

Keep It Simple

More than half a decade on from their chocolate brand's humble beginnings, the Mast Brothers haven't let success affect their ethos.

Words **Shonquis Moreno**
Photos **Alex Fradkin**

Mast Brothers

Brooklyn



At their factory-cum-shop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, brothers Rick (left) and Michael Mast craft artisanal chocolate by hand.



Hear the Mast Brothers express the passion behind their product with Layar



The simple aesthetic of the Mast Brothers chocolate factory fits the no-fuss product.



Chocolate bars are wrapped in illustrated packaging, which is produced in-house. Photo courtesy of Mast Brothers

Lowbrow foods are now highbrow staples in New York City. Chefs are fancifying comfort and street foods: the messy southern BBQ, the grilled cheese sandwich, the hot dog, and even the offerings of the working-class lunch truck. Meanwhile, in Brooklyn, highbrow foods have become more widely available; there's even a weekly flea market of gourmet foods.

Chief among these delicacies is bean-to-bar chocolate, which red-bearded brothers Rick and Michael Mast – a classically trained musician and a former financier, respectively – started making in their shared Brooklyn apartment in 2006. For the pair, making chocolate by hand has ‘an Emersonian spirit’ – a freedom derived from an appreciation of what you have and pride in what you make of it.

Since 2007 – from a one-storey manufactory in Williamsburg, where a sour toasty odour, not yet sweet, lingers in the air – the Iowa-born siblings have been making a symbol of Brooklyn's craft and community ethos. Their chocolate's scant ingredients are extracted and blended in rooms that also comprise only a few straightforward ingredients: white tiles, concrete floors,

excavated brick, thick timber beams and burlap sacks that hold cacao beans the brothers bring from the Dominican Republic on a sailing vessel.

You don't get artisanal chocolate-making equipment off the shelf; the Masts modify what exists and collaborate with like-minded contacts in the community. They lined steel grinders once used to break up brewing barley with stone to crush the nibs, asked an aerospace engineer who runs a distillery (and a new bean-to-bar factory) in Red Hook to design their winnower, and bartered chocolate for convection ovens with Andrew Tarlow's nearby Marlow & Sons.

‘In the beginning we wrapped everything in kraft paper, because we wanted people to think of chocolate as food,’ says art director Nathan Warkentin, who has seen a number of competitors spring up in only the past few years. Today, the illustrated packaging is produced in-house on a printing press the Masts restored themselves; patterns range from old blueprints to Florentine marbling. Chocolate bars are still individually wrapped – you guessed it – by hand. _

mastbrothers.com



'It would be hard to separate Brooklyn from our unconscious stream of influence – it's home,' says Gregory Horgan (right, alongside Cayce Becket). 'There's a creative culture here, but also unpolished history and immense diversity.'

Either *and* Or

Engineers, architects, product designers – Horgan Becket may wear many hats, but its process-driven, eclectic and local sensibilities are constant.

Words **Shonquis Moreno**
Portrait **Alex Fradkin**



Horgan Becket's observation of the vibrant tones found within waning local industrial landscapes led to the Mesh Collection, a project that translates such qualities into utilitarian furnishings.

Architects Horgan Becket reside and work in a former Brooklyn brewery warehouse filled with living-cum-studio spaces for creatives: exposed bricks and iron columns updated with polished fly ash, radiant heating-riddled concrete floors, and a green roof complete with a solar array and bee farm. It's not far from Pratt Institute, where the two met in a 1995 welding class, nine years before founding the studio. Cayce Becket, who did corporate interiors at Gensler, is the scion of an architectural family (Welton D. Becket, 1902-1969), and her favorite plaything as a child was a drafting table. Gregory Horgan was raised by a rural builder with a work ethic and 'a making ethic' that was taken for granted.

Their work – from renovating the Paul Rudolph Townhouse in midtown Manhattan to making retro-industrial, artisanal or manufacture-based furniture, like their Mesh

and Industriel collections – tends to be process-driven and eclectic: 'Mostly, we're after what's missing,' says Horgan. 'Our work is probably not either-or, but rather either-*and-or* – it's not so much what we do, but the way we do it.'

