

BGC CRAFT, ART & DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Lindsey Adelman

Industrial Designer, Founder and Creative Director of Lindsey Adelman Studio
Conducted by Julie Pastor on October 29, 2014 at Lindsey Adelman Studio,
New York, New York

Lindsey Adelman (b. 1968) is a Manhattan-based industrial designer as well as the founder and creative director of Lindsey Adelman Studio. She designs and produces light fixtures that mix hand-blown glass elements with machined metal parts. Adelman received her B.A. in English from Kenyon College before pursuing an M.F.A. in industrial design at RISD, which she received in 1996. She worked for Resolute Lighting in Seattle, moved to New York to found the lighting company Butter with David Weeks in 2000, and eventually formed her own studio in 2006. Her work has been exhibited at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, the Museum of Arts and Design, Design Miami, Nilufar Gallery, and BDDW, among others.

In this interview, Adelman discusses her background and education in order to trace her pursuit of industrial design as a profession. She describes her style, process, and approach to design, acknowledging the challenges she has faced as well as her goals for the future of the studio. Central to the interview is the series of struggles Adelman faced and overcame in order to make a living from her work and achieve creative independence.

This oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview. The interviewee has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

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Julie Pastor (JP): This is Julie Pastor, and I'm interviewing Lindsey Adelman at her studio in

New York City on October 29, 2014 for the Bard Craft, Art, and Design Oral History Project. I was hoping that we could begin the interview with you telling me a little bit about where you grew up and when you grew up.

Lindsey Adelman (LA): Okay, sure. I was born in Manhattan and grew up in 1968 and grew up in Westchester.

JP: Okay, cool. Did design play a role in your childhood at all?

LA: A little bit. Even though I didn't really know the word "design," my mom was an interior decorator for about ten years, and she ran her own company, and I remember, I think I went to the D&D building a couple times with her, and so even though I didn't really know about design necessarily as a vocation or a category I was very aware of Marimekko sheets and an Erica phone and certain things, and I knew I got this sort of buzz off of it. The fun visuals, I kind of got a high off a certain—like, I remember when I was little peeling the paper off of crayons and putting, you know, two colors together, like yellow and orange, just getting that high feeling from the visuals—

JP: From the combinations?

LA: So that there was something in there, I think.

JP: That's really interesting. So, you weren't as into—were you a maker at an early age?

LA: Yeah, I made misses as my sister said. Constantly making things, constantly. And picking up.

JP: What were some examples of things that you made?

LA: Costumes, outfits, that kind of thing, taping things on. I still use tape and string a lot when I make models, but just that, whether it was teeth and tails and then belting your nighties into evening gowns and that kind of thing constantly, yeah. [laughs] And clothes for my sister's Barbies and—

JP: Oh, nice. Were you sewing, or were you just kind of—

LA: Yeah, a lot of sewing. I took sewing in second grade, and so I learned how to use a sewing machine and then I started making, like, culottes and vests and stuff, wraparound skirts.

JP: Would you wear your own designs?

LA: Uh-huh. [laughs] I would.

JP: Did you make any designs for your friends and family, or was it just mostly for you?

LA: Um, for me. [laughs] Yeah, reversible outfits. Yeah.

JP: That's great. It's interesting that you have this background sewing things, because I know that industrial design is not the first thing you pursued when you went to college. So can you tell me a bit about your education before you went to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] and what you were interested in?

LA: Yeah, uh-huh. So I went to Kenyon College in Ohio. I got a degree in English, and then I worked at the Smithsonian for two years and then found out what industrial design was when I was working at the Smithsonian. I never really had heard of it, but it seemed to be a really good option for people that couldn't make up their mind about choosing what to do [laughs]

and this huge creative field, so that's really part of the main reason I chose it. And then got to do printmaking and film and metal, wood, and actually I did a lot of sewing projects at school. I did lighting at school, so you could, since I had my liberal arts, like uh, you know sort of the requirements satisfied, I could do all creative stuff full time at RISD, so that was incredible. No English and Poli Sci. [LA and JP laugh] It was amazing.

JP: Yeah, that's really—so did you take any studio classes when you were at Kenyon at all?

LA: I took one art class that brought my whole GPA down. [LA and JP laugh] I got a D in painting, and it's because I really couldn't even walk to the building. I feel like that's a lot of life in a way, where you really can only concentrate on one thing at a time. And English major was pretty demanding, and we were, you know, it was *Paradise Lost* [by John Milton], James Joyce, and I really could not even go into the building to paint. I couldn't focus on it, and so, you know. And there was no encouragement—nobody thought that it was a good idea for me to take art [laugh], so it really brought everything else down.

JP: That's not really what was nurtured. So how did your time making at RISD feel in comparison?

