster pollinator communities. The project’s investment in environmental resilience is even more palpable underground, where stormwater is collected in a 10,000-gallon tank for reuse as irrigation. Sasaki worked closely with its construction manager on the subterranean system, given that Boston’s historical subway tunnels come within a foot of the plaza’s brick pavers in places. The firms reinforced those structures while weaving stormwater drainage around them.

The reopening of Boston City Hall Plaza has turned the reputational tables. All stripes of observers adopted the transformed public space as a winning gamble, whereas the Brutalist icon that made it possible stirs mixed feelings on the best of days. But there may be a longer-term coattail effect, a project consultant told *Landscape Architecture* magazine last year. In speaking with scores of Bostonians, designer Mark Pasnik recalled, “the [most common] response we get is, ‘I hate the building,’ and then we’d talk to them more, and they say, ‘Well, it’s really the plaza that’s the problem.’” Sasaki’s multiple site improvements could very well “improve perception, and people see the building in a context where the framing... is more close-in and more intentional.” In which case, may the hurrahs never cease.

The northernmost portion of Boston City Hall Plaza accommodates a new Civic Pavilion and a 12,000-square-foot playground.

Photo: Matthew Arielly

The Hanover Walk pathway enters the plaza from Congress Street.

Photo: Matthew Arielly



The accessible promenade rounds the northwest corner of Boston City Hall.

Photo: Matthew Arielly

# Uncorking the Possibilities

Thanks to years-long work with the material, product designer Daniel Michalik has become a leading advocate for cork.



During a sabbatical sponsored by the Portuguese Cork Council, Michalik captured this image of cork bark awaiting processing.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Michalik



A behind-the-scenes look of cork's journey from raw material to refined object in Michalik's Brooklyn studio.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Michalik

— Your first encounter with cork, as a graduate student, was not planned.

I came across some cork that a manufacturer was trying to get rid of, so I found myself with three valuable things: a large amount of material; my school's well-equipped studio space; and the time to focus on work from a speculative perspective. I discovered that cork does things that no other material can quite do. It bends and flexes and compresses. There was also the psychological aspect of it. People had an emotional response to an object, because we have a collective understanding of cork, but they saw it used in a way they never experienced. I had the opportunity to change the context around objects, which gave me the inspiration to keep going.



The stewardship of cork forests has prevented Portugal from undergoing the desertification that characterizes northern Africa.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Michalik



*Descortidores* harvest the bark from a mature cork tree, a process that can take place approximately every nine years.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Michalik

—— How did you see your career unfolding from that realization?

At the time, mass manufacturers had not experimented with cork, so I quickly learned how to design things that were unique to cork as a material, and which I could manufacture in my own studio or with close collaborators nearby.

—— Did you envision your work as a complement to companies like Wolf-Gordon, which uses cork in earnest, as an antidote to the decline of the natural cork wine stopper?

I first got involved with cork in the mid-2000s, about six to eight years after screw caps and plastic stoppers had really hit the market and undercut the natural cork industry. In the past 10 years, natural cork has rebounded to a pre-screwcaps level, because the industry has leaned into the ecologically regenerative nature of the material and eliminated the spoilage effect that natural cork could sometimes have on wine. All that said, the production of cork wine stoppers is inextricably linked to the cork I use, which is waste material from the production of those stoppers. If we can promote the production of natural cork stoppers, we increase the supply of cork building materials, thereby lowering their cost. All these market forces are interlinked.

—— Considering how many decades it takes for cork trees to mature and produce harvestable material, is there much potential to reduce cost?

The forest can only produce so much material, and no cork grower wants to overstress the trees. They have to stick to a very strict harvesting schedule, and they have to hire skilled and well-paid people to harvest the trees. Yet people who see cork as an exciting new material in architecture and interiors want to bring the cost down, and one way to do so is to increase the supply.

—— And this is why, in addition to designing and teaching, advocacy is now part of your day-to-day professional life?

I collaborate with a lot of industrial partners in Portugal and Spain, and with design firms that are interested in using cork on much larger-scale projects. I'm also working on a strategic project about increasing the supply of natural cork on the world market while also healing the natural systems that support cork trees: the more I learn



Top: A collaboration between Parsons School of Design—where Michalik is an assistant professor of product and industrial design—and Cortiçeira Amorim.

Bottom: Michalik’s exploration of cork beams has yielded a series of designs that includes *Striated Chair #1* (2022).

Photos courtesy of Daniel Michalik

about the agricultural systems of cork, the more I realize we can be planting cork forests throughout the world—and that natural systems will benefit as a result.

——— What are those benefits?

I would say that a thriving, working cork forest has four positive characteristics, ecologically speaking. One is the carbon sequestration. These forests are sinking carbon from our atmosphere. The second has to do with the complexity of the root systems within the cork forests, which help to protect soil structure. Three is that, within a thriving forest, you have thriving biodiversity. And number four, cork trees are naturally fire-resistant. I imagine planting cork forests in central California.

——— So, while they’re maturing, cork trees can do the work of protecting ecosystems. Perhaps that can figure into landowners’ cost-benefit analyses.

