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Greg Norton

director of design at Knickerbocker Group, shares his perfect Maine day and design inspiration

Favorite book?

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster (who was an architect as well!) was always a favorite of mine, and I am lucky to have been able to read it to my daughters as part of our bedtime routine. And I try to read Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* once a year, which helps to reorient me and justify the journey I am on.



Is there a show or movie that you think has incredible set design?

Drive My Car is a film that came out a few years ago that comes to mind. The spaces where the characters rehearse, the backdrops of the conversations around and within the red Saab, the fashion of the characters against the landscape, the use of gazes, the final performance, and the slow pacing of it all are really something. To those who haven't seen it, there is very heavy subject matter around grief and guilt, but the messaging—that unexpected things happen, and it's okay to feel things—is worthwhile for anyone to be reminded of.

Go-to shop or local artisan for unique pieces?

South Portland's Art in the Park is a place where I snag a piece or two every year, and it is always extraordinarily inspiring. Also, because our home office is in Boothbay, I have become more familiar with that area and can't believe the local artisan scene there. One shop I need to mention is Peaceful Pagan Vintage in Wiscasset, which offers clothing from the 1900s to the 1980s. Their ethos is amazing and offers people an opportunity to explore vintage items that can't be found anywhere else.

Your biggest design influence?

Bit of a trad answer, but I love the premise of *A Pattern Language*. We are all looking to make sense of things in the physical world and inherently contribute to and ride along patterns that inform local vernacular, friendships, style, scale, and design in general.

What's the most unexpected place you've ever found inspiration?

My cat Bubbles loves the shoulder seasons because the sun's angle is just right for natural light throughout our first floor, and it's fun watching her follow the sunspot on the floor throughout the day. A simple reminder of how the sun informs program and behavior. **MHD**



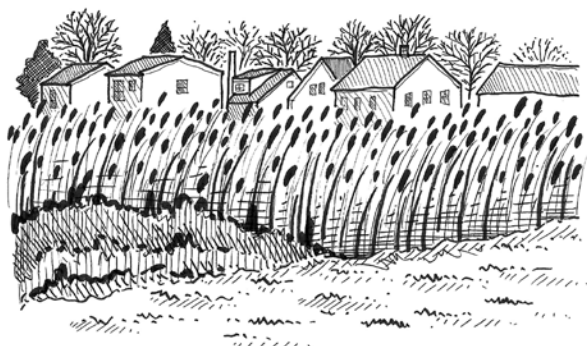
Headshot by Sarah Prak

What would be your perfect Maine day?

What has been fun to experience is how it has changed, being a native Mainer and moving back to this perfect state to have a family. As a kid, it was a fall afternoon at Fort Williams, followed by a night trip with my brother and parents to Videoport and Casablanca Comics in Portland. As an undergraduate at the University of Maine up in Orono, it was finishing a home series sweep on a spring Sunday and hosting a cookout at the baseball house. Currently, it's a day that starts with biking the South Portland Greenbelt to Wainwright with my daughters, followed by a make-your-own pizza night and a walk to Red's, capped off with a family movie.

How would you describe your creative philosophy?

That anything can improve with collaboration and critique.



How does hand sketching drive your design process?

It is the start of any design process. There needs to be a playfulness and flexibility to initial creative ideas, or in the words of John Cleese, being in an "open mode." It is hard to transition from the "closed mode" of emails and Teams messages / meetings into an open mode. Trying to create an environment for our design department to operate in an open mode is a primary goal of mine at the moment.