LA: When I arrived the first day of school, it was a huge feeling of relief. I was like, oh, hello my people. Why didn't I know about all of you? It was incredibly relaxing to be around people in an environment that was sort of the perfect fit, to see so many things that I was excited about, interested about, kind of scared about in the way that you're just nervous and excited to try things because you know you'll love them even though I had never used a drill. I didn't think I could draw, but somehow I really trusted that excitement, and that's a very freeing feeling.

JP: Yeah. Did you have any—I know you didn't have any support in this art class environment in undergrad, but did you have any sort of support or guidance when it came to making the decision to go to RISD?

LA: No, it was mostly based on gut instinct. So, when I was at the Smithsonian I was an editorial assistant, and really became fascinated when I got to take a tour of the exhibition fabrication department, and I think um, feeling like at my job, which was similar to most jobs where you're sitting at a desk and you're on a computer, I was like, I might as well be dead. [LA and JP laugh] It was really like a violent reaction inside of me. I thought, how could anything be more unhealthy than being 22 years old in a chair forty hours a week? I was like, this is not right, and so touring that department, I think the idea that you could be active all day, standing, engaged, sort of working on pieces bigger than you and then in teams, and then—it just, the idea that that could be how you get your paycheck every week was so much more fascinating to me than the other environment, which I felt a bit nervous I would say in that other environment. You would get a lunch break for half an hour, you know, I was a government employee [LA and JP laugh] working for the Smithsonian also. There was just a lot of, um, you didn't feel connected to yourself necessarily, and I think that was the main drive for me. And then when I discovered that word “industrial design” and how that could be a job, it also seemed like a good fit for me. It wasn't an open-ended degree in sculpture. I think I would've felt a bit overwhelmed, and I kind of wanted the sort of concrete endgame that you could get hired with a degree.

JP: Yeah, that makes sense coming from English, too, with a lot of different directions you could go, and—

LA: Yeah, exactly. So it was more just that feeling of um, what is it? It's not a panic. It's like the opposite, where all of a sudden you're, it's just an internal conversation. If I don't do this,

you know, why wouldn't I just try? I'll just put my application in, and I don't really need to talk about it necessarily with anyone if that makes sense, so that's kind of how I did it. I did it the night before it was due actually. [LA and JP laugh] I did, yeah.

JP: Well, it seems to have worked out for you—

LA: Yeah, yeah, it worked out.

JP: Did you have any mentors when you were at RISD who were guiding you more?

LA: Yeah, a lot. A lot of instructors that were incredible people. And they cared so much. I mean, that's the really fascinating thing. It was, it's an environment where you don't feel controlled, and that there's high expectations but that nobody is telling you how to do it, and no one's really shutting down any ideas, so you kind of have to prove yourself, but for people that love independence like I do, it was a really good fit. So, actually a lot of my most favorite teachers have since passed away, which is sad, but this man named Ken Honeybell comes to mind and this other man named Mark Hazel comes to mind, and an amazing teacher whose first name is Amy and I can't remember her last name right this second, and also some teacher's assistants, some graduate students also stick out. They were just so direct and super honest, and I learned a lot of, it's sort of a vernacular. It's a way of speaking about design was a very new world for me. It's so different than dissecting a piece of literature, which there is room for interpretation, but you're not creating it necessarily. You're responding. And starting with one's own original idea as well as studying, of course, a lot of historical precedents at RISD, but the process is autobiographical in a way that you can't ever hide.

JP: Yeah.

LA: I think that was very good for me.

JP: Yeah, that's really interesting. It's an interesting way to phrase it.

LA: Yeah.

JP: When you studied the history of industrial design, were there any designers that you looked to, that were your favorites or that—

LA: that stood out—

JP: that inspired you or anything?

LA: I think it was mainly sculptors that stood out for me when I was studying industrial design. I took a semester off to do sculpture as well.

JP: Oh, cool.

LA: But even just discovering Donald Judd really changed everything for me.

JP: Yeah.

LA: And people that really melded their personal life with their design life I found extremely fascinating. It's just such a deep commitment.

JP: Yeah.

LA: But, he's a good example of that. Mmmhmm.

JP: Okay. What drew you to lighting? So you worked in so many media. When did it become about lighting?

LA: Yeah, lighting, I went that direction actually when I was still in school with my degree project, and things that mainly interested me were its immediate effect on the room, dramatic effect on a space, and everything else in it and the mood of a room. And so this idea of working with an immaterial substance to transform is fascinating to me, and then working backwards to the source of that immateriality is fascinating, so it's like you're working with negative space a lot. And then it's completely open-ended. There's no human factors to consider with lighting as opposed to designing a chair, and I also really like the idea of using real estate in a space that's the ceiling, the corners, the walls, things where you're not competing with side tables and credenzas, if that makes sense.

