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ROCK SHOW

INSPIRATION IS NEVER IN SHORT SUPPLY FOR A SAN DIEGO CREATIVE WHOSE LIFELONG LOVE OF STONE AND SHAPE HAS TRANSLATED INTO AN ENDURING DESIGN ENTERPRISE.

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From intricately detailed decorative accessories, such as the Granada Sphere (opposite) and elegantly minimalist planters (left), to geometric furnishings, including the Ravi Base (bottom), Stone Yard's Mitch Brean draws inspiration from a myriad of sources. Stacks of finish samples for clients rest on a table (below).



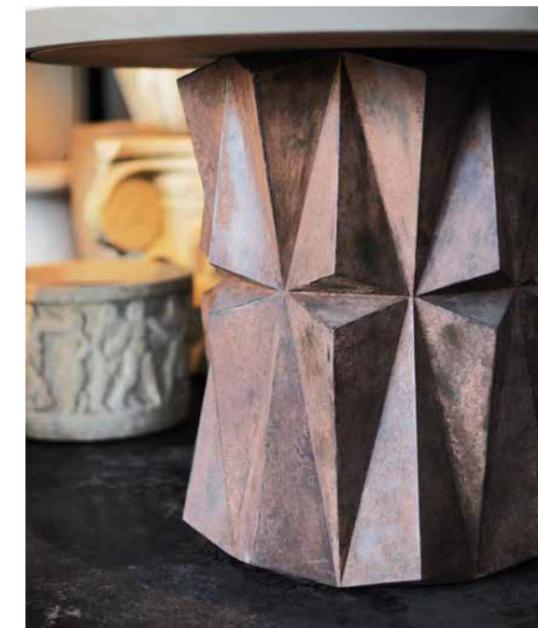
It's only appropriate that the creative catalyst behind Stone Yard, a cast-stone manufacturer in San Diego, should choose a concrete palace to decompress. For Mitch Brean—the company's director of design and product development—one of his favorite spots is La Jolla's Salk Institute for Biological Sciences, the Louis Kahn treasure where he goes to dream about design. He likes to find a place on the lawn and take in the smooth, angular concrete that gives way to soft weathered-wood inserts. This view and the close proximity to the Pacific are what he calls "absolute perfection."

Brean, who started Stone Yard more than 30 years ago, has been drawn to stone and textures since his younger days—he had a rock collection as a child and still has a selection of fossils composed mostly of ammonites. When it first launched, the company focused on old-

world designs, creating planters fit for a spot at Versailles and table bases that referenced beloved European motifs. Today, though, the aesthetic has broadened and his offerings have expanded to encompass avant-garde, laminated-resin pieces, along with traditional styles—yielding an eclectic mix of traditional-meets-modern inventory.

"For the contemporary pieces, I start with a more primitive or classical design and streamline it to my liking," says Brean. "It greatly helps to have a traditional design background, with all its principles of good proportion, as a foundation. Once you have that element down, you can go beyond the constraints and really expand upon your own creativity." The process, he notes, is akin to an abstract artist who starts out painting realistically.

Some of Brean's newer work, in fact, reflects decidedly Surrealist and Cubist motifs. For example, he's currently making a side table with a tree stump





Brean (shown below with a mold for one of his designs) eschews trends for timeless forms, be they traditional or contemporary. A sampling of his varied vision (left) includes a whimsical collection of mushrooms, along with clean-lined table bases and edgy seating.



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A trio of Dodeca planters (above) take their cues from Cubist art. Shelves in Stone Yard's San Diego facility (right) are filled with molds for the company's cast-stone planter designs. The tools (bottom) were developed to add distressing and antiquing to models.



leg that transitions into a flat top, taking a page from Dali's playbook and exploring free-form design. Then there's the Zaragoza collection, which riffs on Picasso's use of shapes. One look at the multifaceted Pucati side table and Ravi base makes it clear that, for Brean, a triangle is never just a triangle: "I've always liked angled things," he says. "I play with various forms, and even take two shapes and add them together to see what can happen."

As a "very visual" person with a penchant for travel—Brean has visited more than 50 countries—ideas are never in short supply. Most recently, he fell in love with a checkerboard pattern found in the main parlor of the Small Temple at Abu Simbel. He plans to introduce the pattern into a mirror design and build the collection from there. "I will most likely angle the edges to give it a more three-dimensional appearance," he shares. "Texture grabs on to color and reflects light in different ways."

Whether he's working on something more contemporary or traditional, Brean is compelled by a desire to build something entirely new and get his "hands dirty," as he puts it. He'll often come up with ideas during his early morning trips to the gym, draw them up, and then work with his tooling department crew to execute the design. "It is so rare that I just duplicate a piece," he adds. "By evolving, I challenge myself both personally and professionally, and that's what pushes my creativity." **L**



Gothic architecture of the 16th century was the catalyst for the Savoy base. Used singly, it makes a striking foundation for a console, but paired, it can become the base for an impressive dining table.