

Disillusioned With Finance, She Gave the Furniture Business a Try

For Josefina Londono, a career move after reconnecting with her family’s furniture business also called for a move to a new Brooklyn apartment.



Josefina Londono left behind a promising career in finance to enter the business of furniture design. The move allowed her to connect a newfound passion with her new apartment.

Upon entering the working world, Josefina Londono had a feeling of disconnect. In 2019, she started a career in wealth management for a New York-based firm after graduating from George Washington University with a degree in finance. Her schooling had led her to imagine how her career might take shape, but what she found was quite different. “You’re just supposed to be this little robot that follows everything,” she said. “The way that you talk, the way that you dress, the way that you behave — everything is being taken from you. My identity was being stripped from me. I couldn’t pinpoint where and how but I just wasn’t myself.” She compared the experience to the Apple TV series, “Severance.” “Corporate America feels like that sometimes,” she said. The television series features characters who have their brains altered to separate their working selves from their nonworking selves. When they’re at their jobs they have no knowledge of life outside the office, and at home they know nothing of work. This “severance” leaves characters forever feeling incomplete, living out two separate and equally dissatisfying lives. Such was the case for Ms. Londono. She felt just as uncomfortable in her Gramercy Park apartment as she did at work. “You’re at the office 12, 14 hours, so you don’t want to bother making your space nice,” she said, “but then when you come home, you’re like, ‘I hate it here.’ I felt like, ‘I’m paying all this money but I’m hardly here — and I don’t like it.’” So after nearly five years, she walked away from what she had imagined would be a lifelong career. After she quit her job, she went to Indonesia. It was a trip she had wanted to make for a while. Her mother joined her at the beginning of the journey and took her on a tour of furniture design studios and factories. For more than 30 years, Ms. Londono’s family has manufactured and sourced furniture in various countries, including Indonesian, Italy, and Colombia, where Ms. Londono spent much of her childhood. “My mom was like, ‘I can take you to where we manufacture, and you can see if this is something that’s of interest to you,’” Ms. Londono recalled. She was immediately smitten by the experience. “It’s like I saw what I was looking for without knowing that I was looking for.” After the two weeks with her mother, Ms. Londono stayed in Indonesia for three more weeks on her own. “I proceeded to ‘Eat, Pray, Love,’ for nearly a month,” she said. “I traveled alone for the first time. I learned how to surf. I generally reconnected with myself.” By the time Ms. Londono returned to the United States she knew she wanted to find a way to make her own contribution to the family business.



Ms. Londono decorates her home with many of her own pieces. The copper stand (foreground) is a collaboration with the designer Jack McCready.



Ms. Londono knew she wanted to move into the studio because of the light coming from the large windows.

“When I came back, I felt very passionate about creating some sort of furniture,” she said. “I’ve always been really hardworking and very driven. It wasn’t the fact that I didn’t want to work, I just wanted to work where I didn’t have to fully act like a man or not myself to be successful.” She also needed a fresh start at home. In Gramercy she was living with a roommate — she couldn’t remember a time when she didn’t have a roommate — but now she wanted her own place. During her time in finance, she bounced around several Manhattan neighborhoods — Gramercy, TriBeCa, Murray Hill — and felt loyal to the borough. But she was having trouble finding anything that felt both livable and affordable on her own. “I remember when I started my search, the first two weeks I came home crying,” she recalled. “Looking for an apartment is a full-time job. It’s so stressful. I spent a month looking at five to 10 apartments nearly every day. It wasn’t me being insanely picky — they were not livable. I saw a place where the kitchen was a microwave, nothing else. I saw a place where the laundry was full of bugs and the Realtor was like, ‘Oh, this is the season for bugs.’ What do you mean this is the season for bugs?” Reluctantly, she admitted it was time to expand her search. When she found an available studio in the Dupont, a new development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, she gave it a look. “I just loved the fact that it was new and that it was my energy only in the apartment,” she said. “And I felt very safe. That was also a huge one because I was moving in alone.”

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Josefina Londono, 27

Occupation: Furniture entrepreneur

On love for design: Ms. Londono has childhood memories of her father’s passion for furniture. “When we would go to restaurants,” she recalled, “he would touch all the material and ask you to flip the chair and see where it’s from. He was so embarrassing at the time, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, I can’t believe this is happening.’ He’s like, ‘Look at the quality!’ I think it just stayed with me, and I learned to appreciate beautiful design.”

On tariffs: Like other small businesses across the country, Ms. Londono’s start-up is trying to survive the onslaught of tariffs. “We’re coping with it just like everyone else,” she said. “We’re trying to stay focused on staying creative — not just with designs but the business model too.”



For the first time, Ms. Londono enjoys her space as a renter. “When you’re renting,” she said, “it’s still your home and it’s still important.”



Ms. Londono, who initially felt reluctant to leave Manhattan, was swayed by the new construction at the Dupont in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and the opportunity to be the first resident in her unit.



The home where Ms. Londono grew up featured a vase by Gaetano Pesce, and she knew she wanted one in her new apartment.



A windowsill provides a place to keep a stack of magazines.

She’s been in the space for seven months now and does much of her work from home — gone are the days of that “Severance” feeling, as every choice she makes in her apartment relates back to her work. In June 2024 she started a line of furniture called Shanti Design. “The idea,” she said, “is to create more for the renter’s space.” For Ms. Londono that means offering pieces with elevated design but accessible pricing and petit sizing, perfect for slim budgets and small apartments. Her curatorial eye favors natural materials like wood and bamboo, bronze and other metals. She described her approach as a blend of “antique references with millennial handcrafted sensibilities.” She launched the company with a collection of furniture sourced from Indonesia, and she hopes that a collection from Colombia will soon follow. “I want to make more targeted, specific curated pieces that honor different manufacturing traditions,” she said. And she wants to continue keeping renters in mind when deciding what pieces to source. She knows firsthand that coming home should be a positive experience, even if it’s late after a long day and there’s little energy for creating a better living space. “I realize a lot of people are in that space of renting and not having a sense of ownership,” she said. “But when you’re renting it’s still your home and it’s still important, and I think there should be options for you to dress it up in a nice way.”