



THE GILDED ONES

ELISH WARLOP

SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

LET'S SWEETEN THINGS UP AROUND HERE!

In the Victorian era, the term “sweetness and light” referred to a powerful combination of beauty and intelligence. When we met lighting and furniture designer, Elish Warlop, on a winter’s day in 2019, we realized that she is, literally and figuratively, a modern-day representation of this very concept! We caught up with Elish at an interesting moment in her life.

Over the past few years, she has navigated her career from architecture and construction management to design, moved from Aspen, Colorado, to Brooklyn, New York, started a design studio, and within short order, found herself featured on the cover of DWR’s popular design magazine for her groundbreaking lighting design. To top off all of these changes and accomplishments, Elish became a new mother and wife in the fall of 2018!

Keep reading to discover more about the adventures of Elish as she explores the beauty and business of light and the sweetness of motherhood.



SO, LET'S CHAT!

Home. Sweet. Home. I grew up in Rhode Island; however, I spent my college years at Cornell in Ithaca. More recently, I lived in Colorado (Aspen and Denver) and now Brooklyn, New York — specifically, Williamsburg.

The J.O.B. I've been lucky enough to have enjoyed a few careers! These days, I am a lighting and furniture designer. I own my own company — Elish Warlop Design Studio.

Wilding Out: What's the craziest thing I've ever done? Nothing too crazy, but I will admit that I've quit jobs unexpectedly, hitched rides while traveling around the country, and moved to odd places. Sometimes I feel a sudden and strong urge to take my life in a different direction regardless of whether I am prepared!

Daytime Reverie: I daydream often. I am currently dreaming about doing an “artist in residence” program in the mountains of Colorado next year.

Sign Language. I am a Taurus! I think Tauruses are supposed to be down-to-earth and stubborn. Yet, I live in the clouds and I think I am pretty open-minded... but maybe my friends and family would say something different!

BFFs. I have a pretty strong group of female friends. Each one of them is passionate, smart, hilarious and loyal. Just a badass group of women!



YOU STARTED YOUR CAREER AS AN ARCHITECT

What made you want to become an architect? As long as I can remember, I've loved art, drawing, and building things. My parents built a house from the ground up when I was around ten years old. My dad developed a detailed manual describing what he wanted in our new house and how he wanted it constructed. I remember meeting the architect, inspecting the plans with my parents, and watching the development and construction of the house from beginning to end. That process definitely influenced my decision to become an architect.

You won two AIA Awards early in your career. Tell us more about that experience. When I first got out of architecture school, I worked for a small firm in Aspen, Colorado. This firm provided me with more opportunities than I would have obtained from a larger firm in a bigger city. One of the projects I worked on was for a family moving from Michigan to Aspen who needed to fit their big life into a small condo. After pulling together imagery and defining the concept, we were off to the races! The overall concept for the space was inspired by Corbusier's famous quote: "A house is a machine for living in." Every inch was considered in order to maximize space. I ended up designing a lot of custom furniture for them. It was a great project with fun clients. The fact that my work was recognized by the AIA was icing on the cake!





YOU FOUNDED AND OPERATED A CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT COMPANY CALLED EFW CONSTRUCTION,

What made you move from architecture to construction management? I left Aspen for New York and was working in a much larger firm. The work flow and process in a large architecture firm meant that I did not have the same closeness to each project that I enjoyed in a smaller firm. As a result, I enjoyed my work less and less. Rather than lose passion for my work, I quit. Shortly thereafter, I volunteered for an organization called Architecture for Humanity. I moved to Biloxi, Mississippi, after Hurricane Katrina and worked with this organization to rebuild homes. We ended up pairing seven homeowners with seven nationally known architects. As a result of these pairings, I ended up doing a lot more construction management, which helped me to realize how much I enjoyed being free from my desk and out in the world engaging with people.

