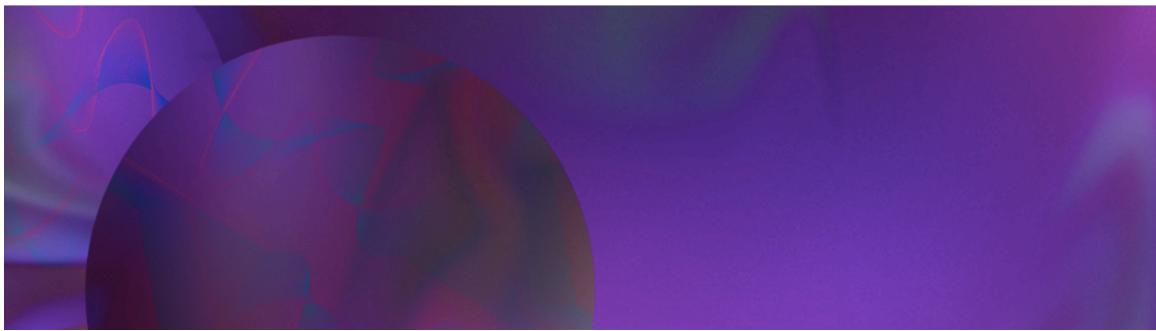


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Why Trending Design Site Hunker Opened A Multi-Story House

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Written By:

Ahead of appearing at our upcoming retail conference, Hunker editor-in-chief Eve Epstein and Whereabout studio founder Gabriela Baiter talk building a media brand today and take us inside the Hunker House—the high-design IRL manifestation of the online decor site



Stephen Paul for Hunker

Takeaways:

•*Hunker is a design & decor media brand + marketplace offering curated inspiration and guidance to today's homeowners.*

•*Recently, the site opened its first permanent IRL outpost: The Hunker House in Venice, California is a multi-level embodiment of the brand, sporting a minimalist aesthetic decorated with merch from Hunker's partners.*

•*PSFK spoke to Hunker's editor-in-chief, Eve Epstein, and founder of Whereabout design studio, Gabriela Baiter, about what it takes to succeed as a media brand today, and why having an IRL creative space to host events and for influencers to crash is an essential part of Hunker's strategy.*

PSFK: Describe Hunker in your words. Is it an editorial site? A marketing partner? A media company?

Eve Epstein: All of the above, I think—though I'd argue that any media business hoping to succeed needs to be innovating and therefore be a "new kind" of company. Brand partnerships have always sat at the core of the media business model. But what sets Hunker apart is that it was built from the beginning to be an exceptional, strategic marketing partner to other brands.

Our idea was that if we could build an authentic and resilient brand of our own through a unique editorial vision, awesome storytelling, effective content marketing, and deep insights that allow us to understand what serves and delights audiences both on and off our platform, we could leverage all of those strengths on behalf of our sponsors. (Easier said than done, but we're lucky to have an incredible team as well as genius partners like Gabriela and her team at Whereabout Studio!) The [Hunker] House has been a big part of that.

In short, we serve our audience first and foremost, but it's that commitment that allows us to meet our partners' needs with sophistication, rigor and empathy.

How did the idea to build the Hunker House, your site's IRL manifestation, come about?

Eve: Hunker House had been a dream of ours since we first launched the site two-and-a-half years ago. And while we were certainly always aware of the value it could provide as a content studio and experiential outpost, the impetus initially grew out of our core values as a brand. At Hunker, we say that your space is an expression of who you are and what matters to you. We believe our spaces tell our stories, and, as storytellers, we knew we needed to walk that walk ourselves in order to truly lead that conversation.

Gab: I've personally always been a fan of Hunker's content. In comparison to other publishers in their space, Hunker never treated the Hunker House as a temporary experiential activation or pop-up. They viewed it as a living, breathing embodiment of the brand, something that can flex over time and serve multiple purposes in this rapidly changing landscape.

After evaluating Hunker's business model, it was obvious that the quality of their branded content was a differentiator for them. By bringing this "in house," literally, Hunker was able to not only create more unique content but also provide additional extensions to their partners that has never really been done before.

