

Rocky Intro:

When it comes to Star Trek, I am a total neophyte. I never watched the show when I was young, instead watching too many rated R movies before I should have and staying up late for the weird independent films that Bravo used to play. I fell into the category of weirdos who hung out with dudes in tattled Eraserhead t-shirts and skipped out on prom to smoke weed in someone's car. I am more of the pseudo-intellectual burnout type than a Trekkie, though I have long been Trekkie-adjacent. I've pursued more experiences that fall into the nihilist hedonism category, which seems in contrast to the utopian world of Star Trek: where there is a positive outlook for the future, money no longer exists, and people work because they want to.

Which reminds me an awful lot of something that writer and McMansion Hell creator Kate Wagner spoke about in [her recent piece](#) in the Nation: "Why Does Utopian Architecture Suck?" Wagner pulls all the utopian architecture threads that brought us to this moment: namely, one in which the kinds of architectural projects that are being discussed are ones like Oceanix City, a "techno-utopian plan...a community of 10,000 meant to float off the coast of New York City." Despite how bleak the prospects of actualizing utopian living feel right now, Wagner reminds the reader that there are some meaningful past examples, such as the "Arts and Crafts movement pioneers and utopian socialists [who believed] we should be free to do as we please and labor as we want to, not as we are forced to in order to survive." Sounds a bit like the world of Star Trek to me.

I started Cocaine Decor with a few outcomes in mind: to teach myself about the history of interior design (with a particular focus on the time period of designs I'm personally drawn to, namely the 1970s through the 1990s), to point out with humor how trash designs can be fun (as well as funny), and to drop into a nostalgia-driven fantasy world where my greatest concern was trying to find 1978 cocaine. When I think about the future, I imagine piles of rubble in a post-capitalist wasteland, where we are finally able to party in these giant cocaine monuments of architecture we were previously unable to. It's not exactly a hopeful outlook. So I find myself wanting to pull on some hopeful threads. Star Trek has always appeared to require a kind of earnest devotion that I struggle to believe in, especially these days.

When I saw Eno Farley's Star Trek + Design account on [Instagram](#), I found myself wanting to know a lot more about Star Trek and the serene, well-curated spaces in it. Eno, the account's content creator, compels the viewer into the Star Trek world through these gorgeous designs, both big and small - everything ranging from sleek tea cups to modern, geometric chairs. I honestly had no idea how much incredible design is in Star Trek and the more posts I saw, the more I wanted to talk to Eno.

Rocky: It's interesting to think about how we both started our accounts in lockdown, and how much they both focus on design within interior environments. I've actually had to work my Twitter audience towards more interior design, because the architecture posts are often favored. I'm really fond of how intimate your account feels because it's so object-specific, that the posts form around these special pieces.

Eno: Yeah, totally. We talked on the phone a bit about the ways the pandemic has radically redefined our relationships to our homes, and the resultant boom in home interiors, Instagram accounts and new social-media vintage sellers. Where we previously viewed our homes as places to briefly relax and sleep before going out to work or run errands or socialize, suddenly home is the only place we ever are. This forces us to imagine the places we'd rather be and shape our homes in that image. For you and Cocaine Decor, you often curate images of and information about these incredible 1970's and 80's rooms that evoke scenes of decadent parties, like postmodern Roman triclinia. For me, my dream apartment is on the Enterprise-D of The Next Generation, which I view as the most tranquil and utopian of the Star Trek series', with the best designer furniture. Of course, in an attempt to appear well-rounded rather than obsessive, my goal is to one day have a place that makes guests think, "Oh, what a cool apartment," without realizing all the interior design is inspired by TNG.

Rocky: So, who was/is in charge of design on Star Trek?

Eno: That has a pretty complicated answer, since this is a series spanning 60 years, 8 series (if we're not counting the animated ones), and 10 films. So there were probably hundreds of people working on set design over the course of the years, the most famous being [Matt Jefferies](#) and [Herman Zimmerman](#) who worked on TOS and the 90's trilogies, respectively. Then you have each series' property masters and buyers who are in charge of going out into the real world to buy chairs, glassware, etc. from shops and integrating them into the sets in ways that'd make sense without them being immediately recognizable as commercially available objects.

Rocky: What are some ways in which design is put together through the course of the show?

Eno: I think that's also dependent upon the series or film. In TOS, you have a lot of angular surfaces and shades of gray that are lit with these incredible gem tones, with primary-colored buttons, knobs, and console accoutrements; but the actual design pieces used in TOS are often by American or Canadian modernists, so it's a kind of funny juxtaposition of these really heavy, blocky sets and then airy, fibrous Danish-inspired design. I know this doesn't necessarily sound complimentary, but if you watch the show, you know how beautiful it looks together. My personal favorite design periods for Trek, though, come from the era of the Star Trek TOS films and TNG. The films are great, I think, because you see this transitional period

between the more austere, more military aspects of The Original Series, and the abject luxury of the Enterprise-D on The Next Generation.