Most of the materials they use – pleasing to the touch and graceful when ageing, like wood and metal – are local, representing what Horgan refers to as 'a warmer, more tactile modern' and 'something that is of, and for, its locale'. He points out 'a huge trend in that direction. It's welcome, and there's good work out there, but there are people churning out wood and metal just because they're wood and metal. I think they're missing the point. There's material aesthetic, and there's good design. And one does not necessarily guarantee the other.' _

horganbecket.com

Pure Places

**Four types
of space –
each close to
the heart of
Brooklyn –
exemplify a
community-
wide search for
authenticity.**

Words Shonquis Moreno

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With a rooftop bar offering views over Brooklyn, Wythe Hotel features time-tested materials associated with local history: excavated and unfinished walls, pressed tin, and exposed brick.

Brooklyn design is about the values of the people who make it and use it. In New York City's biggest borough, those values include concern instead of aloofness, creation not consumption, and handcraft rather than stagecraft. It's a visual culture that draws on many sources and tribes, yet its plurality is found in a collective ethos.

Brooklynites discovered an affinity for a sensibility that's all about doing it yourself, cultivating authenticity and recalibrating legacy skills and objects for the here and now. It's not just about creating good value, but also about living by good values, a process that leads to the realization of an ideal: the growth of a community of increasingly in(ter)dependent business owners, craftspeople, artists and entrepreneurs who inspire and support one another.

From rooftop gardens to cellar speakeasies, different types of spaces offer Brooklynites opportunities to continue their search for the purest 'ingredients' with which



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It's not just about *creating* good value, but also about *living* by good values

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to design their lives. Here, four that are close to Brooklyn's heart – not stage sets or theme parks, but ways of life.

Eat and Stay

Instead of styles recycled rapidly one by one, rich mashups of time and place – collages of visual cultures – generate space that is both familiar and transporting. Located in an old Greenpoint lighting factory, Glasserie ① is owned by Sara Conklin. The mix of brass light fixtures, wooden benches, tile floors, a wall of cacti and Lee Broom's cut-crystal light bulbs doesn't reveal the secret of where or when.

Reynard ② and the Wythe Hotel ③ feature time-tested materials associated with local history: brass, pressed tin, salvaged wood and marble, globe lighting, excavated and unfinished walls, and exposed brick. Andrew Tarlow – co-owner and designer of the two venues and pioneer of seasonal, local, farm-to-table, nose-to-tail eating and craft butchery – never studied design. In 1998 it was he who opened Diner under the Williamsburg Bridge. It felt not designed but left in disrepair – true to itself. 'We unearthed the history of that building,' he says, 'and put it all back ...

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Quality is apparent in carpenter-ly yet refined interiors – a kind of highbrow humble

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Visit Bridget Firtle and her one-woman-run distillery, The Noble Experiment, with Layar

distilleries. So if you're not keen to cook it up yourself using Brooklyn Brew Shop's DIY home-brewing kit, you'll be pleased to know that the borough boasts a number of young zymurgical manufactories.

Former aerospace engineer Daniel Preston runs Cacao Prieto 4 in Red Hook, using the organic cacao his family has farmed in the Dominican Republic for a century to make both liquor and chocolate. Kings County Distillery uses New York grain to hand-make moonshine in a 113-year-old building in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and last year Red Hook's Van Brunt Stillhouse began using locally farmed ingredients to produce seasonal batches.

Ingredients and purity are key for Bridget Firtle, descendant of generations of Brooklynites. She abandoned a lucrative berth at a hedge fund to open a one-woman-run distillery and tasting room named after American Prohibition, The Noble Experiment. 5 Good thing that first one failed.

Snip and Clip

There are plenty of beards in Brooklyn; barbershops like Persons of Interest and Barber & Supply are doing business at a clip. A winter pop-up of Rudy's Barbershop by WRK Design will become permanent this winter. To lure in the community, as much as to fit into the community, the owners excavated the real face of an old Williamsburg bank building and combined cutting floor with coffee shop, lounge and retail space.