JP: Yeah, you can really draw your eye to the—

LA: Yeah, well not only that, but just that there's nothing in the way, so even a tiny apartment, you can still do a light fixture, or it can be wandering, it can be light, it can be heavy, it can be—I love that open-endedness. I found there also to be kind of a void, not like a void in the market when I was in school as I would describe it now that I'm working but, just the possibilities that I saw in my mind I hadn't seen yet, and so that was encouraging.

JP: Yeah. So you were doing something that was new—

LA: Yeah.

JP: How did you start making things, or what materials were you using for these light fixtures?

LA: Yeah, I was using cast rubber and cast plastic and, working with pouring rubber into sheets, into planes and then folding them and fastening them so that they were pretty organic and sort of suggestive, I would say, and with translucent quality, that's mostly what I was doing in school and then combining it with aluminum tubing to run the wires through. And then I would do things like redesign the plug so it matched the shade and do these folded plastic forms over the plug. And, I mean, a lot of what I did in school is still what drives a lot of my work. You know, if I look back to pictures from 1995, I can totally see the connection from what I'm doing now. I would even do things like make a black and white copy onto, translucent acetate of barnacles and then embed that inside of rubber and then fold that into a shade, but it's so similar to what I do now. I just make barnacles out of this technique using gold foil on top of hand-blown glass, but there's so many connections that have carried through, actually.

JP: Yeah, it seems like this organic quality is really a thread that's woven throughout a lot of your work in various forms.

LA: Yeah, very much.

JP: The way you were describing space and light—do you walk into a space and—is there a process that goes through your head—does space play a role into how you design a fixture, or—

LA: Yeah, I mean it does a little bit. It's more the person that I'm talking to in the space who's commissioning the light, and it's really fascinating to get into their headspace of how are they experiencing the space and then envisioning what else is going in the space, what other lighting they're incorporating into it, that is more how I work now, really understanding what the role of my light needs to play. Do they want, I mean there's so many ways it can go, but

often they'll have supplementary lighting in the room, and they want something that's more, not a statement piece but more likely to be the center of your focus, and that's interesting or other times, it's the only light in the room, and they want it to be really shallow to the ceiling and super functional on a dimmer so you can really bump up the brightness or turn it way down depending on the mood. It's just very fun to accommodate the different visions of clients. I really love it, yeah.

JP: That sounds really interesting.

LA: Yeah.

JP: Can you describe your approach to design if you feel like you have one?

LA: Yeah, I would say my approach, right now I'm designing some new concepts, and my approach is kind of weaving in all of the notes and sketches I've done over years and years, which I keep revisiting, and they get more and more developed, and so that all builds up to something. And then it's usually following a new thread, so something that's an impetus propelling the work forward. Probably sounds kind of abstract, but it's often combining those two things, so sort of combining the past and the future, if that makes sense, and often trying to go through a process that yields information that I couldn't have known before. And then, in terms of building prototypes, I always make models that are 1 to 1, and I always hang it from the ceiling, and I always, you know, I have one right in my, it takes up half of my little tiny office next door, , this prototype I'm making, and it's just, it's just nice to live with the form for a few days before I even necessarily wire it up. I think once I build something in actual, in 1 to 1 scale, then that's when the work really begins, because it all, I have a real interest in taking things as I in my mind say from good to great, that's what I really try to do. And I think that happens when you're living with the piece, when you give yourself a chance to critique the entire thing—every single millimeter, opportunities for how you could raise, how you can elevate the form, the feeling, the transitions, you know, I really find being in that space, it's sort of my favorite space to just elevate what you can about any form. There's always, always [emphatic] opportunity. [laughs]

JP: So, this prototype stage. How do you get there, where do you start, and can you kind of walk me through what it's like to have the concept and what steps you go through before it's realized?

LA: Yeah, so I go through what I just described, and then it gets to a form, and I'll give it to my team to wire up, and then I'll, and we'll look at a lot of different bulb choices, transformer choices, socket choices, all that stuff, the pros and cons of all those decisions and then illuminate it. And then at that point there's always more ideas, so what I'll do is often if I feel like one idea is still holding up to be worth pursuing, we'll bump it to the next level. So I often give my team direction at that point of what to change on it or what to make to add on to it, and if it's sparking a tangent of an idea, I usually note that idea. That's something that I really learned in school, frankly, is to finish the idea you're working on. It was very personal advice for me, because I am a total person of tangents, and I get really excited about a distraction, and it takes so much self-discipline to stay on the straight line that I'm supposed to be on, so I spend a lot of time taking notes and sketching tangents. And that allows me to capture those ideas and then complete. And often if I complete the current idea and it's just not that interesting or it's not—it's too similar to something I've done before, or it just seems derivative of, I'm totally comfortable with abandoning it and then making one of the tangential ideas the main event, and that process really works for me—

JP: Yeah. That seems like a good way to stay organized.

