



Oren Sherman, PHOTO Rick Miller

A Creative Design for Life

BOSTON DESIGN WEEK'S LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD-WINNER OREN SHERMAN

What's the most exciting thing in design right now? What's current, what's trending, what's "in"? Designers are asked these questions constantly because we, the people, like to feel savvy and ahead of the game.

In interior design, there's plenty of dos and don'ts, but the key principle beneath it all is that personal style is always "in." Be creative, have fun, make it yours. So, in terms of what's the most exciting thing in design right now, maybe it's actually not a question of what, but who? Who is inspiring personal creativity? Who is championing the path less taken?

That would be Oren Sherman.

Sherman is an accomplished artist, designer, color expert and visual storyteller who has worked at Elkus Manfredi Architects in Boston for eight years as an interior design

specialist. He considers it his first real office job—one he started in his 50s—because he began his career as a freelance illustrator and designer, creating artwork for brands and partnering with big-time corporations like Disney, Hermes, the Olympics, PepsiCo, the US Postal Service and Visa. His work has been published almost a billion times.

Amid this hustle, in his early 30s, Sherman felt he lost sight of why he became an artist and turned to painting and then pattern design, with success in both. This led to consulting with Elkus on projects—designing patterns and choosing colors for carpeting, wallcoverings and painted surfaces—and eventually joining the company full-time with Principal of Interiors Elizabeth Lowrey. This work truly resonates with Sherman's creative spirit. "What

artists really desire," he says, "is a deeper connection to people. As an artist, you live to create and hope someone may look at your art. Working in architecture creates an opportunity for the public to walk through and experience a designed space. I believe a work of art is only complete when a viewer engages with it and this is deeply satisfying for me."

Last year was a particularly rewarding one for Sherman. He was honored with the Boston Design Week's 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in May. He gave a TEDx talk in Provincetown on creativity and the imagination in July (Sherman's husband of almost 30 years, psychotherapist Rick Miller, also spoke at the event). The interiors team at Elkus, which consistently receives recognition for its projects across the country (among many in Boston are the Verb hotel in Fenway and Ink Block in the South End) won a Design Award from the New England chapter of the

International Interior Design Association (IIDA) for its work on Harvard University's Soldiers Field Park residential complex (also Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certified) in September.

What drives Sherman is his belief that creativity involves both a strong imagination and a strong community.

He explained this idea in his TEDx talk (titled "Finding Creativity: A Solo Journey to a Connected Place"), cleverly comparing what it's like to be creative to Dorothy visiting Oz in "The Wizard of Oz."

"Living a creative life," he says, "is the more difficult choice. You get there through your imagination and that is a real place. A familiar, more vivid place, where you will trade the logical for the fantastical. And it is in that place, like Dorothy, you will meet people who may not look like you, but become your real community."

Sherman also co-leads the LGBTQIA Employee Resource Group (ERG) at Elkus with his colleague William Phillips. "Gay people are people of difference," he says. "They are an important part of a team and have a place at the table. A great team is made up of people from different generations, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences."

Another community very important to Sherman is without a doubt the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where Sherman is an alumnus and has been a professor for more than 20 years. About what it takes to be a good teacher, he says, "it must be a completely unselfish endeavor. My whole job is seeing what is unique and wonderful about a person and getting them to see and focus on that aspect of themselves." Sherman knows this work is so important to inspire the next generation to have the confidence to feel free to imagine what is possible for them.

So yes, "who" is the most exciting in design right now? Sherman is the real deal. [x]