

## A Q+A with Be Original Americas President, Sherri Simko | Lumens

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[Perch Linear Suspension](#) by [Moopi](#)

A nonprofit organization dedicated to recognizing, preserving and investing in the future of authentic design, [Be Original Americas](#) aims to bring education and awareness to design ethics, the importance of nurturing original design and what is real, and what's not-so-real. As champions of authentic design, Lumens is proud to be a member of Be Original Americas. To learn more about what the organization stands for and why authentic design matters, we spoke with Sherri Simko, President of Be Original Americas and Director, North America for Carl Hansen & Son.

#### **What led to you joining Be Original Americas?**

Osmosis! I have been fortunate to work for companies that have a design soul. I was with Bernhardt Design at the time Be Original Americas was founded and Jerry Helling was the Inaugural President. And over the years I attended several talks hosted by member companies with Be Original Americas and continued to follow the work of the organization. I identify with the "community" spirit of beliefs toward supporting the future of design and I am passionate about the importance it brings to us as individuals. Carl Hansen & Son was already a member when I joined the company 3 1/2 years ago, so I was delighted to jump in, get involved and join the Board!

[Mizu Pendant](#) by Nicolas Terzani for Terzani, Eave Modular Collection by Menu and [Eden Queen Round Rug](#) by Marcel Wanders for Moooi Carpets

**Why is authenticity in design important to you? To the industry?**

First, I am in awe every day I discover new products and new design concepts that come to market. Instagram is quite the rabbit hole for my daily dose. And to be in this industry and having an active role in seeing product design come to life, I profoundly understand all that goes into designing product – the creative input is just the start and often in itself a long path toward the formation of a final design. It is also all the investment of resources to support the creative process: engineering, manufacturing, prototyping, testing, marketing, and a long list of supporting actors that bring a design to life! This is a huge investment for any company to make.



[String Light Round LED Pendant](#) by [Michael Anastassiades](#) for [FLOS](#)

If we do not protect authentic design and continue to allow copies/knock offs to be made – we devalue the importance of the creative process. And copies/knock offs are mostly lower price look a likes; often confusing the public of how well designed the original

product is, or even recognizing where the original design came from. A few years back a designer was visiting our showroom and sat in the CH24 Wishbone Chair. The comments were, "I never sat in a real one and cannot believe how beautiful and comfortable it is". (And then I literally fell out of my chair!) And less expensive copies may use substandard and possible harmful materials and often lack proof of proper safety measures. I could go on! Authentic design requires an investment of talent, time, a thoughtful selection of materials, and proper protocols to bring product to market and SO much more.



[Coppelia LED Chandelier](#) by Arihiro Miyake for Moooi and [Celestial Carpet](#) by Edward Van Vliet for Moooi Carpets

**Are there any Be Original Americas initiatives invested in combatting waste-based economy and (over)consumption culture?**

We have worked over the years with the U.S Customs and Border Protection to stop counterfeits from entering the ports. This is one of the most impactful ways to break the cycle of imports of knock offs. And our ongoing programming certainly addresses this important issue we face today. We need good design to help improve our future.

The approach of product design today does not exist without incorporating a sustainable life cycle assessment of the final product. Many of our member firms create products that are using recycled materials, incorporating parts that can be easily replaced and creating programs that accept returns and refurbishment.

Many classics were designed and crafted with longevity in mind – you paid a good price to purchase something that would last. Our culture has changed with prosperity where we can buy many things; so why have just one good item? And e-commerce is supporting mass amounts of options through ease of purchase. Does the consumer really know what they are buying when they hit that button? What is the material? Where was it made? Is it comfortable? Is there a warranty guaranteeing it will perform over a period of time? BUT I do believe we are turning the corner and our community is on a correction course. Having our members work together will be important for us to combat our waste-based economy.

**Authenticity and the slow process of design can often be at odds with the fast-paced, production-focused economy that designers might feel pressure to keep up with. How can designers and brands make sure that authenticity remains central to their practice?**

Brands need to be more proactive in educating designers on product attributes and offer smarter tools to support the time-consuming exploration and specification process. Brands need to provide

consultative examples to arm designers with facts and figures to educate their client why a product is worth choosing over another. Designers are doing the same in their practices too – investing in more strategy-minded services and investments in technology to support the creative process, and many are being proactive in creating internal go-to resource libraries that are vetted to support original design and sustainability. And Be Original Americas provides a CEU Course to design firms who want to dive into the roots of why authenticity is so important.

**Has there been a particularly inspirational or profound conversation/interaction you've had thanks to your position at Be Original Americas?**

Hands down, it has to be the involvement in our Student Fellowship Program. Be Original Americas provides some amazing programming to educate design students on understanding the product design process. Our Student Fellowship program went virtual over the past 2 years and was highly successful due to our member companies sharing a look into their product development and design process. Over 3400 students globally participated. Many of the talks are available to view on our website. These programs are free for students and creates a lasting impression in really understanding the root of design and manufacturing. The investment our members make to develop these programs is priceless. It is a mind-blowing experience our members have created for students for the sole purpose of continuing to usher in new designers to our industry with a well-informed appreciation for authentic design.

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[Multi-Lite Pendant](#) by Louis Weisdorf for [GUBI](#)

As choice and convenience become commodities, authenticity is more important than ever for design enthusiasts. Those in the know appreciate great design as more than just something beautiful to look at. Well-designed products add value, comfort and ease to our lives at home, at work and at play. While cheaper design might seem like a good idea at first, these knockoff designs are often much less comfortable, less durable and more prone to outright falling apart. High quality design is guaranteed to do its job and do it well. The hope of Be Original Americas members? By encouraging investment in authentic design, they will guarantee that quality products and good design continue to come to the market.