Not far away, Russell Manley's Tommy Guns 6 represents an ideal of the barbering tradition – quality – signalled by tiled floors, spherical towel steamers and legacy objects sourced from salvage companies. 'This look has come to symbolize the Brooklyn interior,' says Manley. 'The architecture of the area

... together again.' At a time when South Williamsburg was desolate, Diner served as a gathering point. In making his latest, Tarlow looked to 'grand meeting spaces' – hotels, pavilions, train stations – in turn-of-the-century New York and Paris to produce a hub for community and outsiders alike.

John McCormick didn't go to design school either, but in Williamsburg alone he's made St. Charles Cellar, St. Mazie bar, Moto and the absinthe-inflected raw bar Maison Premiere. He favours reclaimed materials to tell tales: green wainscoting found in the nuns' bedrooms at a 19th-century Catholic girls' school, iron parts in the belt-driven ceiling fans cast by an Amish foundry and even grapevine cuttings smuggled in a woman's brassiere from Sicily. McCormick and his two partners – who learned to build on the job – have rescued memories as much as things. McCormick says he has an aversion to white tablecloths and feels at home in places that resonate with spirit and histories: 'Often I find myself creating stories as I'm working.'

Drink and Brew

Alone among NYC's five boroughs, Brooklyn has experienced an increase in manufacturing since 2010. In the last year, the area has seen 18 new farms, a vineyard and at least two



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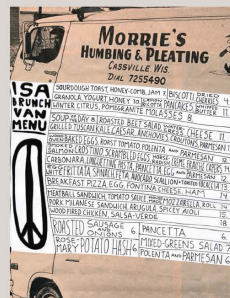
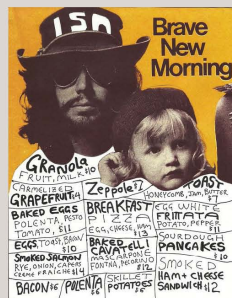


Photos Angela Silva

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‘The Brooklyn aesthetic is driven by an interest in where things come from’

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lends itself to the look, because many brick buildings predate steel-frame warehouses and have huge timber supports, pressed-tin ceilings, cast-iron radiators or steam pipes still in use. The quality and materials in these vintage pieces are astonishing.’

Browse and Shop

Brooklyn’s emphasis on quality is also apparent in its carpenter-ly yet highly refined interiors – a kind of highbrow humble. For two years now, the refined-rustic wooden surfaces of restaurant Isa 7 have illustrated this well. Along with the eatery’s humorous, hand-drawn, handwritten and collaged menus, 8 the décor fulfils the promise of the well-crafted food.

But it is finely curated design shops like Mociun and Joinery 9 that exemplify this aspect of the aesthetic. At Mociun, displays extend to all surfaces, including windowsills and a polished-concrete floor. Caitlin Mociun built nothing into the walls so that customers can enter a different landscape on any given day.

Joinery makes the most of its clay-plaster walls and Edison bulbs, not to mention every inch of floor space. Owner Angela Silva’s wee budget forced her to design and source everything herself – often from the local hardware store – including a blowtorch to singe the pine ceiling. Silva also tapped into the surrounding business community: the owners of furniture shop Nightwood refurbished the fixtures, and garment racks are the result of collaboration with Serbian artist Ana Kraš. The story of each object is as important as the object itself: Silva made tags to let people know what they’re paying for, and she can’t meet the demand for her Brazilian textiles, which she describes as a ‘dyeing craft’ that she wants to help resuscitate. ‘The Brooklyn aesthetic is driven by an interest in where things come from,’ she says. ‘We’re drawn to craftsmanship, quality and sustainability because we want to feel good about what we buy. We’re choosing fewer objects but with greater value in mind. If handmade textiles and reclaimed wood have come to define Brooklyn, that’s a good thing.’