



"I'm excited about the sophisticated design scene in San Diego," says John Cortese, who develops furniture for his company, Seventh & 7th Designs, in the city. *Opposite:* The simple aesthetic and use of materials evident in the work of the Eameses resonates with Cortese.

PORTRAIT: ERIC STONER. OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF HERMAN MILLER INC.

Much has changed for John Cortese since he began his career sweeping floors at a woodworking shop in Brooklyn 20 years ago. After a yearlong apprenticeship with a violin maker in Woodstock, New York—"I spent my mornings and evenings learning how to sharpen Japanese hand tools and then spent my days making them dull by working on violins"—he returned to Brooklyn, rented a bench at a community shop and began making his own furniture designs. "Simplicity with a kind of radical edge has always been my signature," says Cortese, who learned the importance of quality from his grocer father and style during his days as a fashion photographer. Today, working from a studio in San Diego's Point Loma Design Center, he continues to straddle the line between functional objects and works of art with the 125 designs he offers through his company, Seventh & 7th Designs. The hand-finished pieces are made from materials including walnut and leather, though Cortese is beginning to explore concrete, steel and exotic finishes, explaining, "I'm always looking for the unexpected." *seventhdesigns.com; 323.203.1823*

Inspired by the distinctive lines inherent to zebrawood, Cortese designed the Quincy side table with a curved and sinuous form.



TRUE GRIT

JOHN CORTESE



WHAT'S INSPIRING YOU NOW?
Salvage—simple, useful, old design that I can make live again. I believe that furniture should get better with time.

DREAM COLLABORATION:
I am living it right now. The finisher I work with, Ben Eismann, is on fire with ideas that are so outside the box, it's inspiring. We're doing a lot with walnut, bleaching and torching it, and then adding stains to highlight the beauty of each piece of wood.

GREATEST INFLUENCES:
George Nakashima. My clean and simple style came from him and from my early work with hand tools.

GO-TO HOST GIFT:
My mom's homemade pesto.

FAVORITE CITY:
Brooklyn. My roots are there. The name of my company, Seventh & 7th Designs, refers to the cross streets of my grandfather's and father's grocery store. The building has been in the family for over 125 years.

EAMES OR MACKINTOSH?
Eames, for the simplicity of design and material.