



(l-r) Steven Johanknecht, Roman Alonso and Ramin and Pamela Shamshiri. Photographed by Christopher Dibble.



Group Effort

Welcome to the World of
Design Collective Commune.

By Rose Apodaca

When a respected store designer, a book publisher and sibling production designers come together to design their own dream shop, what is the strategy? Commission a celebrity architect to contrive a slick space? Install futuristic digital gizmos?

Not by a long shot. Inside design collective Commune's cavernous West Hollywood headquarters, just beyond the reception desk and a wall tacked with project plans and inspirational images, the four founders—Steven Johanknecht, Roman Alonso and Pamela and Ramin Shamshiri—erected a canvas tent, and scrawled an inky tribal pattern to conjure the African kraal idea behind it. “We painted it ourselves. It was sort of like a group project,” laughs Alonso, the book publisher. The nomadic structure known as Community Shop is in fact, very in line with the out-of-the-box

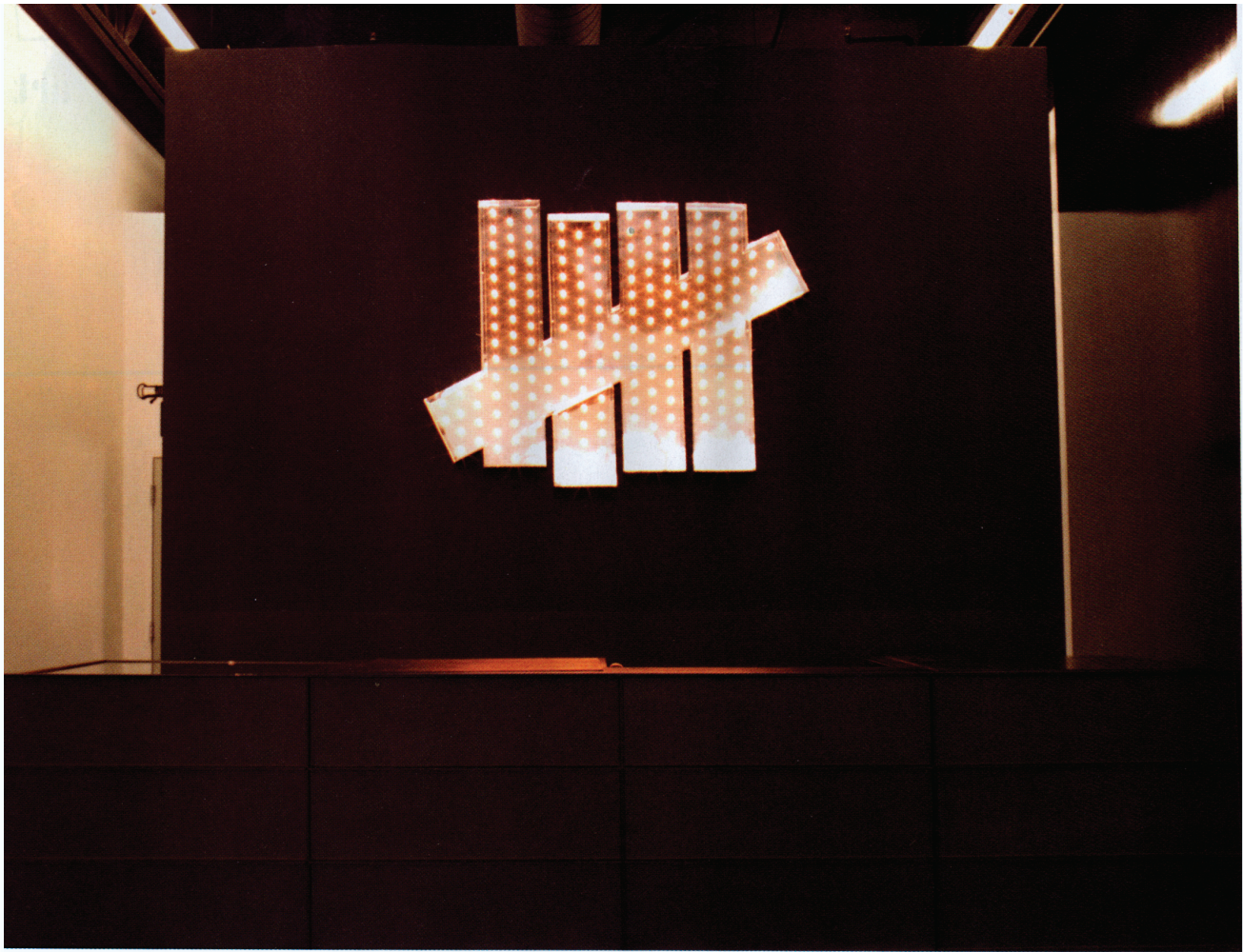
approach that's put Commune at the top of design lists.

