

CULTURE + LIFESTYLE

Aspen's Bustling Arts and Culture Scene Thrives Amid the Pandemic

According to AD100 designer Rodman Primack, who recently set up shop in the town: "Design thinking actually created modern Aspen and...its great music and art institutions"

By Janet O'Grady

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In 2007, Pritzker-winning architect Shigeru Ban was hired to design the new facility for The Aspen Art Museum.

Aspen's ski lifts are open for business. With COVID precautions in place, the sport is considered relatively low risk by experts. With four mountains operated by the Aspen Skiing Co, there's plenty of room for social distancing, both on the slopes, and off, in spacious homes.

In wealthy enclaves like Aspen, urban dwellers residing full-time in their vacation homes, or taking long-term rentals, has become the norm during the pandemic. Record-breaking real estate sales for 2020 tallied more than \$3.1 billion in total volume in Pitkin County (where Aspen is located), according to MLS listings. “COVID has made an already hot real estate market like Aspen’s, and its surrounding towns, scorching hot,” says Susan Plummer, with Coldwell Banker Mason Morse.

“The pandemic has resulted in a very different season this year,” says Richard Edwards, owner of the world-class Baldwin Gallery, the exclusive Caribou Club, and venerated historic downtown buildings. “There are fewer of the well-travelled Australians, Brazilians, and Europeans, who typically make up about 20 percent of our yearly visitors. But there are sophisticated, cultured people here.”



Inside the famed Baldwin Gallery, featuring three works by Taryn Simon from her 2019 exhibition: *Paperwork* and *The Will of Capital*.

And the people here have attracted urban galleries, restaurants, and brands looking for business during the flight of city clientele. This summer design lovers buzzed about the pop-up by Mexico City-based Ago Projects, cofounded by design entrepreneurs Rodman Primack (an AD 100) and

Rudy Weissenberg, with Aspenite Jamie Tisch. The gallery was so successful that it's continued this winter, evolving into the renamed Pitkin Projects, and now includes home accessories. Find a curated selection of vintage fabric pillows from Primack's RP Miller; Fabien Cappello lamps; sculptural Butt chairs by Christopher Wolston; Dax Savage's baskets; throws of sustainably harvested Mongolian cashmere from Hangai Mountain; Fenway ceramics; and jewelry by Lisa Eisner and Daniela Villegas.

"We wanted to provide a stage for a global group of local makers," says Tisch, known for A-list entertaining. "Aspen homes are more than statements. They're about making memories." Lockdown fatigue, she adds, has made us "realize the importance of our homes to our sense of wellness."

Art lovers will head to Baldwin Gallery and Marianne Boesky. Venice, California-based Honor Fraser gallery opened a pop-up showing Kenny Scharf. Mexico City's Galeria Mascota, offers a diverse roster, with outstanding ceramics by Takuro Kuwata, Dan McCarthy, and Shio Kusada.

Stop at the five-star Little Nell, whose lobby and living room were given a sleek make over by Madrid's Luis Bustamante. Its pre-COVID-packed Chair 9 bar, remodeled recently by Champalimaud Design, is now renamed the Wine Bar. Find socially distanced high-tops and an intimate chaise lounge, with an adjacent tented Krug Lounge. Across from the Nell, sip a signature Garibaldi—Campari and OJ- at Dante Snow Lodge, the first outpost of this legendary Greenwich Village restaurant and bar.

At the mountain's base contemplate artist and activist Paula Crown's outdoor sculpture *Jokester*—in the shape of a giant plastic cup. Evoking our wasteful consumption, the message lingers. Crown, whose family owns the Aspen Skiing Company, is the vision behind the company's design—from hotel and restaurant branding to art collections to its innovative Art in Unexpected Places. The award-winning program provides commissioned images on lift tickets of limited-edition works by artists like Jim Hodges and Mark Grotjahn.



Installed from 2018 - 2020 outside the Little Nell Hotel, Paula Crown's *The Jokester* sculpture is meant to serve as a commentary on pollution and waste. It has since been relocated to Sculpture Milwaukee.

You can't miss the Shigeru Ban–designed [Aspen Art Museum](#). See L.A.-based Mary Weatherford's "Neon Paintings," and Barbara Kasten sculptures. Its new director Nicola Lees, previously with London's Serpentine and the Frieze Foundation, brings a heightened interdisciplinary approach to shows. Immerse yourself in [Winterfest](#). Here artist Veit Laurent Kurz, working for the first time with architect Jens Rønholt Schmidt and their newly formed design studio Rønholtkurz, has rendered shapes and forms recurrent in his own drawings into a three-dimensional design that

reconfigures the imagery of a cabin, mountain, and lake in the gallery. Curated by Saim Demircan, it displays works for sale that fall between arts and crafts, with artists splitting proceeds with the museum. Before exiting, stop at its cool new design-driven the Store. Artist Jonathan Berger has reimagined the gift shop as if looking at specimens in a natural history museum. Some objects are not for sale; others are priced from free to \$50,000.

In a stunning bucolic setting, take a guided tour of Anderson Ranch's "Sculpturally Distanced" tree art and interactive LED light show. Come summer the campus hums with design, painting, furniture making, and ceramics workshops.

What sets Aspen apart, says Primack, is that it's "one of the few places in the country with such a concentration of contemporary art collectors. And this community is also keenly interested in design."

