

USA

Brave new world

Pivoting to survive

When the pandemic hit the US, design commissions for restaurants, hotels and offices vanished overnight – and designer and artist Matthew Moore found himself rethinking his company. Over the next few weeks, his team at Mateo Goods in Phoenix, Arizona, focused on developing an object to meet the changing working habits of Americans: a minimalist sit-stand desk. “It’s about serving what people need right now,” he says.

Available in Baltic birch, walnut or white oak, it was released on IndieGogo this summer and raised \$250,000 (€215,000) in a month. “[2020] has been a terrible year,” says Moore. “But now is a good time to think about the basis for businesses, families, friendships – and make that more sustainable.”

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It’s a message that resonates with Patrick Robinson, founder of sustainable clothing brand Paskho. Although the high-performance men’s and womenswear was already made to high environmental and labour standards in China and Laos, he wanted to do more. “As I watched the unemployment rates go up, the social unrest, the inequality, the people at food banks, I made a choice that we had to have a bigger social mission,” says Robinson.

He decided to bring back manufacturing to provide jobs for the thousands of highly skilled people suddenly without work, from Broadway seamstresses to factory workers. He is now working on creating a co-operative model so that his new employees can also have ownership of the New York company. “We call it a community because as makers we’re all equal,” he says. “We believe that the so-called gig workers should have more rights.”

Then there’s female-led filming hub Upriver Studios, which is hoping to provide jobs in upstate New York. It opened a massive soundstage mid-pandemic to provide a sustainable,

coronavirus-secure option for new productions. “Questions of equity, justice and opportunity have been everywhere in 2020,” says Laura Callanan, founder of impact investing non-profit Upstart Co-Lab. “I think the creative economy has a big role in addressing them.”