Maybe this is also because I tend to be partial to both Space Age and postmodern design, but **I love the ways in which the production designers seemed to decide that, well, if Star Trek is an aspirational future, then it should include luxury design.** So you start seeing pieces by Pierre Paulin, Eileen Gray, Philippe Starck, etc. more prominently and more often. I think another reason this is my favorite period is because it's what I think set the standard for what was to be the new Starfleet aesthetic. TOS incorporated a lot of great design, but much of the mid century modernism that we associate with the series wasn't actually used on the Enterprise, but in places like starbases, space stations, and on alien planets. When work started on Phase II (the Star Trek series that was planned for the late 1970's but was doomed to cancellation before going into full production), the plans for the ship's interiors involved [Saarinen-style womb chairs](#), Paulin pieces, and other design elements that look more Space 1999 than Star Trek: The Original Series. No episodes were ever filmed for Phase II, but I think you can look at the concept sketches as examples that the TOS films and TNG followed.

Of course, each series is subject to the trends of the time in which it was created, which is why you see so much American MCM furniture and brutalist artwork in The Original Series; space age design in the films; a healthy mix of early modernism, space age, and postmodernism in The Next Generation; really wacky postmodernism (and [a lot of IKEA](#)) in Deep Space Nine; a pretty eclectic mix of 20th century styles in Voyager (similar to TNG but with more Scandinavian tableware). Enterprise seemed to take some cues from TOS, and limited its own Scandinavian and Bauhaus pieces on the very-austere NX-01 to tableware, while reserving the designer furniture for alien worlds and Starfleet Headquarters. More recently, Discovery and Picard have both done a bit to use some postmodern and mid century pieces, but I think they probably mark the biggest aesthetic departure from "old Trek." It makes sense given the twelve-year gap between when they were made, but many of their sets look a bit West Elm or CB2 to me, especially on Discovery. I'm critical of this now, but in thirty years, I guess fans will probably look back at Discovery and Picard with a similar appreciation for vintage 2020's design that we have for postmodernism now.

Rocky: You've mentioned how much Star Trek you started watching in quarantine. Do you feel that it helped in some way, during events like the uprising and the continued exposure to fascism? What perspective(s) did Star Trek offer you during that time?

Eno: So one of the main reasons I love Star Trek so much, and what really sets it apart from a lot of other science fiction, is how aspirational it is. Worldbuilding is always inherently political, but so much of the sci fi genre is cautionary tales of dystopian futures where humanity has either continued down this present course of neoliberal capitalism, investment in policing and

militarization, and the human and environmental devastation that follows, or the consolidation of state and/or corporate power to reflect fears of deindividuation. Many more are the AI/robot apocalypses representing the dangers of unchecked technological advancement or the alien invasion stories that in themselves could be read as either coded anxieties about “the other” or self aware criticisms of colonialism.

I love science fiction, but it’s usually a pretty cynical genre, even when the intended message is progressive. Star Trek takes another route to ask “What if humanity evolved beyond capitalism and made sure everyone’s needs were met? What if our relationships with other species were based on friendship and mutual aid? What if we didn’t treat sentient technology as tools but as comrades?” and offers what that might look like. It’s subversive in its optimism, and offers a model to consider rather than a problem to be overcome. The Federation has its own share of problems, but the problems are often “in what ways can we limit our own technology to avoid harming the galactic ecosystem even when doing so puts us at a disadvantage to hostile empires?” (TNG), “what values are we willing to compromise in the fight against fascism?” (DS9), “what is the extent to which we value cultural differences if said culture maintains an intentional racial or gendered underclass?” (all of Trek). So the issues that arise in Star Trek, in addition to the episodes meant to mirror social and political issues contemporary to the show, also present questions of how to maintain an aspirational society once it has already been achieved.

Your question was what does this mean to me, politically, and why is Trek useful? The world as it is now may technically be post-scarcity, but the distribution of wealth and resources is wildly unequal; and the utopianism of Star Trek seems increasingly unattainable. Episodes like TNG’s “Encounter at Farpoint” and DS9’s “Past Tense” two-parter, and the film “First Contact,” remind us that the transition from the states and economies of the 20th and 21st centuries to those of the 23rd and 24th wasn’t easy or peaceful. In the Trek canon, we’ve yet to experience The Bell Riots, World War III, and the Post-Atomic Horror. First Contact posits that the pivotal moment in which humanity decides to start getting its shit together is when the Vulcans make first contact with Earth in 2063, and humans are both united and inspired by the knowledge that we are not alone in the universe. With help from the Vulcans, humanity is able to usher in an unprecedented era of peace, space exploration, and eventual formation of The United Federation of Planets.

