

Forbes

Meet Roxy Te Owens: The Founder Of Society Social And Pioneer Of The New Traditional Design Movement



New traditional is the new modern. SOCIETY SOCIAL

Instagram and Pinterest's influence over interior design has pushed styles to evolve faster than any other time in history. The past decade has seen a range of styles come into prominence starting with ultra-modern and then mid century modern design. Enter Chip and Joanna Gaines with their modern farmhouse look and shiplap everywhere, which ultimately ushered in more contemporary looks.

But the next big thing in interior design is undoubtedly "new traditional," which is sometimes called "grand millennial." And there's no more important furniture designer and entrepreneur pioneering this movement than Roxy Te Owens, who is the founder of [Society Social](#). If you haven't heard of this brand yet or explored their Instagram account, it's time to get on board.

A Female Founded Brand

Society Social was founded in 2011, when Owens was living in Charlotte, North Carolina working as a buyer for Belk department stores. She was decorating her first apartment and couldn't find exactly what she wanted. "There really wasn't a place for the girl who wanted a pink sofa or something just a little bit different and custom. At the same time, I didn't have a lot of money to spend on designing our first apartment or to hire a decorator for that matter," she tells me. "Society Social was my mission to offer fun, custom furniture at somewhat accessible price points."



Society Social chairs SOCIETY SOCIAL

It's not a surprise that Owens started a furniture line because she was born into the industry. But that doesn't mean she has had a free ride. Owens' family immigrated to North Carolina from the Philippines before she was born. They had very little and built a business making private label furniture for other brands, even living in the factory with their daughter for the first two or three years of her life. Many of the artisans who make Society Social's furniture in both North Carolina and the Philippines are people she has known since she was a child.

But Owens is a true entrepreneur. Other than the knowledge she learned from her family and the fact that she uses their factories, nothing was handed to her. She started Society Social with her own savings and hasn't taken on a single investor.

Her family was skeptical at first, which is understandable. They weren't a consumer-facing brand and weren't sure if people would buy furniture online. "[They told me] no one's going to buy a piece of furniture unless they can see it and touch it in person," she says. But they ended up being her biggest supporters. Launching with six bar carts, a sofa, and a lounge chair, she never looked back.

New Traditional

Society Social is equally rooted in traditional silhouettes and Instagram. "We've always been traditional with a twist," says Owens. "I like layers, textures, patterns, and color. To me, that feels homey."



New traditional is about shapes and ideas like an English wingback chair and putting a new spin on it with colors and fabrics, or accents like contrast piping. It's an ode to the heritage from a millennial perspective.

Design Truly Within Reach

Another thing that is unique about Society Social is the scale of their pieces. While they can be used in larger spaces, they are specially designed for smaller homes and apartments. "Not just in big cities, but everywhere, people are living smaller overall. All the sofas were 75 to 77 inches in length when we started and was very intentional. People have asked us for sectionals and big pieces of furniture and I won't do it," says Owens.

Price is also important. While Society Social isn't trying to compete with big names like Ikea or Pottery Barn by any means, their prices are dedicatedly accessible with items such as the [Elise Sofa](#) starting at just \$1435.

Customization is also at the heart of Society Social, being one of the few brands that offer a large number of custom options for upholstered items.



Dunmore Cane Credenza in Dragon Fruit SOCIETY SOCIAL

While many furniture brands offer just a few color fabric choices for upholstery, there are tens of options for most pieces as well as color matching of Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore paint. It's incredibly easy to get exactly what you want.

Collaboration With Ariel Okin

In April 2020, the brand launched a collection with interior designer Ariel Okin, who is best known for her work designing Lena Dunham's New York apartment and Goop's headquarters. This collaboration not surprisingly was the result of Owens reaching out to Okin on Instagram. There are [seven pieces in this collection](#) including seating, tables, a bookcase, and pillows.

The Bobbie Coffee Table is one of the most charming pieces in the line. Named after Okin's father and father-in-law, it features Trompe L'Oeil wicker in a skirt-like scalloped shape that's reminiscent of coastal town silhouettes. While the upholstered top is soft and kid-friendly, you can easily use it as a regular coffee table with a tray. There are 56 different fabric choices for this piece.



Pieces from the collaboration with Ariel Okin LOREN BARHAM

Social Media And Design

Looking at the brand's Instagram feed, it's easy to understand how they've built a following. Social media has been the biggest influence on design in the past decade. "I think that Instagram, Pinterest and all social media has really empowered the consumer to become their own designer because there is so much visual information out there about how to lay out furniture and educate yourself on different styles. [You can learn] what silhouette of a sofa might fit mid century modern or traditional space," says Owens.



societysocial
Hickory, North Carolina

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It's truly democratized design and has been a way to educate the consumer, but the flip side is that there can be too much of a good thing. "I don't think there's a downside except that everyone's homes look the same. There aren't a lot of places to go if someone wants to shop traditional."

That sentiment is exactly why Owens is a visionary.

What's Next

Owens will keep designing and selling furniture, but ultimately her vision for the brand is to open up a Society Social restaurant or hotel, much like Restoration Hardware, but with her new traditional aesthetic. "That would be my biggest dream. There's no one else who's doing it right now, but maybe one day," she says. Considering how far she's come, it's a dream that's likely to come true.