

HABITAT

AN INSIDER'S LOOK



RESTORATION RULES

Throw open the doors to this CREATIVE'S WORKSPACE and prepare to be overcome with envy. But, as MUSICIAN and ARTIST Jason Leonard tells us, sometimes you also need to appreciate the JOURNEY to get there.

WORDS SERENA RENNER

Jason Leonard's studio at 3587 Northeast Prescott Street, near the Alberta Arts District in Portland, Oregon, is hard to miss. The exterior is jet black and shaped like something between a general store and a 1920s nightclub.

The distinct façade (which was painted light green at the time) is what caught Jason's attention when he was searching for a building to buy in 2013. He was looking for something that could house both his poster restoration business, The Affiche Studio, and accommodate his alter ego – the more right-brained illustrator, animator and former member of the Portland indie-folk band Loch Lomond.

"All my extracurricular time is spent playing in bands and doing other artistic things," says Jason. "It's always been this kind of duality."

While efforts to unite his disparate artistic passions are still underway, Jason knew the first step was finding a building that could serve as a workshop as well as a storefront gallery. He solicited the help of a friend, Shannon Baird, who works in real estate and runs S Baird Design, to find a space that fit the bill.

"And then one day, she was like, 'Hey, look at this.' We came over and looked at it and that was it." For US\$310,000, the boxy brick building on Portland's Prescott Street was his. >



STYLE THE LOOK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
FREEDOM PARK AVENUE
 BAR CABINET AU\$1699
 freedom.com.au
WHARFSIDE ARK BAR
 STOOL AU\$50A
 wharfside.co.uk
LUMIRA CYPRES DE
 PROVENCE CANDLE
 AU\$59 atelierlumira.com
HEDLEY ROUND PLANTER
 AU\$30 ezibuy.com

Originally a grocery store called Marble Palace Grocery and Market which opened in 1924 and later serving as the upholstery business of Gary Kirk – known for his work with the McMenamins chain of Oregon breweries, music venues and historic hotels – the unique structure is tucked away but still catches the eye, Jason says. At least that's what he saw from the outside. What wasn't so obvious was the amount of work required to restore it.

The LIGHT was a HUGE DEAL for me. I love light, so SKYLIGHTS were a big thing, but also having DIFFERENT lighting options.

"There was no hot water; the electrical system was faulty; there were no side or back doors or anything. It was a struggle," recalls Jason.

But with Shannon's direction, Jason got to work reading blogs such as Blood & Champagne, Design*Sponge and Remodelista, and started a Pinterest board to begin what would be a six-month renovation.

"Most of the research was really just poring over lighting choices," Jason admits. "I mean the light was a huge deal for me. I love light, so skylights were a big thing, but also having different [lighting options]."

Some lights needed to change colour or dim down for intimate concerts. Others had to shine brightly while Jason was working to restore collector's items. When the contractor stripped the ceiling to create six skylights, the interior revealed original two-by-four and two-by-12 Douglas fir beams, "probably from trees that were 500 to 1000 years old", says Jason. >



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE AFFICHE STUDIO



STYLE THE LOOK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
GLOBE WEST BROOKLYN LOFT PENDANT AU\$520 globewest.com.au
WEST ELM TILLARY SOFA IN FAUX SUEDE BONE-PINDOT US\$1149 westelm.com
DAVIS & WADDELL HAMPTON RECTANGULAR BOARD AU\$45 kitchenwarehouse.com.au
FREEDOM FIFTIES DINING TABLE AU\$1299 freedom.com.au
WEST ELM CREWEL SLICE CUSHION AU\$54 westelm.com.au

The two-by-12s sit atop a cross-hatched structure of two-by-fours. They were so beautiful, Jason decided to leave them exposed. In between, the contractor cut rectangles for natural light.

The end result is a cohesive aesthetic that he describes as a mix of Scandinavian, Japanese and “Northwest”. Contrasting the rich wood beams and the graphic posters hanging around the studio are white walls, blond wood cabinets and trim, sunny yellow kitchen stools and hanging plants whose vines dangle from the rafters. Real-world places also influenced the design – a cheese stall at Grand Central Market in Los Angeles inspired the hexagonal white tile pattern on the kitchen wall.

“[The contractor] had to do that wall, like, four times,” laughs Jason. “It probably drove him mad, but I feel it was maybe good that every single thing, down to the last detail, was thought about five times.”

In many ways, the restoration process paralleled the vintage poster business for which Jason fixes up paper memorabilia using a linen-backing method. He spends most days carefully matching colours using scrap paper or acid-free markers, and subtly mending damage without masking a poster’s age.

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE AFFICHE STUDIO



“I love old stuff, and I like the way old paper looks; I don’t want to cover it up,” says Jason. “When you’re restoring something, you’re keeping part of its age. It was the same with this building. There are tonnes of old buildings in Portland that are getting destroyed – old churches and stuff. But I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to keep the history.”