What kind of projects did EFW Construction secure? I was a one-woman show! I had a job trailer on site and managed construction from there. In the three-year life span of EFW Construction, I completed two major commercial projects — a doctor's office and a bank office.

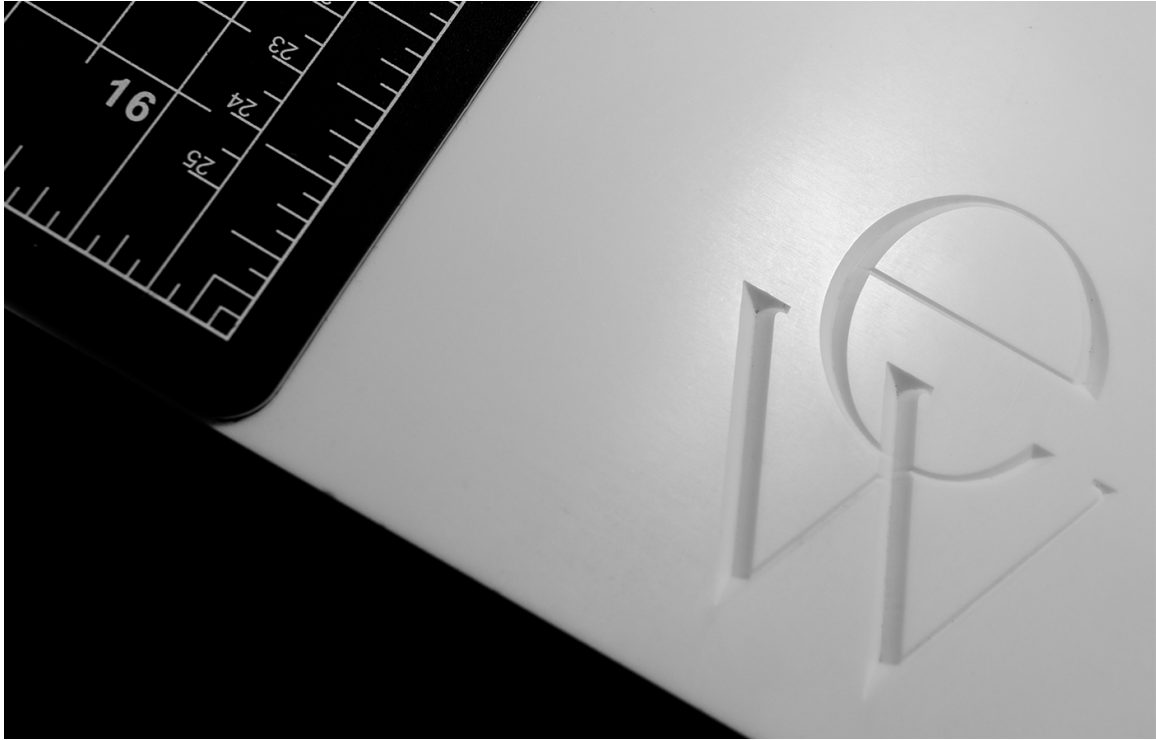


WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO PURSUE AN MFA IN DESIGN AT RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN (RISD)?

The idea had been percolating in my head for a while. I knew if I did not apply to design school after my last construction job, that I would never do it. I applied to the only school that I wanted to attend — RISD. I thought: “Well, if I get in, then I will decide what to do.” Thankfully, I got in!

THESE DAYS, YOU ARE A FURNITURE AND LIGHTING DESIGNER, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DESIGN AESTHETIC?

After I completed my MFA at RISD, I founded Elish Warlop Design Studio under which I create modern lighting design and furniture. My design aesthetic can be summed up in three words: Delicate. Architectural. Sculptural.



TELL US ABOUT YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS, FROM INSPIRATION TO FINAL PRODUCT,

My most successful designs come when I let go of the outcome and trust my process. Inspiration comes from a variety of places — from architecture to jewelry design to fine art. I think in little models. My process is about paring a concept down to its core. I try to find the very spirit of the thing, the essence that will get translated into something larger and detailed in the next step.

