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Clever

How Designer Sam Stewart Is Coping at Home

Long walks, ping-pong table nets, and a short film

By Zoë Sessums – April 27, 2020



Photo: Courtesy of Sam Stewart

As shelter-in-place orders went into effect across the world, we started to wonder what all our favorite designers and creatives were doing at home. Beyond the seriousness, we started to see glimpses of ways these people were staying busy and getting crafty. We Zoomed in, we emailed, and we got them to teach us something fun. Here, we talked to New York-based designer Sam Stewart about how he's spending his time, places he's finding inspiration, and rituals he's gotten into to stay sane. For an added bonus, the furniture designer (if you love the tables and chairs at Dimes, you're already a Sam fan), he made us a video called *Quaranta*.

Clever: How have your day-to-day routines changed from pre-quarantine to now?

Sam Stewart: I think like most people, the changes in my routines have been pretty significant. Pre-COVID, I was out of my apartment for the majority of the day. Often, back and forth between my studio/office in Chelsea and fabricators in Brooklyn and Queens, overseeing the fabrication of new things for upcoming projects—all of which have since been canceled or postponed. The steady rhythm of dinner/drinks with friends or gallery openings have ceased for who knows how long.

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What are you working on?

I'm working in a very hypothetical way. I've been so driven the last couple of years by a steady stream of deadlines and projects that it's a bit of a shock at first to think in the context purely of your own invention, with no real deadlines to consider. Specifically, I'm planning a new body of work that transforms my observations of the domestic or industrial landscape into actual objects. Some of these observation-objects are of things that simply bring me joy, some that have a function as furniture or lighting, some with a dark or perverse sense of humor, and others that play with scale and levels of abstraction.

Have there been unexpected sources of inspiration or places you're looking to for inspiration?

Of course! I have been allowing myself the daily walk, starting in the East Village and wandering in one direction until I'm tired. In general, I'm slowing things down a bit, taking time to look very closely at the wild variety of architectural details that are on every block.

What are some rituals you're performing to stay sane and/or occupied?

Tashon Hopkins's Instagram live boxing classes three days a week, tending to my fire escape garden, and baking.

Do you think this time will change how you work in the future?

To some extent, yes. For example, right now I'm trying to stop saying, "When things return to normal," because I think that there will be no such thing as a "return." We're moving forward into a new reality, so I'm doing my best to shape the way I live and work to be compatible with whatever that may be.

What have been the best discoveries?

The eight hours of direct sunlight on my fire escape, a sourdough culture courtesy of a friend, the family of northern cardinals that nested in our courtyard, the short films of Jan Švankmajer, the cast concrete and stainless steel net ping-pong tables in Tompkins Square Park, everything about the beautiful Sasaki Garden at Washington Square Village, and MFK Fisher's book *The Gastronomical Me*.