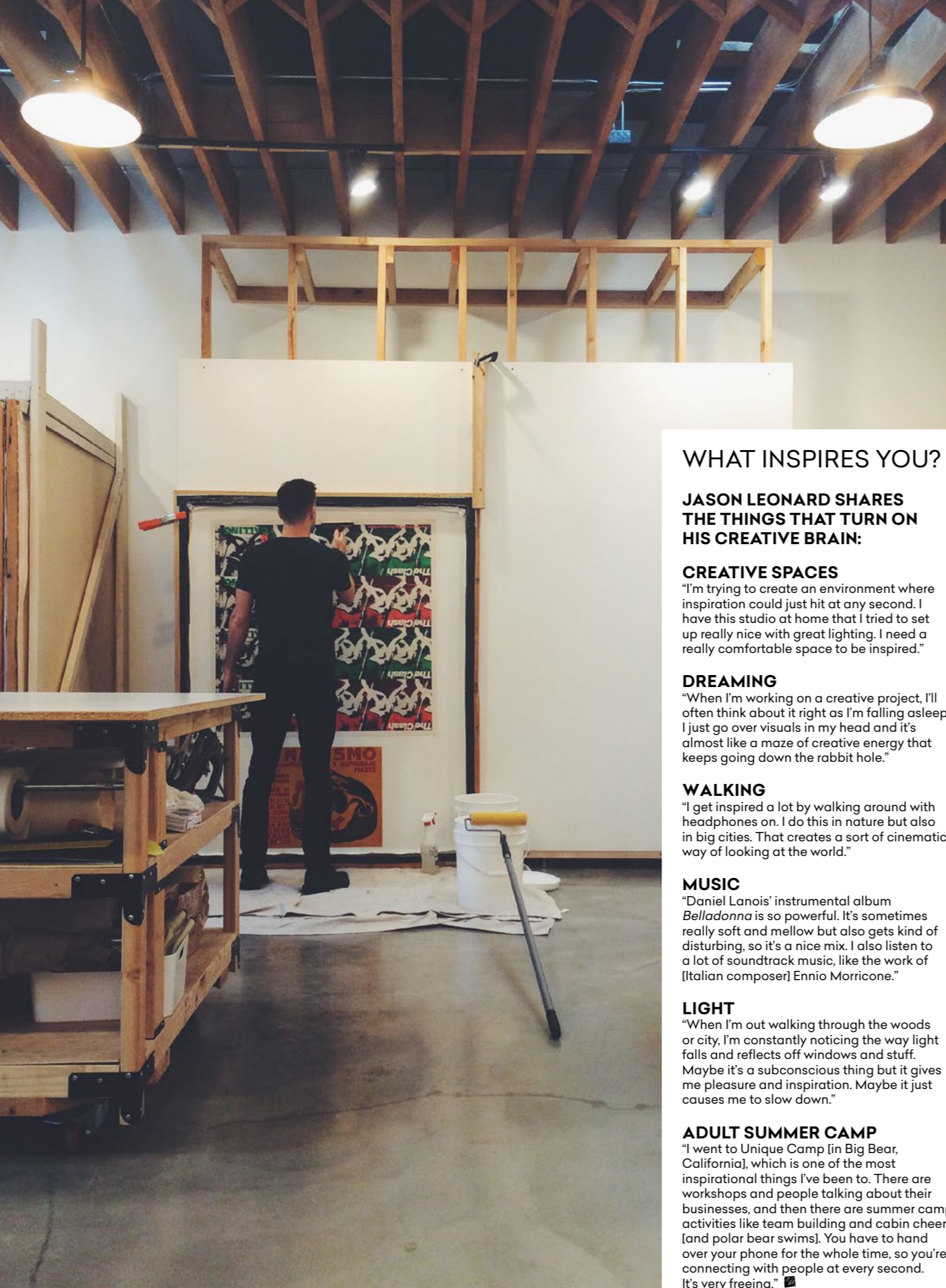
Now that his bright, open studio is set up (in a modular, movable fashion at that), Jason is dreaming up all of its possible uses. He’s already hosted music nights, cooking classes and candle-lit dinners and is planning a drawing night, lectures and other events – perhaps a showcase of his personal collection of Polish and Russian posters – associated with the Last Thursday on Alberta monthly art walk. He calls the new space Archipelago Gallery & Studio, which hints at his personal quest to combine all his artistic islands into one destination and brand.

More than anything, however, he wants to help people come together and collaborate, starting at Archipelago on Prescott Street.

“I’m inviting people over just to come and work or have coffee or read a book,” he says. “A huge thing for me with this space is just getting people together.” >

I love OLD STUFF, and I like the way old PAPER looks; I don’t want to cover it up.





WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

JASON LEONARD SHARES THE THINGS THAT TURN ON HIS CREATIVE BRAIN:

CREATIVE SPACES

"I'm trying to create an environment where inspiration could just hit at any second. I have this studio at home that I tried to set up really nice with great lighting. I need a really comfortable space to be inspired."

DREAMING

"When I'm working on a creative project, I'll often think about it right as I'm falling asleep. I just go over visuals in my head and it's almost like a maze of creative energy that keeps going down the rabbit hole."

WALKING

"I get inspired a lot by walking around with headphones on. I do this in nature but also in big cities. That creates a sort of cinematic way of looking at the world."

MUSIC

"Daniel Lanois' instrumental album *Belladonna* is so powerful. It's sometimes really soft and mellow but also gets kind of disturbing, so it's a nice mix. I also listen to a lot of soundtrack music, like the work of [Italian composer] Ennio Morricone."

LIGHT

"When I'm out walking through the woods or city, I'm constantly noticing the way light falls and reflects off windows and stuff. Maybe it's a subconscious thing but it gives me pleasure and inspiration. Maybe it just causes me to slow down."

ADULT SUMMER CAMP

"I went to Unique Camp [in Big Bear, California], which is one of the most inspirational things I've been to. There are workshops and people talking about their businesses, and then there are summer camp activities like team building and cabin cheers [and polar bear swims]. You have to hand over your phone for the whole time, so you're connecting with people at every second. It's very freeing." 📌