LA: Yeah, and I kind of refuse to commit to dates for launching new projects, because I think in a way for me as a designer it's almost irresponsible. It's almost like if you commit to a fall launch, and all of a sudden, if the work I'm making doesn't feel good enough, I would hate to have to fill that commitment with work that's unresolved or boring or, you know. I would prefer to have no deadline, and then it's, I can launch it when I feel it's ready. I feel like that process also really is the best thing for me.

JP: Yeah. And that must make it so that every piece that you finish is one that you're satisfied with.

LA: Yeah, yeah. Satisfied with enough to put it in the world, yeah, and then I can always work on it more. Yeah, totally.

JP: That's really interesting.

LA: Mmhmm.

JP: Can you describe your aesthetic? I know we talked about these sort of organic elements, but are there any other words you would use, or—

LA: Yeah, I think it's a combination of the organic elements—the organic elements I like because it feels beautiful and creepy at the same time. I love things that are like, the idea of weeds growing through cracks or like covering a fence or, I was saying barnacles or fungus taking over surfaces, I love that, and it also feels super creepy to me. And then, I think that the other side of me really believes in modernist Bauhaus-driven form, so that's why all my components are machined, and it's all about precision and they all pack into these tiny bins. And, so a giant chandelier can come apart and fit into a shoebox, the armature—

JP: Wow.

LA: Yeah, and that I love as well, because I think I'm quite—I like to be economical. I like to conserve energy in terms of everything, in terms of the amount of material I use, the amount of labor to assemble something, so I think both of those loves kind of drives the work.

JP: And aside from the creepy elements, is there anything else that inspires your designs either in the past or right now?

LA: Kind of bringing a sense of well-being to a space so it feels uplifting, and it feels serene, and it feels almost like a little bit of a break, like kind of a vacation is what I would like them to feel like and not too serious, not ever taking myself too seriously, yeah, it's just sort of—I don't want to say vulnerable, but in a way I don't ever make work that looks perfectly symmetrical or that every piece of glass is blown into a mold or that my work tends to be a lot more, let's see, a little imperfect intentionally.

JP: Mmhmm, that's really interesting. So shifting gears a little bit and coming back to as you were finishing up RISD, so what were your next steps after graduating?

LA: I went to move, I moved to Seattle, because my husband Ian, who was my boyfriend then, was recruited to work at Microsoft as a designer, so that's why I went out to Seattle. And I worked at a lighting place right out of school.

JP: Yeah, you worked at Resolute Lighting, right?

LA: Right, uh-huh.

JP: And then what brought you back to New York?

LA: Our break-up. [laughs] We got back together, but I was like, “I’m outta here.” [LA and JP laugh] And I just really feel the most comfortable in New York City. So I worked, I actually worked in advertising when I got back here first, and then I worked for David Weeks after that, like a year later.

JP: Yeah, what was it like working with David Weeks?

LA: Awesome. He’s an amazing person and really generous, great environment in his metal shop office, and his aesthetic is amazing. He sort of has the belief and talent and patience to make work that’s exactly the way he wants it in his mind. He doesn’t ever take short cuts. A lot of companies do. They’ll go for what parts are most affordable or what they have extra of, or what doesn’t take a lot of labor, and his studio, they were using almost jewelry techniques, like silver soldering to attach certain parts together, just because it was so, so [emphatic] beautiful. And you realize in the end it’s worth it. That is the way to make work.

JP: Yeah.

LA: And yeah, so it was an awesome experience, I would say.

JP: And what was it like working at Butter? You two [Lindsey and David Weeks] created a studio together?

LA: Yeah, yeah so that was a lot about the work that we, you know he felt was sort of fifty-fifty in terms of creative direction with us, and so I was an employee of his at the time, and I mean honestly I think this says a lot about him too, just being a good person, you know [laughs] being a gentleman truly, that he was like, “This is as much you as it is me. Why, what do you think about this idea of starting a company together?” And so the work was really different from what he was doing, and it was all sort of origami-driven in a loose sense.

JP: Were there any challenges, or did you feel like it was totally just a beneficial experience?

LA: Challenges, yeah, a ton. I mean it’s really hard to make a living if you sell lampshades for \$25 each.

JP: Yeah.

LA: [laughing] So, we didn’t make any money. We got a fair amount of press, which in the end was good, but no, I think, when I came to the time in my life when I want to have a baby and then my husband and I got pregnant, I thought, “Okay, I think I’m going to ease out of the work thing and just stay home for a while,” so that’s pretty much when we closed the company and the studio.

JP: Okay. And how long was there a gap between that time and when you started your studio?

LA: Yeah, so two years. I was home with [my son] Finn, who was a baby.

JP: Yeah, that makes sense. So, what was it like to form your own studio when you did that in 2006?

LA: It was good. It was sort of scary. I decided, I didn’t really form a studio, but I decided to say yes to an exhibition where I was making some light fixtures to put in, and they were the beginnings of the Bubble Chandelier series, and then put them in the exhibition.

