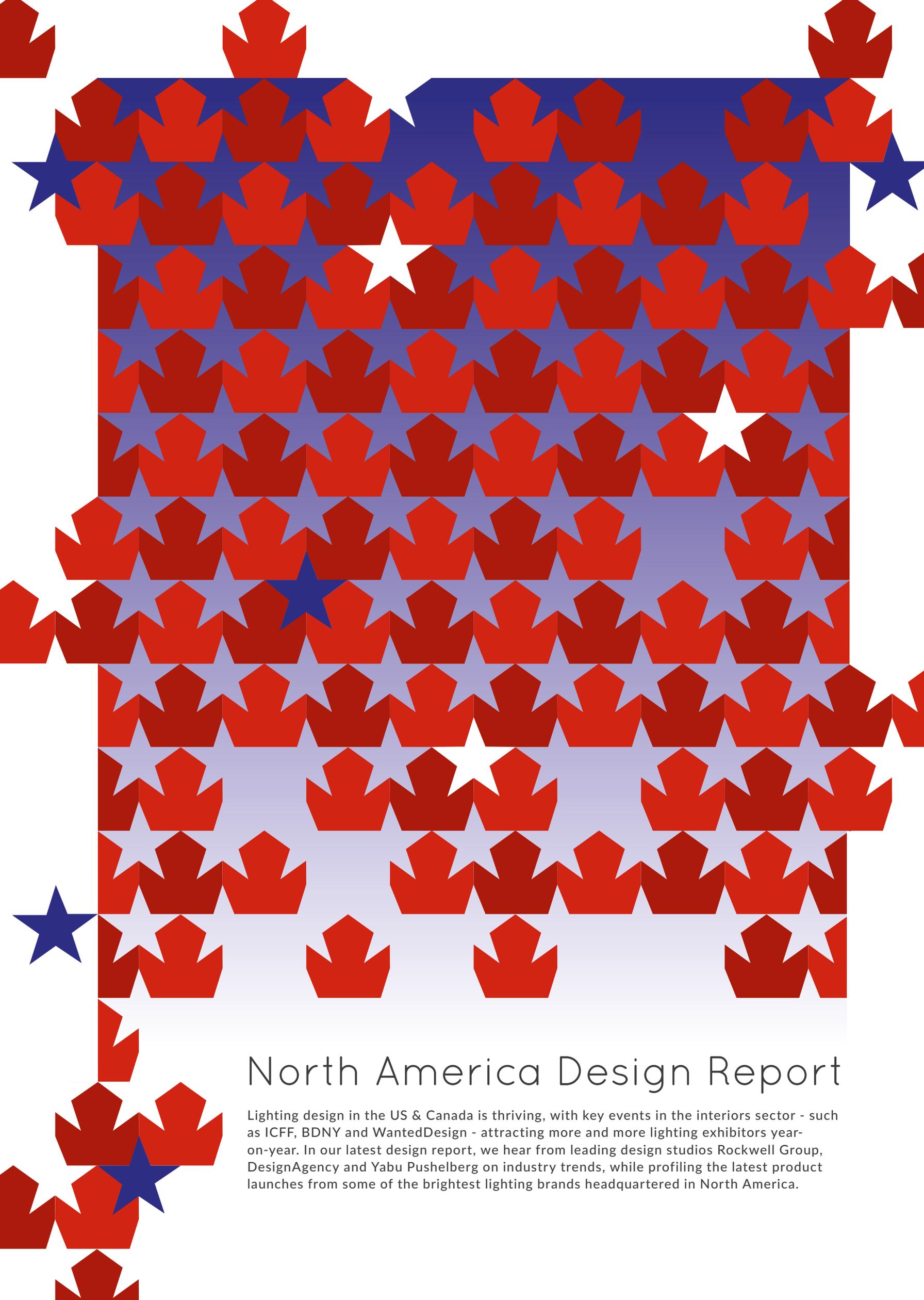




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DECORATIVE LIGHTING
IN ARCHITECTURE

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North America Design Report

Lighting design in the US & Canada is thriving, with key events in the interiors sector - such as ICFF, BDNY and WantedDesign - attracting more and more lighting exhibitors year-on-year. In our latest design report, we hear from leading design studios Rockwell Group, DesignAgency and Yabu Pushelberg on industry trends, while profiling the latest product launches from some of the brightest lighting brands headquartered in North America.