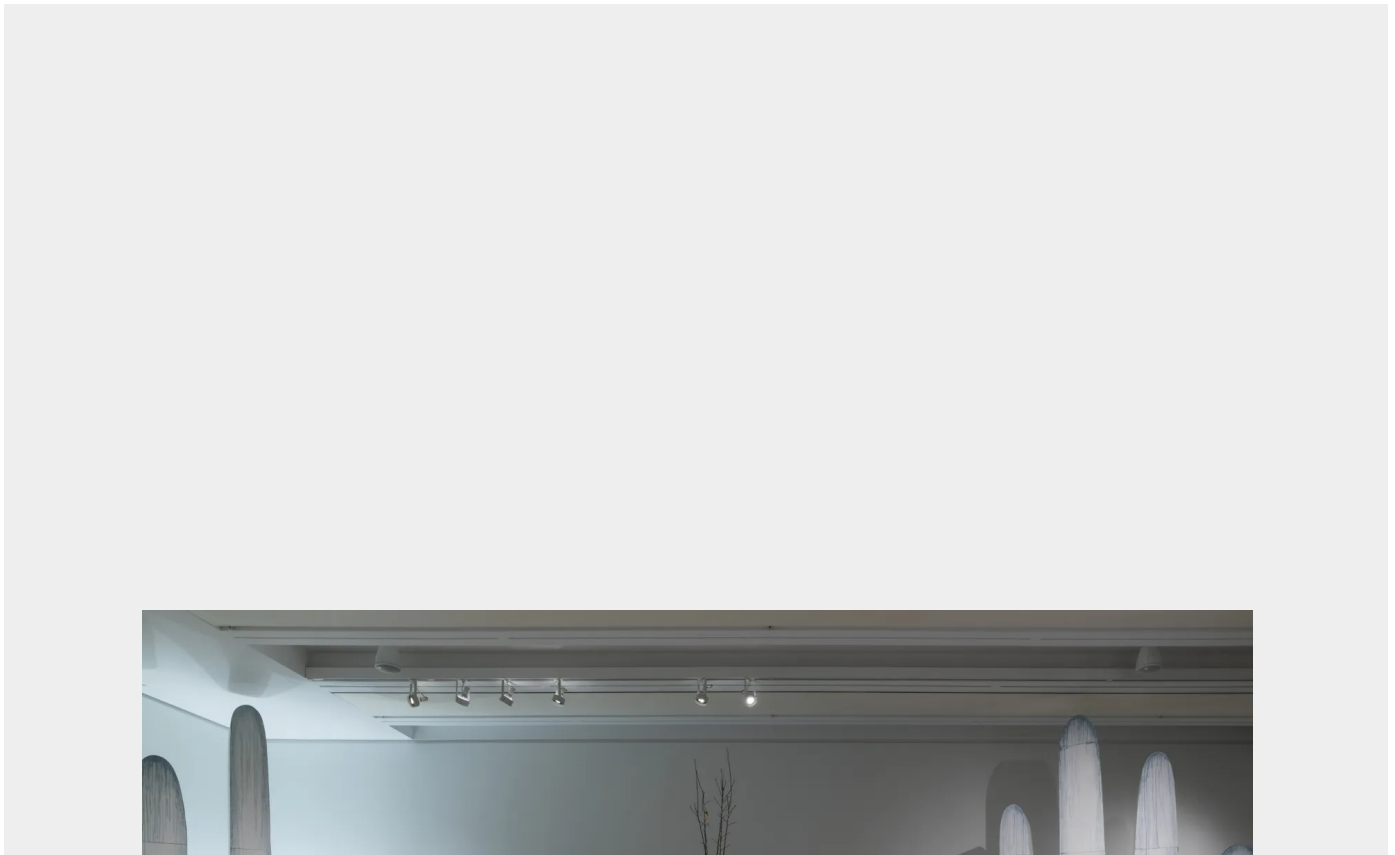
Primack is so busy with new projects that he's just opened a local office here. He's collaborating on a home for Bumble founder Whitney Herd Wolfe with Rowland + Broughton, Aspen's hottest, most interesting firm.



Inside an artist collaboration with Aspen's hottest firm, Rowland & Broughton. Titled the Art Barn, the private tearoom in a residence was crafted by the architects with the help of a tea master. Joshua McHugh

Sarah Broughton says they are designing houses for clients bringing their art collections to Aspen. “Our work is bespoke architecture,” she says, adding they are working with more makers and artists like the Haas Brothers on unique designs like fireplaces and lighting. “And during the pandemic, we’re seeing a demand for more intimate spaces for gathering.”

Design world luminaries Peter Marino and Holly Hunt own homes here, but you won’t find a designated design district in Aspen, with stores for outfitting homes. To understand design in Aspen, you have to dig into its history. Be peripatetic and explore the downtown and nearby West End, where restored Victorians and miners’ cabins stand as vestiges of Aspen’s founding as a silver mining town in the 1890s. Then walk the Aspen Meadows, a 40-acre parcel where design merges with nature. In the late 1940s, Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke and his wife Elizabeth brought the Bauhaus-trained artist Herbert Bayer to the then ghost town to transform it into a cultural and skiing mecca. It’s also home to my favorite hotel, with modernist buildings set in a garden of Bayer earthworks and Andy Goldsworthy’s serpentine “Stone River” sculpture.





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A view into Winterfest, an ongoing exhibition of Arts and Crafts at The Aspen Art Museum.

“Design thinking actually created modern Aspen,” says Primack, referring to the town’s Bauhaus past, “and provided the structural foundations for its great music and art institutions.” And design thinking and generous patrons are moving the town into the future.