And the exhibition was actually in a model townhouse, and so they were selling like fourteen townhouses. So really, the quote unquote business started when the neighbors started ordering the same fixtures, but I didn’t really have, I wasn’t really sure I wanted to be a

designer anymore. I didn't know if what I wanted to do was work anymore, and so it all happened, but it was not like I had a game plan. I just started making these lights and filling orders, and it was extremely challenging actually, because I didn't have a studio. I had a babysitter a few hours a week, it was really, I mean, my friends would be like, "Your life is not supposed to be this hard. What are you doing? The universe is telling you to get out now!" [LA and JP laugh] But I think that once I started making a profit on the very first ones, that kind of, it was that taste of freedom and independence I was really craving, and I followed that. That was like the drug, kind of part of it where I was like, I want more of that, this is an amazing feeling to kind of make your own mistakes, make your own decisions, be responsible for all of it, and that was really fun. And I also, I mean, just as a person, I like not having to use words for things. It was nice not to have discussions about the work, frankly. It was nice just to have a process that was—I don't know how to describe. A process that's not analyzed is like the sweet spot for me where you're not running it by a board of directors. And this isn't to say I'm criticizing being business partners whatsoever, it's just it's own thing to be on your own and that you're so willing to take the risk of something crashing and burning, but you just want to do it. So I feel like that's—I mean, that's kind of why I'm still in it. It's because I love that feeling, and I don't like explaining things, and I also don't like to build up a logical case for anything. I make a lot of decisions that don't have a logical case to them whatsoever, and that just sort of works for me.

JP: Yeah. Can I ask where the exhibition was with these model townhouses?

LA: Sure, yeah, it was in Brooklyn—State Street. And the architecture firm that sponsored the whole thing was Rogers Marvel. I still work with Jonathan Marvel.

JP: Oh, nice. And where were you making these orders without a studio? What space were you using?

LA: I found a place that worked on—not antique lights—but a lighting restoration type place, so I kept going there with my parts and that were sort of screwed together, but I had to hire them to wire the entire thing and plate things, and it was really, really, really, really [emphatic] stressful, actually. It was so difficult. There was a lot of disappointments, a huge learning curve, but I hung in there. [laughs]

JP: Yeah, you did. And it seems to have worked out. So at what point were—so you made these profits from filling these orders, and what was the next step for you moving forward?

LA: The next step, little by little, was I guess photographing the work that I had made in people's homes. And then, I don't know if I had a website per se, but I had something. I think it was the first step, putting a price tag on them, starting out with one product and then other people could discover it and order it. That's kind of how it started. The New York Times covered the project—that was great. Interior Design Magazine covered the project, so that's I think where all that hard work with the company Butter really paid off, because I knew the editors personally, I mean I think that's why, that's how I started, yeah.

JP: Yeah, strong connections.

LA: Yep.

JP: And, when did you get your own dedicated studio space or start to have more staff?

LA: Yeah, not for a little while actually. I don't remember the year, I mean it could have been 2008. I can't really remember, but it was in Brooklyn at the American Can Factory, which is a really terrific building next to the Gowanus. And shared with two friends, yeah. One's an artist

and one's a jeweler. And then had an intern for a while, two interns. I just saw her actually in London. She lives there now. She just started at the Royal College of Art for graduate school, and so, yeah, that was six years ago. And then I think it just went along as responding to how much help I needed depending on how many orders we had. So it was just really slow at the beginning, but I didn't even know what slow was. It just seemed like work, and it seemed like a nice studio. [LA and JP laugh]

JP: Were you actively trying to get clients at that time or was it just kind of—

LA: I was not, nope.

JP: Hmm, interesting.

LA: I was not. No, one order at a time seemed overwhelming enough—

JP: Yeah [LA and JP laugh] you needed to dedicate yourself to that.

LA: Yep.

JP: So what size is your current staff here now?

LA: We are 27 people.

JP: 27, and what are the various roles that staff play throughout the studio?

LA: It's divided into departments. There's the sales department. There's the finance department, and then the process is divided into pre-production, production, and post-production. So post-production includes shipping and gathering all final details. Production includes building, and pre-production includes all the parts, processing, quality checking, and prepping for the builders, so they pull the parts needed for each job, put them in a bin. And per month, we probably build seventy chandeliers per month.

JP: Okay, wow.

LA: Yeah.

JP: And can you describe how your workspace—does your workspace sort of follow a similar division or—

LA: Yeah, it does. I mean, it was great to get this beautiful loft space. We moved to this top floor in June and just designed it so that all the people are along the windows, you know, there's windows on the four sides, and then we put the shelves of inventory in the center, and the flow kind of makes a logical sense actually in terms of how far people need to move each day. You know, it's a nice flow, and then we have our space that's the common area that we use for all sorts of things, lunch and slideshows and things.