Image: Saty+Pratha



DesignAgency

Founded in 1998 by partners and long-time friends Matt Davis, Anwar Mekhayech and Allen Chan, DesignAgency unites interior design, architectural concept, strategic branding, and visual communication in a unique and innovative way. One of the most distinguished design studios in Canada, its services are widely sought after, with clients in more than 26 cities and nine countries worldwide. Its global success is based on its high level of design excellence and ability to create special environments through narratives developed with the client.

"Canada's design scene struggled for many years as it was such a small market and there just weren't enough opportunities and even less room for experimentation," the DesignAgency founders tell **darc**. "As a result, homegrown talent moved away to cities such as New York, which offered better platforms for establishing careers. That said, Canada is currently experiencing a boom in creative energy; we have a burgeoning design scene that is part of a great influx of talent across a range of cultural fields including music, culinary, architecture, and design – and the world is recognising that something exciting is happening in Canada and wants to be part of it. In addition, there's the impression that our country is a progressive one and Canadians are good people to work with. We believe this is attracting global hoteliers, restaurateurs, and developers. This, in-turn, is providing us with an influx of talent from around the world, which is making our design culture really interesting. Our Toronto studio for example, employs designers from all over the globe including Australia, Syria, Russia, Spain, UK, Iran and Korea. Canada has also experienced an economic boom in recent years – and in particular Toronto – so this has influenced the opportunities available to designers and with that brings a sense of competitiveness, and clients are now commissioning more innovative work. Canadian firms are also being commissioned to work on some of the world's biggest luxury hotel and restaurant properties around the world. Though each studio's approach and style is unique, we're seeing a lot of strong work coming out of Canadian offices.

In terms of design trends, now more than ever we're experiencing a globalisation of design, so the trends we're seeing in Canada are the same elsewhere in the world. We're moving through a form of post-modern revival where a lot of designers are using simple shapes that toy with asymmetry and whimsy to enhance the overall design concept. That said, since Canada is such a vast country, our designers have to consider that lighting conditions are not the same from coast to coast. We differentiate from places such as Miami or LA in the US, because we have such a dramatic change in season year-round. In Canada, it's crucial that lighting, particularly in hospitality venues, takes into account winter conditions by creating a warm atmosphere that draws guests in from the cold. For the Lena restaurant in Toronto, for example, we added a tall cascading fixture with tear-drop pendants around the bar that casts a soft glow and announces the restaurant from the street, drawing guests inside.

And in considering materials and textures – it's a very exciting time right now as almost anything goes. There is so much choice on the market that designers are using a plethora of materials but what stands out is when they are used in new and innovative ways. If we are to pinpoint a specific trend, we would say that although designers have orientated towards brass and bronze detailing over the past few years, this is now being replaced by painted metals. Also, in Canada, architects and designers have always excelled at designing with timber, but now with changing building codes and an influx of new sustainable wood products, we are likely going to see an explosion in experimentation with wood and exciting new designs at all scales. Then when you look at lighting trends specifically, we have definitely seen a move towards more custom and decorative lighting being used to differentiate projects; more room-defining statement lights. These are being complemented by dimmable, architectural LED strip lights.

Essentially, these are more like sculptural centrepieces that anchor the room and can function almost like art in the way that they can elevate and often define a project. For example, our firm recently designed the Louix Louis restaurant at the St Regis Hotel in Toronto where we custom designed three Czech crystal chandeliers to evoke the feeling of whisky swirling in a glass. Our Canadian clients are definitely becoming more aware of what we, as designers, have always preached, that 'lighting is everything'. It's a good time to be a lighting consultant as they are now regarded as essential to the consultant team. There's a real upswell of Canadian lighting design talent right now, for example our friends at Anony have been creating some really great pieces lately. We're also really excited about the work we're seeing from Castor, Omar Arbell (Bocci), MSDS and Lambert & Fils. We are also fortunate to have some very informed lighting stores in the country, such as Dark Tools, which has incredibly knowledgeable staff that go beyond traditional retailing and work in more of a consulting role to help educate designers about lighting and find the right solutions for a project. Lighting in Canada has always played a key role in interiors and with design becoming such an integrated system, it's now even more critical that interior design, art and lighting all work together. Moving forward we see an increasing demand for lighting control and think that custom lighting will also continue to be critical."

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