

A portrait of Gerald Olesker, a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a dark shirt and a light-colored jacket. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with some faint sketches or drawings.

Gerald Olesker

Founder of ADG Architectural Detail Group

POSTED ON APRIL 18, 2019
BY EDITOR, IN INTERVIEW
8 MINUTE READ

Gerald Olesker is a trained architect, creative entrepreneur, and founder behind ADG Architectural Detail Group, ADG Eco Lighting Products, ADG Lighting, and 20/twenty publishing. He has designed and manufactured lighting for over \$3 billion in real estate. His work appears in luxury and celebrity homes and commercial developments in and around Los Angeles and around the globe.

His award-winning team of 18 artisanal craftsmen manufacture pieces designed by Olesker at his factories in Chatsworth and El Monte, California.

Olesker's custom lighting and architectural designs and furnishings have been featured in national shelter and lifestyle publications including Architectural Digest, Elle Decor, Elegant Homes, House & Garden, Los Angeles Times, People Magazine, Robb Report, Interior Design, LUXE Magazine, California Homes, Chicago Tribune, Malibu Magazine, Santa Barbara Magazine, and Orange County Register. He has also been featured on Wall Street Radio, Fox News Charlene on Green Hawaii, North American Design's Green Leaders of Tomorrow, and LA City Watch.

Olesker earned his Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) from Cal Poly Pomona. He has been a featured guest speaker, moderator, and panelist at several conferences, including the Green Expo Showcase and the Valley Economic Alliance Economic Summit. Gerald is a former board member with the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) in Los Angeles, as well as the Cabrillo Music Theater. He also sat on the Education Committee for the Institute of Classical Architecture (ICA), Southern California Chapter.

Where did the idea for your company come from?

When I left my first company, I wanted to jump back into the world of design but not product development. I started ADG (Architectural Detail Group) with architecture and design in mind, but clients kept redirecting me to product development. So ADG became ADG Lighting, and instead I began developing lighting, furniture, and other architectural elements for some of the greatest homes and hotels in the world.

What does your typical day look like and how do you make it productive?

I start with my cup of coffee and begin my social media review. I look at and engage with client and industry-specific websites. I read and listen to business articles from Forbes, Washington Post, and various design journals such as Dering Hall. Then I take my seven-mile trip to my office. Once I arrive, I review projects and perform design oversight.

My productivity depends on dealing with my team that is about creating a baseline that is business relatable, not design relatable. I have a flowchart, which is a who's who sheet, as well as a spreadsheet, which provides an overview and baseline for the design-intensive projects that we have. All our projects require creativity, constant variation, and understanding the different variables of architects and designers that we deal with on a daily basis since we run 30-60 projects per quarter. I created this system so that we can handle two to three times that volume, projecting our considerable annual growth.

How do you bring ideas to life?

I think pondering is important. Reading and engaging with other design professionals helps to elevate the process of design. But being an architect first allows me to see the built environment differently than being a product designer. Being an architectural industrial designer gives me an advantage over the majority of other product manufacturing firms.

What's one trend that excites you?

I don't like the word "trend." I can't get excited about trends, but I can get excited about the process of design and ideas that can be implemented for upcoming projects. Because trends are just that — they're a fad, they die quickly or have an insignificant short term, which I think destroys the value of higher level art and architecture. This is why we are style makers and not trendsetters.

What is one habit of yours that makes you more productive as an entrepreneur?

My colleagues call it "Gerald's Daily Dose." The habit is loving to engage with others, fact-find, and consistently to reach out to help others in their businesses, which gives me the freedom to experiment, discuss and evaluate how other companies are run or how project management teams run their projects. This gives me inspiration and newfound ideas.

What advice would you give your younger self?

I would actually keep the same path. I wouldn't change anything. I know through hard times I have been able to evaluate and make excellent decisions, and also learn from my failures. However, I might have joined some business organizations earlier, such as the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO).

Tell us something that's true that almost nobody agrees with you on.

Mutuality is the key to success. Many people might actually agree with this, but I think in today's political, economic, and design environment, we seem to consistently fight for who the expert is rather than understanding that through valuable discussion and exploration time, resolution is brought forward. Hence, mutuality does not mean that we have equality, but it means we have equity.

As an entrepreneur, what is the one thing you do over and over and recommend everyone else do?

Engage with the design and architectural community at an organized level. We understand there's a time frame, budget, and design need on every project. So when we call on potential projects, we know that time is the biggest asset; however, it tends to be the largest obstacle on a project. As the specialists, we work on the functional details of a project and know that it's not just about going to a website, clicking on a picture, and ordering the product. It is about coordinated efforts and strategy. We truly recommend that these architects, contractors, and designers that want to exemplify the best work engage with trades like ours because we get the process.

What is one strategy that has helped you grow your business?

A fellow advisory board member told me years ago about the importance of metrics. I use that to guide what I do. It's what keeps us on track at a consistent growth rate of around 20%+ each year. By reviewing a large series of numbers reconfigured in multiple ways, we're able to keep track and grow our business.

What is one failure you had as an entrepreneur, and how did you overcome it?

I wasn't able to implement those metrics with my first business having two family members as partners. So I had to exit. Once I did this, the economy imploded and I was able to understand the numbers, but I wasn't able to grow the business until I brought in a team that wanted to engage, learn and grow with the same intent of mutuality.

What is one business idea that you're willing to give away to our readers?

I'd like someone to write a book entitled "The Comma at the End of Your Name." This book would celebrate those that don't have the comma and those fancy titles. The people we engage with on a daily basis typically don't have the comma at the end of their names — the auto mechanic, the food server, the office worker. We celebrate those with the fancy titles, they get all the glory and the credit, but what about the people that don't get celebrated, those behind the scenes? This book would celebrate those people.

What is the best \$100 you recently spent? What and why?

I recently made a donation to Hillel at the University of Oregon. I have now become more involved and am on their advisory board, helping to curate a mentor program for students and professionals.

What is one piece of software or a web service that helps you be productive?

I use ROGI (www.myrogi.com). It is an app designed to take everything you do for clients and keep it in one central location, all documented on your smartphone or PC. You can use it to bid on jobs, track clients, or keep your to-do lists updated. I use it to take photos or videos, record voice memos, or set up project reminders. I use it at our factory to document the process.

What is the one book that you recommend our community should read and why?

Stephen King's "Gerald's Game" and his other book "Carrie." It reminds me every day of my wife and I, since her name is Carrie! Sometimes you just have to have some morbid humor in your life.

What is your favorite quote?

"Imagination is more important than knowledge." – Albert Einstein

Key Learnings:

- Use metrics as a guide to growing your business and following its trajectory. It will make decision-making a lot easier.
- Engage with all of your business partners, team, and vendors at an organized level, regardless of your industry.
- Helping fellow entrepreneurs in their business can be a win-win for both parties. It can kickstart and inspire some new ideas that you would have normally never thought of.
- Allow time in your workweek to ponder. The inspiration it creates will take your work to a whole new level!

Connect:

<http://www.adglighting.com>

https://www.instagram.com/adg_lights/

<https://twitter.com/ADGLighting>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/gerald-olesker-9a0153/>