JP: Nice.

LA: Yeah.

JP: Would you say that handcraft has any importance in the making of your work?

LA: Uh-huh.

JP: And how do you engage with both technology and handcraft? Do you envision sort of a balance of the two or is one more—

LA: Yeah, I do, yeah. There's a balance. I don't really even necessarily think about it very much, but the way it works is that since each person building the work really has to use their

eye and a lot of judgment to build each because the angles are very slight in terms of the relationship of the joints to each other, there's no indicators that are pre-marked, so they eyeball a lot of the work based on CAD drawings while they're building it. So yeah, having human beings [laughs] that are trained and thoughtful is kind of essential here, and then each piece of glass, since they're not mold-blown, it varies by a few ounces. So, when you put on the glass globes, the fixture can tilt one way or another, so the department that's post-production—actually both departments balance the chandeliers a fair amount, production and post-production. Again, they really have to make judgment calls depending on their aesthetic judgment, if that makes sense.

JP: Yeah, it does make sense.

LA: Yeah, there's nothing automatic about the process. And then, technology allows us to be very efficient and precise on all levels with the work we do. The LEDs out right now are amazing. They're warm light, they're small, it's finally getting to a place that's super exciting, so that technology is changing the entire face of lighting design in the best way I think. And then we have a 3D printer here, we 3D print a ton of stuff, even if it's just for prototyping parts before we get them cast or we can 3D print in outside places in brass and in glass actually, so that's been awesome. You save so much money on tooling and mold making, and it's changed extremely quickly in five years. Even all these sketches on the wall, this is all for 3D printed ceiling medallions, and then we get them electroplated in copper, and then we plate on top of the copper, so we can match the finishes of the chandeliers, so that each one is a unique print, and we would not be able to do that kind of work if it weren't for where our technology is right now, so it's exciting to think of where it's going, actually.

JP: Yeah. Would you say that making fixtures to sell and to make a living, has that influenced the way you've designed, or—

LA: Yeah. So the whole experience from building to shipping to installing to living with is definitely part of the design requirement, I would say. Is that kind of what you're asking?

JP: Yeah. Is there any design that you felt like you couldn't realize because it might not be successful on the market, or do you just kind of—

LA: Oh, that's interesting. No, I mean the market tells you what's not successful, so there's many pieces I've made one, but that's its life. [LA and JP laugh] It's one. Yeah, it's nothing you can control.

JP: Yeah.

LA: But I think that's actually cool that the world tells you if it's desirable or not. It's an amazing thing.

JP: So, switching a little bit, I wondered if you could tell me a bit about the You Make It light fixture kits and sort of how you came up with that idea and what realizing it was like.

LA: Yeah, I came up with it when, a few years ago I kept toying with this idea of how I had a desire to put a light out there that was more affordable, and I really kept going around in circles of how one does that. I didn't want to manufacture things outside of the United States. I couldn't find a way where people could get paid enough and to buy high-quality parts and make something that was long lasting that I could sell for \$150 or \$200.

JP: Yeah.

LA: I really couldn't figure it out, and so then I just went back to this idea of how about I just put the plans out for free. People can buy the parts that I used to use to make chandeliers that are available from these websites Grand Brass and stuff, with lots of disclaimers.
[laughs]

JP: [laughs] I know, I've read the instructions.

LA: [laughs] Yeah, don't get your wires wrong. But it felt like the idea of just making it free felt so much better than the idea of like trying to make it really cheap. It was like, okay, people have the opportunity to use their own elbow grease and sweat rather than their credit cards for something that you could kind of imagine going into a dumpster, because you wouldn't be able to make it. That's why I develop these parts that I have, because it will hold the glass up in a way that's totally solid. That was a lot of the reason, and now it's been amazing. I mean, somebody said they just looked at the Google Analytics, and that 75% of our traffic is from people looking for the DIY fixture.

JP: It's insane. I've seen them on every apartment blog; every interior design blog has a Lindsey Adelman chandelier. [laughs]

LA: Yeah, I know, and I didn't really know. I didn't think about that aspect at all. I really, it was—it just seemed like, oh this is a way to put the idea out there, and I've already done the work. That's really kind of what it felt like more than anything else. It's been cool, though. It's been really—I feel like I've gotten connected to people that I love being connected to that I wouldn't have met otherwise. And also this huge DIY community is so inspiring.

JP: Yeah.

LA: And there's such a joy, kind of what I was talking about before, of just like buzz or high you get just from making stuff, just from trying to do things. And again, it's not—there's no agenda. It's just satisfying to put something in your home that you built yourself.

JP: Yeah.

LA: You don't really need to overthink it. It feels good, so I think that's been an amazing aspect of it.

JP: Yeah. Does it ever feel strange, if you make the DIY directions, to see people who modify it or change it?

