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## Rhode Island School of Design Community Confer Virtually to Address Nationwide Shortage of Personal Protective Equipment Due to COVID-19

*Students, alumni and faculty are pivoting to creatively meet the demand for gloves, masks and face shields for medical personnel across the U.S.*



*Designer Matt Muller 14 FD tests a prototype face shield made with affordable and accessible materials like clear vinyl and Velcro. Courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.*

**PROVIDENCE, RI (April 2, 2020)** – Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) students, alumni and faculty are conferring virtually about creative ways to meet worldwide demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) for medical personnel across the United States.

A recent report in the *Washington Post* indicates that the federal government's response to their desperate requests for emergency medical supplies and equipment has been slow and inconsistent from state to state. Many RISD alumni who have carved out professional niches as creative entrepreneurs are pivoting to join the effort, rejiggering their studios and other fabrication sites to produce fabric masks or plastic face shields rather than apparel or home goods, for example.

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Naomi Mishkin 11 GL at work designing apparel for working women before COVID-19 forced her to shift gears. *Photo by Sabrina Santiago, courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.*

Brooklyn designer **Naomi Mishkin** 11 GL, who launched the made-to-order line for working women **NAOMI NOMI** in 2018, is collaborating with her manufacturing partners to help local hospitals access more of the PPE they need. Given the lockdowns needed during the pandemic, “our production is completely on hold,” she says, “so we *had* to pivot. We had no choice.”

Mishkin is taking a two-pronged approach: sourcing materials to create hospital-grade masks at her facilities in Brooklyn and in Manhattan’s Garment District, and teaching fellow makers how to sew their own masks via Instagram workshops. More than 25,000 people watched her recent *New York Magazine* Instagram takeover tutorial. “Making things helps people process,” notes the endlessly energetic entrepreneur.



George Coffin 12 FD and Jillian Wiedenmayer BArch 12 in their Brooklyn studio. *Courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.*

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Also in Brooklyn, **George Coffin** 12 FD and **Jillian Wiedenmayer** BArch 12—coprincipals of the design consultancy Studio Den Den—are focusing on building community, raising funds via GoFundMe and producing hundreds of reusable, 3D-printed face shields for NYC health care providers.

“We quickly saw how dire the situation was,” says Wiedenmayer, “and it was glaringly obvious that we had the skills and the passion” to meet the need.

“We vetted these products for function, comfort and ease of production,” the duo notes. “So far the prototypes are quite durable, offer flexible comfort, don’t fog up much and fit well over goggles and masks.”

Using the iterative process they honed as RISD students, Coffin and Wiedenmayer are attempting to improve their designs with every batch, beginning by sending multiple prototypes to partner hospitals and asking for feedback.

“We recently switched to a different open-source design by the Swedish 3D printing company 3DVerkstan,” they say, “which is simpler, prints faster and removes the elastic band from the equation.”



George Coffin 12 FD in his Brooklyn studio. Courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.

In terms of division of labor, Coffin is handling design, prototyping and printing, while Wiedenmayer is coordinating with hospitals and working with other designers to bring them up to speed. “We meet in the middle with assembly and—of course—critique,” she adds.

The design duo credits RISD with helping them develop problem-solving skills and the confidence it takes to step out of their comfort zones in a crisis situation. “Put me in a room, show me the tools and materials available, present a problem, and I won’t sleep until I’ve figured something out,” says Coffin. “That’s RISD in a nutshell.”

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The wide Velcro band in this face shield can be easily removed and disinfected on site.  
Photo courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.

Coffin and Wiedenmayer are also talking with other RISD alums, including Mishkin, **Rachel Paupeck** MArch 12—principal of the interdisciplinary firm Montgomery—and industrial designer **Josh Linder-Haber** 12 ID, all of whom have manufacturing experience, partners and equipment they're eager to share—and making those resources available on their website.

"It's really important for people to connect and add what they can to the conversation," says Mishkin, "rather than reinvent every wheel."

Meanwhile in Providence, textiles artist **Jungil Hong** 99 CR/MFA 15 TX is collaborating with designer **Matt Muller** 14 FD and his team at Pneuhaus, a maker of large-scale inflatables, on their own PPE supply chain while also organizing a large-scale purchase of surgical masks from China.

"We're distributing shields and masks directly to health care providers, postal workers... and other essential workers," says Hong.

"Complex loopholes make it hard for hospitals to do this critical purchasing," they explain, "so we're distributing shields and masks directly to health care providers, postal workers, housing and social services advocates and other essential workers across many fields in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York and Maine."

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Photo courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.

Hong's and Muller's approach to design and production is driven by available resources and the need for inexpensive, reusable face shields that can be easily sanitized on site.

"We got 30 of these clear vinyl prototypes into the hands of local doctors, and they love the fact that they can lay them flat and wipe them clean," says Muller. "And we can make them for \$2–3 per unit versus \$8–10."

"We can sustain our business and provide a product that's a quarter the price of what's out there because our design is so much simpler," says Muller.

The Velcro strap, Muller explains, can easily be removed and disinfected in a bucket of bleach solution. The Pneuhaus team is also making incremental improvements with each iteration.

"We have the capacity to make between 1,500 and 3,000 shields per day once we get going," says Muller, "which means we can sustain our business and provide a product that's a quarter the price of what's out there because our design is so much simpler."

Muller says that the all-consuming effort is actually helping with team morale, noting that "it feels good to *do* something." And the Den Den duo concurs, encouraging other alums as well as current RISD students to "get involved and do everything they can to help." After all, they point out, "Netflix will still be there when this is all over."

## About Rhode Island School of Design

RISD's mission, through its college and museum, is to educate students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation. The college's strategic plan NEXT: RISD 2020-2027 sets an ambitious vision for educating students for the future and bringing creative practices to bear on the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet and new ways of making and knowing. RISD's immersive model of art and design education, which emphasizes critical making through studio-based learning and robust study in the liberal arts, prepares students to intervene

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in the critical challenges of our time. Working with exceptional faculty and in extraordinary specialized facilities, 2,500 students from 69 countries engage in 42 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs. RISD's 30,000 alumni worldwide testify to the impact of this model of education, exemplifying the vital role artists and designers play in today's society. Founded in 1877, RISD (pronounced "RIZ-dee") and the RISD Museum help make Providence, RI among the most culturally active and creative cities in the region. Find more information at [risd.edu](http://risd.edu).

A selection of high-resolution images is accessible [here](#).

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