

On the Bright Side

1stdibs Founder Michael Bruno Thinks This Idea Can Help Save Upstate New York's Small Businesses

Bruno is supporting the area's renowned design and antiques shops during this trying time

By Madeleine Luckel

April 24, 2020



Hort and Pott, a beloved design show located in Oak Hill, New York, is featured on Tastemakers.
Photo: Courtesy of Tastemakers

"I'm all ready for this call," [1stdibs's](#) founder Michael Bruno says as soon as he picks up the phone. "I swept my floors, opened a bottle of wine, and am looking out at the lake, so I can't complain." But as idyllic as Bruno's home setup undoubtedly is, it has also lit an urgent fire under him to do what he can to help the region during this difficult time.

While Bruno's digital accomplishments are widely known, his passion for [upstate New York](#) is another guiding life force. The region, in which Bruno's house is located, reminds the founder of the European countryside, in that visitors never know what charming small business they will find while tootling along local roads. That appreciation helped lead Bruno to found [Tastemakers Guide](#), a website that highlights such shops, restaurants, and hotels—including Bruno's own [Valley Rock Inn](#). ("You know, it's interesting," the 1stDibs chairman says of his initial impetus to launch the website. "I obviously like curation, so I thought, Why couldn't you apply that same process to the upstate region?") The still-nascent Tastemakers has recently made a quick and agile pivot, in light of the economic devastation recently wreaked by [COVID-19](#).

Now Tastemakers is being relaunched as a platform that allows small businesses to share their current operating status under a guiding ethos that knowledge is power. That includes whether or not businesses are open, their adjusted hours and services, and much more, all conveniently located in the site's new Updates From the Field sections. The featured businesses are still those handpicked by regional experts, but the new work is mainly being done pro bono. That innate kindness is drawn into further focus when one considers that many of these same people have been recently mired in murky [PPP](#) waters, unable to receive the government's small business loans that initially seemed like a wonderful potential lifeline.

"I just think that if these small businesses can get some decent business this summer..." Bruno says to AD PRO, trailing off. "If they have to make it through winter all the way till next year, we could lose a lot of these places." Bruno adds that while New York City is currently inundated by COVID-19 cases, summer could be the next phase during which individuals are comfortable with small, and safely organized, excursions upstate: "Get out in nature, that's what everyone wants, right?"

As for Bruno, this period has come with a silver lining. "It's made me fall in love with my house again," he says, adding that he's rediscovered it through cleaning, and couldn't be happier after having turned his dining room table into a desk. Of course, the area's ultimate lure lies outside the home: "I love Hudson because I'm an antiques junkie—you go there for a chest and it's dangerous!"