The other opportunity concerns reclaiming used cork stoppers. Cork is almost infinitely recyclable, and you can recycle cork stoppers into building materials. Currently, there is not a robust infrastructure for collection, nor a system for reusing those cork stoppers. We need to build networks of collection facilities and processing points.

——— Do you feel optimistic about these paths forward?

People who work with land look for the quickest and biggest return on investment. It’s a major threat, because in cork regions where tourism is surging, like Portugal, building a luxury development that depletes the water table and damages forests offers quicker, bigger returns than stewarding a cork forest. I can’t blame a landowner for wanting return on investment, but the more that we can communicate the opportunities of cork, the more we can fight against threats.



A bottle cooler, tiny ship, and trivet, shown clockwise from left, are readied for production in 2020.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Michalik



Maria Moyer  
An object created for the 2023  
*Rewilding* exhibition at Curator's  
Cube in Tokyo.

Photo courtesy of Maria Moyer

— @mariakmoyer

## *Sharing Authorship*

The work of Los Angeles-based artist Maria Moyer defies easy description. Working mostly in ceramic, Moyer makes delicate forms cradling massive volumes. In other clay compositions, the medium seems both stonily jagged and barely hardened. And yet other sculptures are feats of head-scratching balance, threatening to slink or gallop away when one's back is turned. Moyer's meditations on beauty are frequently informed by nature's creatures and the systems that made them, and in recent years, she says she is making "an ongoing attempt to work more directly with nature, to see and share things as they are—exquisite and fleeting."



Basil Kincaid

*Four Eyes One Vision* (2021)

Ghanaian wax block fabrics, cotton warp  
cotton weft handwoven Ashanti Kente, lace,  
abrokeyere, embroidery

104 x 60 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Hauser + Wirth

Photo: Thomas Barratt

—— @basilkincaid

## *Patches and Portraits*

After graduating from an art-school program focused on Western masters, Basil Kincaid searched for historical inspirations that aligned more closely with the Black experience. He did not have to look farther than his own family, which had been quilting for generations. The realization “really shifted my whole thinking process, because my art didn’t have this spiritual and ancestral slant to it previously. When I started sewing, I felt my grandmother was there with me,” he says. Now a rising star based in St. Louis and Ghana, Kincaid has focused his arts practice on quilts that overlay portraiture on a more traditional, collage-like background: “I’m able to honor all these women in my family who weren’t acknowledged as the artists and geniuses that they were.”



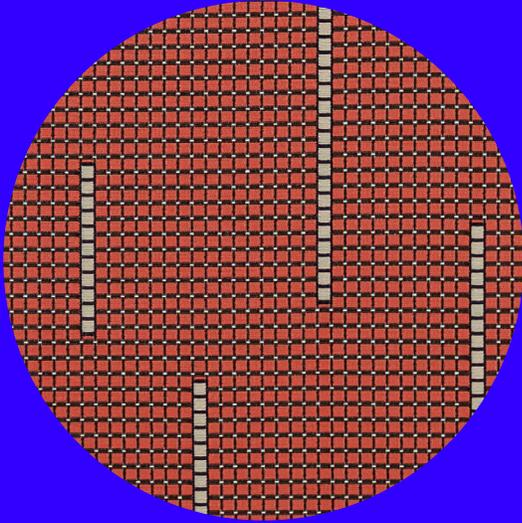
Kiva Ford  
In addition to drinking vessels and miniatures, Ford's studio practice includes sculptures like *Metamorphosis III* (2023) that contemplate the intersection of art and science.

Courtesy of Kiva Ford  
Photo: © Matt Cashore

@kivafordglass

## *Close to Perfection*

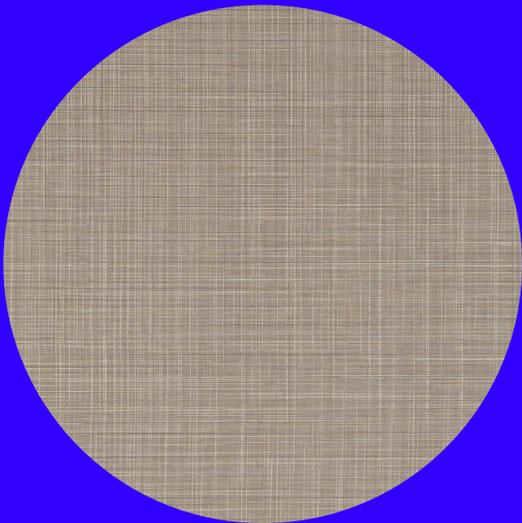
While scientists are increasingly conducting their experiments using algorithms and cloud computing, they still rely on glassmakers to produce the flasks, burettes, and other equipment whose precision is measured in microns. That demand has propelled young talents like Kiva Ford to chief-glassblower positions at NYU, Princeton, and the University of Notre Dame, where he currently supports radiation research. Ford is so devoted to his craft, that he designs and fabricates glass in his free time. Exactness is also the rule for this more artistic endeavor, as it may take Ford hundreds of tries to achieve one of his signature goblets.