For someone who personally has witnessed the evolution of retail from a traditional sales channel to form of rich, interactive media, it became clear that the house had the potential to be the soul of Hunker and a powerful IRL opportunity for brands.

How did you decide on a property, and how did you go about transforming it into a distillation of Hunker?

Gab: The property was almost too good to be true. Located a block from Abbot Kinney and right next door to famous Instagrammable sites like the Love Wall, we were able to capitalize on Venice's foot traffic and take advantage of a corner lot to build awareness. It was also important to us to find a space that had multiple levels to physically segment the many dimensions of the Hunker brand.

The space had to embody the many perspectives and styles of Hunker's brand. Beyond that, it needed to stand the test of time. We started with the shelf, which became the marquee fixture (and most Instagrammable) moment in the house. Every object of the shelf featured a story on Hunker.com with a quote from the editors. While this execution was quite simple, it did provide an element of rotating discovery that also looks just as good in a shelfie.



Stephen Paul for Hunker.

Eve: Finding the property was one of those crazy journeys where we didn't even really know what we were looking for until we found it. But, as Gab says, it was a no-brainer when we did.

As for the design of the space, it's really all about our creative director, Paul Anderson. He is brilliant and tireless and has an incredible ability to convey the heart and soul of the Hunker brand in a visual, visceral way. The custom plywood elements create a visual through-line that conveys our love for humble materials, clean design, modularity and storytelling. As we've cycled different furnishings and décor through the space, I've been amazed at how it can morph while still remaining true to the Hunker aesthetic and sensibility.

Working with Gabriela and her team at Whereabout Studio was incredible—their intuitive grasp of our brand vision and deep knowledge and expertise in bringing brand spaces to life were essential. What amazes me most is the feeling people have when they enter the space—it goes beyond an appreciation of the design and décor, though of course that is there. It just feels happy, real and welcoming.

What kinds of events and experiences do you host in the space?

Eve: Lots and lots of stuff. Over the past year, we've hosted panel discussions, cocktail parties, dinners, team meetings and DIY workshops. We've had overnight guests from all over the map— influencers and artists we invite to come to use the space to create, recharge, and explore the neighborhood and city. And, of course, we've created tons and tons of original premium content, both editorial and partner-driven. We've made content with brands ranging from Food52 to Dyson to Blu Dot to Walmart there, and it's all been a blast.



Paul Anderson for Hunker

How has Hunker House enhanced your strategy as a brand?

Eve: Hunker House has allowed us to express ourselves more fully, and to extend and deepen the conversation we have online with our audience, our community, and our partners. As the digital landscape evolves, as our content strategy evolves, so does our use of the space.

For example, this year, we significantly ramped up our affiliate commerce content, and the House naturally became a big part of that, particularly in the service of brand partnerships that spanned both affiliate and custom creative. Having a place to style and shoot partner product to feature in this shoppable content allowed us to move beyond the everyday product imagery that typically features in these sorts of articles. I expect we'll do more of that in the coming year, as commerce content will be an even bigger focus in 2020. Video is a part of our plan as well, and we'll definitely be using the space for some of those franchises.

What can other brands and media companies learn from Hunker House?

Gab: Hunker House is a great execution of omnichannel marketing at its best. The space isn't acting as a consumer-facing experience. Instead it is a B2B opportunity for Hunker to create more meaningful digital content centered around real things happening at the House. It is also a compelling space for influencers to discover new products and a programming space for Hunker to lead thought provoking discussions in the community.

If a brand has an office, an Airbnb or a retail store, they can learn from Hunker by activating that space in new ways. Whether it's an educational workshop you plan on livestreaming to a larger audience or an influencer shopping night, those curations can also have a home online.

Whereabout Studio

Hunker

For more from Eve and Gab, come see them at PSFK's Future Of Retail 2020 conference this January, tickets available now!



To view the full story: <https://www.psfk.com/2020/01/hunker-house-interview-future-of-retail.html>