



THE ART OF CRAFT

Product Designer Anna Rabinowicz on creating modern-day heirlooms

| By Smitha Sadanandan

New York-based product designer Anna Rabinowicz brings her creative thinking and skills to craft functional, luxurious objects made of semi-precious stones, no less – accented with pure gold and sterling silver.

It was on a travel to Spain, muses Anna, that she found her true calling and decided to follow a career in design. When she was 20, Anna lived in Florence for six months, as part of a university exchange program. During one of the school breaks, she traveled to Barcelona and visited Gaudi's Sagrada Familia. "I climbed one of the spires of his church at dusk, looked out over the organic, undulating tiles of his unfinished masterpiece, and lost my heart." Anna returned home, and told her parents – who were hoping that she would become a neurosurgeon – that she had found her passion and path in life.

With a Masters Degree in Design and Engineering from Stanford University, Anna began her career by designing prosthetic knees and devices for cardiac bypass surgery. "My professional interest has always been to improve people's lives. My intention has never wavered, simply the manifestation. The link between the two parts of my career is biological inspiration. I loved creating medical devices, and a prosthetic knee that I designed is still widely utilized for total knee replacements. In the case of designing medical devices, the biological inspiration is obvious – it involves deeply understanding the actual biological piece or function, and then attempting to directly replicate it through design," she explains.

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As time passed, Anna gravitated towards designing bowls, cake platters, trays, bottle openers and lifestyle products under her brand Anna New York. She launched her first home collection for RabLabs in 2002. Although the products are high on the luxury quotient, Anna's creations marry function and aesthetic. "The usability of my designs is of paramount importance – I am always thinking about how people will use our items. It is part of my DNA as a Stanford-trained product designer – my training in both art and engineering necessitates a focus on improving people's lives."

Alabaster is the medium of choice for Anna's Tondo collection, while pyrite stones accent her wooden bosque boxes. A fragment of shell, a crystal formation or even an organism, like the sea fan (which inspired the Espera collection), can spark off her imagination. Unlike most product designers, Anna prefers to work using amethyst, crystal, rose quartz, lapis lazuli, malachite and tiger's eye, among others. Why? "It's critical that the designs that I work on will last forever. Using these materials ensures that they not only feel precious, but that they look and feel the same today, as they will many years in the future," says Anna. "If people walk up to my designs, and feel an ineffable desire to possess them, then I have done my job."

To craft her elegant, luxury products, Anna works with artisans in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul region (south of the country). It is the geographical epicentre, she adds, for many of the materials – and an industry of craft has sprung up around the places within which these materials are found. "Also, the mentality of the artisans we work with in Brazil is a very good fit for my company – we share attributes like integrity, focus on quality, the desire to bring beauty into the world, the importance of building close relationships," she points out.

IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE

Taking time off her busy design career, Anna also worked as a full-time professor at Parsons for ten years. She fondly remembers the many professors who she had and who were (and are still) so "impactful" in her "professional trajectory, and life." Anna takes mentorship seriously. It is a goal, she admits, to provide the same for her star students. "Now, I periodically teach classes within the d.school (design school) of Stanford University, my alma mater. I love the intoxication of being in the classroom, and the privilege of imparting knowledge that I have gained over the years to groups of students."

What is the latest design you are working on? "I am working on our spring 2018 home-object collection, as well as our next furniture collection. The focus of the home object line is on gracious home entertaining – and may involve some surprise materials," says Anna.

