



Behind the Design: Q&A with Jesse Hill of Hill Studio

The industrial designer behind Lightcorp's Most Modest brand says it's all about "complex simplicity."

BY CHRIS DAWSON, LIGHTCORP

Have you ever wondered where designers go to get inspired? To find out, we sat down with Jesse Hill of Hill Studio in Baltimore last month and decided to do a deep dive into the creative process of the mind behind

LightCorp's Most Modest brand. From ideation to realization, his insights offer a glimpse into the innovative thinking that drove the development of not just this project, but many others.

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Delve: Everyone loves a good origin story, so can you share what drew you to industrial design in the first place?

Jesse Hill: I found out about this realm of design when I was perusing through a Sunday New York Times Art & Design magazine that had a large article about Marc Newson, the prolific industrial designer. It showcased his amazing apartment, his cool vintage car, and all the trinkets and artifacts he has collected over the years. They of course also spoke about his career and the types of projects he worked on. It was everything from shoe stores, airplanes, cars, furniture, interiors, electronics, and all the in between. I was immediately drawn to learning more about what this career path was. It felt so open and freeing, yet still grounded in the familiarity and the needs of people. Up until then I thought if I liked to draw and create things that exist in this world, then architecture was my option, or being an artist. Once I learned about industrial design, I was set on learning this skill and trade, and excelling in it as a career. The things that drew me in deeper were how important it was to consider constraints and the needs of spaces, people, interactions, and all other factors to a project.

Delve: Can you share a little of what your ideation process is like?

JH: It varies slightly, but overall I try to learn as much as I can about the project, limitations, constraints, users, and all other factors. Once I have a good understanding, I try to push myself to ask even more questions or provoke and pry with my client to get them to ask harder questions before we seem to align on a general path. I start with research: looking back before going forward always helps; understanding manufacturing and why these processes are necessary for the project; based on the information are there other processes I could introduce or suggest to drive a direction.

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— Jessie Hill



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I then start to concept and iterate, most likely with loose sketches and 3D, maybe some models and mockups made from anything I have in my

studio. This gives me a sense of scale and proportion. Once all parties are more in line, I will take it further with renderings, material choices and the small details of manufacturing and accent factors such as the noticeable nods that users find clever and enjoy.

Delve: What are some of your more unconventional sources of inspiration?

JH: I like to reference the past, because I think

it helps guide the future and prevents us from repeating ourselves sometimes. As far as unconventional, I enjoy hikes and walks in nature, and I also like to observe the different textures and colors within a city landscape—where brick meets old stone and then sidewalk or metal. All these material and textural changes help inform me in many ways.

Delve: Do you have a design philosophy?

JH: “Complex simplicity” is what I like to say. I take an empathetic approach to design and try to see products through both macro and micro lenses—striving to understand products in both their larger environments, while also concerned with the details and nuances that make a product approachable and appealing. It is always the goal to have longevity in a product, in turn making it more sustainable. This approach allows me to design within the constraints and contexts while also factoring in the ways the world shifts and is ever changing.