From these miniature models comes a jump in scale to a workable prototype. This process always reveals something previously unknown about the materials I am using. That information and learning are critical in the next phases. The prototyping stage also gives me the opportunity to work with other artisans or manufacturers, as I need to involve experts in order to move the design forward. My process can be described as a movement from inspiration to generation to translation and culmination with refinement.

Success is achieved when the final object has been transformed by the process while still maintaining the spirit of those initial miniature models.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE DURING THE CREATIVE PROCESS ?

Finding reliable suppliers is probably one of the most difficult tasks. You have to be comfortable with the level of quality that they offer and they have to be comfortable with the scale of the work you want created. Your needs must pair well with their skillset and work process.

Thankfully, I work with two people whose work and commitment to my design approach has remained consistent over the years; however, as my business grows, my needs will change. And that means staying open to new partnerships.

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HOW HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES AS AN ARCHITECT AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGER INFORMED YOUR FURNITURE AND LIGHTING CREATIONS?

My furniture and lighting straddle the line between object and architecture. They are more like installations rather than independent objects. I customize my creations to the places

in which they will eventually live. Because of this interface between the object and the existing architecture, it is helpful for me to understand what is going on behind the walls. My background helps me when speaking to contractors and designers because I have an intimate understanding of their work and process.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ONE OF THE FEATURED DESIGNERS OF MEGA FURNITURE DESIGN BRAND, DESIGN WITHIN REACH (DWR)?

Working with DWR has been pretty amazing. The company displays such high regard for design and for designers as well. My work may seem simple, but it is rather complex, which makes it difficult to manufacture. They took the time to make sure that we got it done correctly without cutting corners. I really appreciated that and I am proud of the results.



YOU RECENTLY BECAME A NEW MOTHER! HAS MOTHERHOOD CHANGED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR WORK?

Becoming a mom has been totally bananas! To be honest, the baby is so new that I am not sure I know just yet whether or how he will change my perspective on work.

Before he was born, I worried that my passion for my work would dwindle and that I would become completely wrapped up in him. That did happen for a bit once he arrived into the world. This baby business is all-encompassing! But now that I am five months out, I can feel that old, or even renewed, passion for what I do returning to me. I am really feeling ready to pull up my sleeves and get going again.



HOW HAVE YOU BEEN DESCRIBED BY
PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL? DO YOU
AGREE WITH THEIR ASSESSMENT?

I've been described by my family and friends as creative, visual, and as a maker of things. It makes sense. I have always loved drawing and building things. I remember constructing forts for my sister and me while growing up. When I was in high school, I started taking art classes at RISD during summer breaks and eventually assembled a portfolio of work, which I used to get into Cornell. So, yes — I would totally agree with that assessment.





WHAT THREE WORDS DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONAL STYLE?

Structured.
Minimal.
Classic.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU WHEN IT COMES TO DRESSING YOURSELF; COMFORT OR HIGH STYLE?

I don't believe that one has to sacrifice comfort in order to look good. I have to feel good about myself and confident in my look when I am out and about — so for that reason, I would say comfort.

DO YOU TAKE FASHION RISKS? COMFORT OR HIGH STYLE?

I don't get too risky when it comes to my sartorial choices. I am straightforward and classic with my style. That said, I do like to mix proportions. So sometimes I pair huge men's jackets with skinny pants or sleek tops with bold A-line skirts.

WHOSE STYLE DO YOU ADMIRE THE MOST AND WHY?

The fact that I am so straightforward in my personal style is why I love the style choices of people like Bjork or Yayoi Kusama. Frankly, I admire the way many New Yorkers wear their loud and colorful art on their bodies because . . . why not? It saves me a trip to the art gallery!

WHAT ARE YOUR FIVE GO-TO WARDROBE PIECES?

Black. Black. Black. Navy. And oversized eyewear.



WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE DESIGNERS?

I am very interested in discovering ways in which we can slow down in a fast-paced digital world. I also love experiential pieces — work in which you can walk around and through. Es Devlin is a set designer and artist who experiments with video and virtual reality. Her work, “Room 2022,” was featured at Miami Basel a few years ago. She created a hotel within a hotel — a hybrid of visual and real that disoriented the senses. It was fantastic!

I am also obsessed with repetition and manipulations of scale. I love how these concepts can draw us in or push us out. They often reveal the secret of how the parts are connected to the whole. This is why I love Iris Van Herpen’s creations. Her pieces often build upon a small unit that gets manipulated to create an entire system. She pushes modern manufacturing techniques, such as 3D printing and laser cutting, to create beautiful flowing sculptures for the body. Her work is remarkable.



WHAT'S ON YOUR BUCKET LIST?

To participate in an artist-in-residence program and to learn kintsugi in Japan. Kintsugi refers to the art of mending broken ceramics using gold. It is an ancient and wonderful way of creating something new and beautiful from something that we might otherwise discard.

WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT OBSESSIONS?

My baby and Wild Wild Country on Netflix!

WHERE WOULD YOU TELL FRIENDS TO GO IN ORDER TO GET YOUR PERFECT WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN EXPERIENCE?

I would start off at Oslo Coffee Roasters and eavesdrop on the locals complaining about changes in the neighborhood. Then I would visit A/D/O in Greenpoint for the latest in design talks and modern installation art. On the way there, I would stop by Rough Trade record store for massive amounts of music and to recall the bygone analog era. Lastly, I recommend taking the ferry south where the views of the Manhattan are just spectacular — the kind of escapism that you need when you live in the city.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD, WHERE WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Any town near the ocean and/or a mountain range. San Francisco would fit this description nicely!



TO WHICH PLACE WILL YOU TRAVEL NEXT?

My husband, baby, and I are headed to Italy this fall. My husband and I married quickly, just before our baby arrived last September. Now we want to have a full-on wedding in Italy in front of our family and friends.



TELL US WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT GOLD?

I cannot resist shiny things! Seriously, though, I love the rich, luscious, yellow hue of gold.

WHAT AUVERE PIECES CAN'T YOU LIVE WITHOUT?

I want the Callen Rings. And the Slash Ring. And the Open Cage Cuff! Okay — I pretty much love all of the pieces in Auvere's Arignote collection. Why? Because I am obsessed with structure, linearity, and geometric forms as they are the foundations of classic and timeless design. And it appears that Auvere is similarly obsessed!



PARTING WORDS?

Follow the light. It ultimately leads to good places.

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ELISH IS WEARING:

Look 1: Black and white skirt: Phoebe; Black silk top: Vince; Black boots: Franco Sarto; Navy coat: Vince; and Jewelry: Auvere (Arthropod Earrings Satin; Callista Cuff; Callen Rings Satin; and Slice Rings Satin);

Look 2: Gray Top: TILL.da; Black Jeans: Scotch & Soda; Boots: Halogen; Jewelry: Auvere (Capture Ring; Slash Ring Polished; Luna II Ring; Luna IV Ring; Perigree Bracelet; and Arthropod Earrings);

Look 3: Black silk top: Vince; Jacket: Trouve; Men's Black Leather Jacket: Faith Connexion; Green pants: Club Monaco; Sunglasses: Tom Ford; and Jewelry: Auvere (Winged Earrings; Spike Ring Polished; Slash Ring Polished; Capture Ring; Double Moon Ear Cuff Polished; Large Ornate Amulet polished); and

Look 4: Black knit top: Joan Vass; Black leggings: Theory; Black Boots: Franco Sarto; Navy coat: Vince; and Jewelry: Auvere (Vortex Ring; Capture Ring; Slash Ring Polished; Golden Apex Ring; Contour Earrings; Open Cage Cuff).