This is obviously not going to happen, because Vulcans are not real. If we want to get to the Federation, we have to get there ourselves, and nihilism isn’t really useful in this case. This is what I take away from Star Trek. I’m not equipped to suggest what specific kinds of activism, mutual aid work, or policy will help us reach this goal, but I do know that Trek is useful and inspirational to me and others because it affirms values of solidarity, accountability, and environmental stewardship. To uphold Federation values is to work to better ourselves and the rest of humanity, even in the face of unwinnable odds. There’s a very famous quote from the

science fiction author and anarchist, Ursula K. Le Guin, that I feel articulates this well, though: “We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings.” She wasn’t talking about Star Trek, of course, and the mechanisms of capitalism are arguably more malleable and insidious than those of monarchism, but Le Guin’s sentiment is similar to that of Star Trek: that a post-capitalist future could be possible, but we have to work for it.

Rocky: In a past interview, you said: “I was worried I’d eventually hit a wall and run out of objects to make posts about, but I don’t think that’s going to be a problem any longer.” I relate to this a lot, I thought for sure I’d run out of steam, but every pass I take on a certain topic within “Cocaine Decor,” I find more to talk about and post about.

Eno: I think that’s true of most things, where knowledge is cultivated through research and experience. In my case, starting out, I was very much just a Trekkie with a passing knowledge of design history. I’d be able to recognize some very well known pieces, or people who know more about design than I do but liked my Instagram would send me information, or else I’d refer to the websites of other fans working on similar projects, like Ex Astris Scientia or Quark’s Qantina. Eventually I just spent so much time reading about designers, movements, styles, etc. in the hopes of coming across something used in Star Trek, that it’s much easier to identify objects now that I know what to look for. At this point, I have close to 5000 screencaps from Trek saved to my computer which include objects either already-identified or that I hope to find. It sounds like your own journey with Cocaine Decor is sort of similar. Given, you have a much stronger background in design history than I do, but the sheer breadth of topics that you cover within design seem to lend themselves to conversation and exploration.

Rocky: What are some of your favorite pieces from Star Trek?

Eno: So I’m extremely biased toward the design in The Next Generation.

I really love Joe Colombo’s Bobby Cart. I just think it’s such an immediately recognizable and accessible design object, and one of the first purchases I made when I decided to start intentionally collecting pieces that were used in Trek. I also really like how specialized its use was in Star Trek: almost always in sickbay or a similarly medical setting. Maybe ironically, mine is the type that was not used in sickbay, but appears briefly on the bridge in The Final Frontier. Eventually, I’d like one of the type that was used in TNG, DS9, and Discovery.

The Paul Boulva chairs that were used for Ten Forward are another favorite of mine. Actually, any of the pieces that were used in Ten Forward. It’s my favorite part of the Enterprise-D; a wealth of really interesting postmodernism: from Ron Rezek lighting to Octime Arcoroc glasses to Shozo Toyohisa flatware. Ten Forward itself has this almost ethereal beauty that’s really complimented by the sculptural furnishings and tableware.

Other pieces I really love but have no hope of ever owning, because they're too expensive, are any of Pierre Paulin's chairs that were used throughout TNG. I'm especially partial to the F598, or Groovy Chair, that was used in one of the Enterprise-D's corridors and in some crew quarters.

Rocky: Are there more places you see the account going: things you want to expand on, or eventually shift with Star Trek + Design?

Eno: My plans for Star Trek + Design have never been especially ambitious, even though it does feel like a (fun and rewarding) full time job sometimes. I'm just doing this for myself and for people who enjoy it. I may eventually make some subtle shifts, like the inclusion of electronic devices. I worry that might be a slippery slope away from furnishings and decor, though, which is what I like to focus on. I recently spotted a Weltron Model 2001 radio in Deep Space Nine and published some information about it, but a piece like that is still definitely within the scope of design more than, say, a vintage video game console used as part of a control panel.

Ex Astris Scientia has some interesting articles about the use of found objects in Trek, but I don't think it's really my purview. So, no, in general I'm pretty happy with the way things are going. Maybe one day I'll luck out, and a production designer from Discovery or Picard will be so impressed with my knowledge that they'll want to hire me, but until then, I'll just keep doing my research and building my little collection.