LA: I love that.

JP: Really?

LA: That's why I put it out, and very few people actually do variations of it, but that's my—that's how I feel about it. Now you understand how to wire, and you understand these connections, go crazy. Yeah, that's the ultimate.

JP: You're sort of creating a generation of future industrial designers.

LA: Yeah. Totally, totally.

JP: That's really interesting. Do you partner with Grand Brass, or do you just kind of—I've looked at how it leads you to their website with the list of parts to buy—

LA: Yeah, we work together. You know, we held their hand to get it all together, and they're super game to make it a kit on their end too, so it's frankly a lot less work if you do it all at once, so that really was the extent of the partnership. Somebody on my staff had the

patience to make that whole thing happen with the kit, so yeah, it's been good for both of us I think.

JP: Yeah, I think so too. Can you talk a bit about the goals you have for yourself and for your studio moving forward?

LA: The goals are kind of two-fold, I'd say. One is that we're putting a limit on production runs now, so we've identified the strongest standard models of chandeliers, and then we're building them in limited runs and storing them so essentially people go online, and they can, this is launching January 1st, they can see what's available, they can see if it's sold out, when it will be available again. And the drive behind that decision was that I love the size of the studio, and I didn't want to keep expanding in a response to demand, and I also lived through 2008, and the market in America [laughs] isn't always like it is right now, so I kind of want to just really capture this beautiful sweet spot that we have right now, where you know, studio life, it's good. It's a high quality of life. Everything is working. I hung in there to get to this point, and I want to put a limit on the number of things I make every year. I like the idea that everyone who owns a chandelier, it retains its value, because there are never too many being made in the world, so that's one side of the business. And then the other side of the business is then pushing experimental work, probably a lot of work that will end up being the only one in the world, like I was saying before [LA and JP laugh], but I really, really [emphatic] like making pieces that aren't necessarily the crowd pleasers. They just—they more reflect a side of me that I feel like putting into three-dimensional form. So I like making work that is spiky or oozy or a little wrong or it looks like it's turned inside out or just—you're combining something that looks like handcuffs with something that looks like fat or I don't know. I think I am fascinated by a lot of things that aren't necessarily pretty, and so I want to have the freedom to push that.

JP: Yeah.

LA: And I also love trying out ideas. I mean, this is a lot of what we're doing at the studio. I want to slip cast ceramics in leather molds, for example. So I'll probably have a chance to do that, because we're putting a limit on filling orders. And we do a lot of other projects. We just shot a music video, for example.

JP: Oh, cool.

LA: Yeah.

JP: What was it for?

LA: We made the music. [LA and JP laugh] So we did everything, and fourteen of us were backup dancers. I mean, it was a huge two-day production like film crew with fourteen people. We have parties a lot, we do a lot of stuff that's not about profit or selling work. It's just about just what we're into. So that's more I think of what I want to spend time on. And also the way that family life relates to studio life. My husband is a designer, our little boy is 10, and he is a super creative little guy, and so it's kind of combining creative life with other elements of my life that are not in the public eye. I think if I don't make space and time for that, I mean, nobody else is going to do that for me. That's kind of where I'm at right now. [laughs]

JP: Yeah, that seems really important, and I think a lot of that ties in with your work with the Robin Hood Foundation. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

LA: Yeah, that's been awesome. So they do an amazing job supporting and evaluating different organizations around New York City that support and try to resolve New York City families living in poverty. So they're really trying to get people out of poverty. My studio is a huge supporter of that, and that's a total dream. I never thought that I would be in a place where I could actually have extra to give back to New York City, so that's been really personally extremely rewarding and also alleviates grief on how much we charge for chandeliers. [LA and JP laugh] My work can really only—there's a very small percent of the world's population that can buy a standard chandelier that's \$110,000, that's preposterous. [LA and JP laugh] So it feels really amazing to have this fund that supports people literally living two blocks from here, like the Bowery mission, that area is—I love that about New York City actually—that you see everything, everything. And there's no reason to pretend it's not there, and so the fact that people who Robin Hood supports have dedicated their whole lives to these social causes—I'm so grateful that people are that committed. It's amazing, yeah.

JP: Yeah, and it's amazing that you're able to participate.

LA: Yeah.

JP: I mean, I think it's along with a lot of the You Make It and everything, that you're sort of—your audience isn't just one fixed customer, it seems, that you're just kind of appealing to people who have an interest in design and—

LA: Yeah, yeah, it's true. And I'm inspired by people that do work like that. There are so many examples of people who really connect to community and are inclusive and have business plans that are enlightened, you know, there's a lot of people that I can look up to, so it's good.

JP: Yeah. This is again shifting a little bit, but I saw the stunning chandelier at the MAD [Museum of Arts and Design] Biennial—

LA: Oh, great.