— Upholstery

## Float

Aliki van der Kruijs designed *Float* as an outgrowth of paper explorations in which she cut out linear sections of cardboard boxes and realigned them “off the grid”. From this slight out of alignment gesture comes a new pattern. *Float* is a polyester/nylon construction in seven colorways.



— Wall Protection

## Sparta

RAMPART® flexible wall protection performs as well as rigid sheet goods and offers superior stain resistance. *Sparta* is an exquisite and versatile interpretation of linen. Thanks to its broad palette, the pattern can be used in different colorways to distinguish areas or floors for wayfinding. *Sparta* can be applied to irregular surfaces, such as CMU blocks, when first applying RAMPART Stronghold wall liner.



— Wallcovering and Upholstery

## Cork

Wolf-Gordon is the premier source for cork wallcovering and upholstery. Renewable, naturally fire resistant and antimicrobial, *Cork Wallcovering* is a sustainable product of the renewable cork bark tree. Once the bark of a live cork oak tree is stripped, it will regenerate every 10 years. Our cork wallcoverings are Class A rated as per ASTM E-84.



— Festival

# Roots: The International Garden Festival

## Reford Gardens

Grand-Métis, Quebec

Until October 1, 2023

The International Garden Festival held at Reford Gardens has commissioned more than 250 contemporary gardens since its 2000 launch. The 24th edition of the festival adds five works to that count. While these new gardens appear dramatically forward-looking, they all employ local materials and traditional construction methods that predate our digitized era. The installation *matière-matière* is emblematic of this cycle's "Roots" brief. A collaboration between Quebec's Studio Haricot, Rose-Marie Guévin, and Vincent Ouellet, the contemplative outdoor room is made from a mixture of hemp and plaster.

Studio Haricot, Rose-Marie Guévin,  
Vincent Ouellet  
*matière-matière* (2023)

Hempcrete

Photo: © International Garden Festival, Jardins de Métis/  
Reford Gardens



— Exhibition

# Public By Design

## Exhibit Columbus

Columbus, IN

Through October 2023

In less than a decade, Exhibit Columbus has become one of the world's most reliable sources of exciting temporary architecture. Unlike similarly pop-up initiatives such as the Serpentine Pavilion in London, Exhibit Columbus does not call a global metropolis home. This biennial takes place in its namesake Indiana city, whose unique legacy of modernist buildings dates to a local church completed by Eiel Saarinen in 1942. *Public By Design* is the just-opened fourth exhibition and includes 13 site-specific commissions. In a new development for the program, these installations were conceived with residents as engines of downtown revitalization.

Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO  
*Designed by the public* (2023)

Steel frames, MDO plywood, aluminum composite panels,  
acrylic paint, collection of various items

Photo: © Hadley Fruits

— Monograph

# New York City Ballet: Choreography & Couture

## Rizzoli

Published September 2023

Throughout its 75-year history, New York City Ballet has tapped prominent fashion designers to create costumes for the stage. In 2012, those partnerships became officially coded into the company's DNA, when choreographers Peter Martins and Christopher Wheeldon collaborated with Valentino on its inaugural Fall Fashion Gala. In *New York City Ballet: Choreography & Couture*, New York City Ballet costume director Marc Happel chronicles the dozens of garments made in the ensuing decade—and reveals how fashion's biggest names modified their work to enhance dancers' poetry and athleticism.

*New York City Ballet: Choreography &  
Couture* cover

Photo: © Pari Dukovic



— Conference

## PopTech

The REACH at the Kennedy Center  
Washington, DC

October 24–26, 2023

At 27 years old, the PopTech Conference is one of America's longest-running thought-leadership events. The forum has annually welcomed scientists, artists, and other visionaries to Maine to share research and ideas that are poised to change the world. Distinguishing PopTech from other innovation showcases, organizers often select presenters whose work is informed by activism and social entrepreneurship, and they encourage all participants to form genuine connections outside an auditorium, so they may dream up something new together. Recently PopTech has started touring the conference out of state, and this October it convenes at The REACH at the Kennedy Center.

The PopTech stage.

Photo courtesy of PopTech



— Exhibition

## Break Traditions, Saving Traditions: Elsie Allen and the Legacy of Pomo Basketry

**Santa Rosa Junior College  
Multicultural Museum**

Santa Rosa, CA

Until December 22, 2023

The Pomo people of northern California are renowned for basket-making, and masters of the craft are held in special regard by community members and scholars to this day. Although arts institutions and private buyers have sought Pomo baskets since the 1880s, the Elsie Allen Pomo Basket Collection is the only known group of its size to have been created and curated entirely by Native American weavers. To mark the collection's 20-year residence at Santa Rosa Junior College, the school is displaying all of its 131 baskets for the first time.

Annie Boone  
*Feathered basket*

Mallard and meadowlark feathers woven into three-rod coiling with a sedge grass root weft over willow warp sticks; rim decorated with Washington clam shell money beads.

Photo courtesy of SRJC Museum

# HOWL

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Next Issue: Winter 2023.  
See you then!

Feedback and suggestions for  
future content should be addressed  
to [howl@wolfgordon.com](mailto:howl@wolfgordon.com).



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