The freewheeling spirit of the tent suggests the summer camp aesthetic that Commune bestowed on the Ace Hotel in Palm Springs, which opened last February with canvas-walled rooms and outdoor lounges with fireplaces tiled by legendary ceramicist Stan Bitters. (They also opened a second Community Shop in the hotel last month.) So, too, the interior of the Heath Ceramics store and studio in Los Angeles, which is headed by Adam Silverman, an up-and-coming pottery star and Commune colluder on the Ace.

This sensibility is also perceptible in the eight-story Opening Ceremony department store that opened last fall in Tokyo; the irreverent Anglomania of the Juicy Couture flagships in Beverly Hills and London; the haute sex environ of Kiki De Montparnasse in New



Opening Ceremony, Tokyo



Commune's interior for Las Vegas's **Undefeated** store, Las Vegas. Opposite page: **Heath Ceramics**, Los Angeles. Photographs by **Corey Walter**

York's SoHo; and, among their current gigs, a respectful updating of a Buff & Hensman house from the 1960s nearby their WeHo office. Each project thrives in its own fully realized world, looking and feeling comfortably evolved, but on closer inspection reveals carefully considered influences and elements that enhance each brand's authenticity.

Consider the signature pop aesthetic of the tween-targeted DIY fashion boutique Fashionology in L.A.: Commune took its cues from the vibrant graphics of 1960s-era artist Sister Corita Kent. "In our design work, we pride ourselves that we don't force any aesthetic onto anybody," remarks Alonso. "If you look at our projects, they're all really varied in the way they look, in the way they function. We listen. We like to think of ourselves as image therapists."

Alonso established himself in L.A. at art publishing imprint Greybull Press after a high-profile run in public relations in New York for Isaac Mizrahi and Barneys. It was through Barneys in New York where he met Johanknecht, a highly creative store designer who developed the look and context for the once pioneering retailer and later for the Donna Karan stores. Through lensman Dewey Nicks, Alonso met the Shamshiris, who were then staging elaborate VIP events internationally.

A sake-soaked dinner in L.A. in 2003 led to the formation of the joint collective. They moved into a new HQ 14 months ago, where,

depending on the gig, a motley crew of experts—graphic artists, copy editors, artisans, consulting stylists, set painters and other imaginative pals—pass through. Some leave behind handiwork to sell in the "tent": Alma Allen's turned wood bowls; E.R. Butler's nickel "Totem" candleholders; Robert Lewis' "Love" lights; Clare Vivier's leather-scrap laptop cases; ecclesiastical beeswax candles by New York monks; pottery by Silverman and April Napier. Alonso points out a set of six glass straws hand-blown by Brian Doran and protected in a roll of reclaimed leather. "They're very eco-friendly since you can wash and reuse them." Much of it is available at communedesign.com.

"We also wanted to develop our own brand," adds Alonso, who designed the minimally embroidered table linens of piece-dyed natural cloth. Johanknecht is behind the kilim throw pillows stacked outside the tent, and is working on a wallpaper collection.

Offerings sprawl beyond the tent, including antique beaded Native American crafts from the collection of Alonso's Greybull partner Lisa Eisner, who numbers among the handful of photographers, including Jim Goldberg and Tierney Gearon, represented by Commune's new booking agency.

"We love the people we collaborate with," continues Johanknecht, "so it's great to continue to work with them, developing things that aren't necessarily specific to a project—just things we love." ★