JP: And I wanted to ask you what it was like to be invited to participate in the first ever one by Glenn Adamson—

LA: Oh yeah, yeah. Glenn's awesome. That show was all over the place. [LA and JP laugh] I could not figure out what the theme was, but I was really psyched to be in the lobby surrounded by the arrows, the Fredericks & Mae arrows swirling around. The light I did was part of the Totem series, which feels, that specific one felt like a fertility goddess. It has almost these illuminated caviar eggs at the bottom and then spikes kind of protecting the eggs, I felt like. That museum is amazing. There are so many great things in there. There's been so many shows, the one about lace, the one about slash, the paper cutting, the residencies with makers that they have, that you can go in and watch people make their work. I just feel like they're doing a lot that's about craft and that is different from the other museums that are really focused either on design or art. So, yeah, that was a total honor.

JP: Yeah, it's different from seeing your work in a gallery space. I know your work has been in a number of galleries.

LA: Yeah. It's totally different, the people who go to museums, it sort of reaches a huge audience, so that's really good.

JP: And thinking about industrial design or craft and design as a whole, what do you wish for the future of designers or studios like your own?

LA: Um, what do you mean? [LA and JP laugh]

JP: I mean, I guess, what's an ideal model that you think people should be working towards? I know most of your studio has focused on small batch production and everything is made very locally. Do you think that that's a value that everyone should take up, or—

LA: No. No, I think that people should just trust their own gut. I have no idea what other people should do or not do. [laughs]

JP: That's totally fine. [laughs]

LA: I actually think that that's nice to let people give themselves permission to do what feels good to them, frankly.

JP: Yeah.

LA: Yeah, and I think my closest friends do that, and I love the variety of how different designers go about making a living in New York City. It's incredible. We went to the most incredible archery weenie roast by BDDW about two weeks ago upstate. I mean, there must have been 500 guests, and everybody's dressed up and shooting arrows, and it's all design firms, architecture firms, interior designers, editors, everyone. And it's Jeep rides and shooting arrows through the woods, and that's how BDDW does it, you know, and that's so inspiring to be invited into somebody else's world and have them take it to the nth degree. I mention it because that's why I would never impose my ideas onto anybody else's company. Does that make sense?

JP: Yeah.

LA: I want to be a guest in their world and their art. That's what makes my favorite things, when people take their idea all the way. It's amazing.

JP: Yeah. And it seems like even if aesthetics are really different or process is really different, there's still this sense of community, and—

LA: Yeah, or just excitement. Or just passion. Or just what you're into. Or even if you're into being bad, that you're into something.

JP: [laughs]

LA: I think that that is what— aesthetics do not matter that much. I have people that I love who I would not want to live with the things that they make, but I love being in their world, and I love their ideas behind the work. And I love their passion for the work, and they don't care if it's not my aesthetic. It doesn't—they just know what feels good to them, and that's what I respect the most in other designers. That's what I find contagious. That's what I find inspiring. It takes me off the hook when I make things that isn't their aesthetic.

JP: Yeah.

LA: It's a very special place. I think it might come with age. No, not necessarily—I'm thinking of a person who's 20, who is in their twenties [LA and JP laugh], who does really kickass work. It happened to me with age. [LA and JP laugh] Some people get it really young, yeah.

JP: Well, is there any work that you would say you're most satisfied with or most proud of, or do you think that any piece, whether it's—you know, whether there's one produced or you're constantly producing it—

LA: Oh, that's an interesting question. Some work that I just started that I'm really happy with where it's going is I have a show out in East Hampton right now. It went up in the summer, and we're taking it down I imagine kind of soon, but um, at Turpan, which is a little store up there with beautiful things. And there are two pieces that are really minimal. They sort of have one strand of rope and tubular light, and one porcelain shade and a mobile. I would say that that aesthetic direction has very much captured my attention and energy right now, and I do not see it as being the same audience of people that are spec'ing the Bubble Chandeliers, necessarily. I don't know who the audience is. But I love how the work feels. It's very quiet. And almost describes what isn't there if you know what I mean. Empty space is a huge luxury I think, especially in New York City, so this work in a way describes the blank white space between things, and that [emphatic] I'm really into.

JP: That's a really interesting idea. Do you want to produce more things that are in that more simplified—

LA: I think so. I want to at least build the prototypes. That's where my head is right now.

JP: That's really interesting.

LA: Yeah.

JP: Well, that's about—those are my main questions.

LA: Okay, thank you.

JP: Is there anything else that you wanted to add that I didn't touch on?

LA: No, I liked your questions. Thanks for doing your research. No, I feel like—I think it's just a really cool project that you're doing. It allows people to be really casual and forthright and frank and candid about their process, so no, just thanks for including me.

JP: Yeah, I'm so happy that you were able to participate. Thank you so much.

LA: Yeah, thank you. My pleasure.

[end of interview]