

INTERIORS[®]

A modern outdoor patio with a wooden slatted ceiling. A black fireplace is the central feature, with a woven basket hanging above it. The patio is furnished with wooden chairs and a table. In the foreground, a table with drinks is visible. The scene is bathed in warm sunlight, creating strong shadows.

100TH ISSUE

ART IN DESIGN



HAMMERTON NATURAL LIGHT

TEXT: ERIKA HEET

Levi Wilson grew up around the rhythmic clang and din of metal, in his father's ornamental iron shop in Salt Lake City, Utah. His mother, a seamstress, further taught him the art of handcrafting. This interplay of hard and soft "provided contrasting elements in design—form and function," or, as he says metaphorically, "overalls and high heels." Wilson went on to study architecture in Europe, focusing on ornamental iron, and embarked upon "vagabond travels through the west coast." He founded Hammerton in a Salt Lake City garage in 1995, its compound name aptly describing what he intended to produce and convey. "Hammers are used in every trade, from watchmakers to blacksmiths, and 'ton' is a village or town," he says. "Hammerton was a great name for a group of artisans applying their craft."



That garage has grown into a 50,000-square-foot facility, where artistically inclined craftspeople make sparks fly as they grind and finish metal pieces, where Wilson can conjure a new prototype in a matter of hours, and where sales, design and high-end clients touring the shop coexist with gritty fabrication stations nearby. Machine shops, heat sinks, powder coating bays, assembly, pottery kilns and the glass "hot shop" are all under one roof, allowing Wilson and CEO Bill Shott, who became Hammerton's president in 2005, to have complete control over quality, speed, flow, shipping and, of course, artistry. Shott, who describes himself as "a bit of an ideologue," found Hammerton after spending 25 years in Silicon Valley running software startups. "I grew up with an appreciation for high-end home furnishings," says Shott, whose wife, Nancy, is also part of the Hammerton team. "My mother was an interior designer," he says. "My favorite class was woodshop, and lighting was a natural extension from that."

Wilson's designs are rooted in the interplay of materials, with metal and glass dominating much of the work. A recently debuted piece, the 500-pound, 7-foot-plus Element chandelier—its many protruding crystal arms extending like an oversize sea urchin—reflects his love of nature. "Nature is the foundation of all great design," Wilson says. "Quartz crystal and the science behind how it grows led me to chirality, or the idea of asymmetry and how it relates to nature's design. So I guess science could be considered the inspiration." Its scale (opposite) doesn't faze him in the least. "The Element is small compared to a lot of the custom fixtures we create," he says. And, he adds, "I did not design the Element for most people. Most of the time I have to design for others. This was done for me."





BILL SHOTT | LEVI WILSON





Hammerton serves a robust clientele in residential, hospitality and commercial markets, and is represented in 200 retail showrooms, plus a handful of select to-the-trade showrooms. They process 100 to 150 custom quotes per week, which translate into thousands of custom designs annually, from high-volume runs of corridor sconces to one-off signature large-scale installations weighing several thousands of pounds. California and Florida demand the most attention, although the principals note that they do very well in major metro markets, and in their stomping grounds of the intermountain west. "It's hard to overstate the importance of having the customer at the center of your operations," Shott says. "We talk to hundreds of customers on a daily basis, which informs our understanding of the market and trends in design, materials and beyond." Continuing this spirit of strong connectivity, the team has been able to pivot to handle the challenges of the past months—with many of their employees working from home—and report that despite some dips, the high-end residential market remains strong.

"Some of the best designers I've worked with start with materials first," says Wilson, who still freehand sketches his concepts and consistently plays with mixtures of materials in the shop to stay intrigued. "I have a tremendous amount of respect for designers," he says. "Nobody understands what they go through, but we marvel at it. All the nights designers have stayed up selecting, finessing...it matters. It's the same thing with lighting. If it's done well, everyone appreciates it but they don't know why." It's this deep understanding of the design process and grueling behind the scenes work, done at odd hours when the muse visits, that sets Hammerton apart. "I design without boundaries, without supervision," Wilson says. "And you know it when you see it. That's exciting." ■ *Hammerton, hammerton.com*

