

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## New York City: Trophy Central

Companies Make Everything from Statuettes for Hollywood Awards to Spelling Bee Prizes



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David Mortitz, president of Society Awards, pets an 'Imposing Cat' sculpture inside the company's showcase and conference room in Long Island City. *JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



By **ANNE KADET**

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It's award season, and once again folks crowded around their banquet tables and television sets will be asking the usual questions: "Who gets sales rookie of the year?" and "Why did *she* win for best actress?"

But for some of us, the questions are more profound. "Who designed that strange trophy? Why does it feature two porpoises and a unisex angel?"

The answers, more often than not, lie in our backyard.

It's fitting that New York, the city that perfected status symbols, is home to some of the award industry's most prominent players. They range from Tiffany to Crown Trophy, a 150-location national retailer that started on Brooklyn's Avenue U.

One up-and-comer: David Moritz, president of Society Awards, an upscale trophy maker headquartered in Long Island City. He's the force behind some of the world's best-known awards.

While many of his clients—ranging from the outfits behind the Golden Globes and Emmys to the American Welding Society—supply their own designs, others tap him for custom creations.

Mr. Moritz, a fit, intense man dressed in a black blazer and leather pants, displays his new line of ready-to-inscribe trophies in his office's dimly lighted library lounge. It's a sophisticated take on the usual assortment of outspread wings, golden angels and flaming torches.



A display case at Society Awards contains trophies for everything from the Emmy Awards to honors given by a welders' association. *JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

His favorite design? The \$210 Society Star, with what he describes as its “masculine curves.”

“People in the company call it the ninja star,” says Mr. Moritz. “It’s the one that looks

like you can kill people with it.”

He pointed out a silvery winged stallion. “I also like this Deco Pegasus,” he says. “Pegasus is really cool.”

I admired a pair of \$360 prowling-cat trophies and wondered if they were cougars or pumas.

“I think they’re jaguars,” said Mr. Moritz. “I get to decide.”

Mr. Moritz, a 33-year-old former entertainment lawyer, entered the trophy business in 2007, when a friend noted the market was missing an upscale awards brand.

Now, it’s a \$5 million business with 17 employees and a manufacturing plant in Oklahoma, where his folks live.

The entrepreneur admits he has zero design credentials; he relies on a team of illustrators and sculptors to realize his ideas. But he believes he has developed creative judgment through hard work and discipline.

His aesthetic? “I like metallics, shiny things, florals, reinterpretations of tropes and sex appeal.”

Function plays a role as well. A contest trophy should be tall and slender, for example, so the victor can wave it over his head like a proud baboon. An award created to honor a lifetime achievement, meanwhile, is shaped so the modest recipient can cradle it in two hands.

The job’s not all glamour and creativity. Mr. Moritz says he does a lot of hand-holding for his clients, who will often send an HR drone or event-planning assistant to pick a design.

“The primary emotion new customers feel is anxiety,” says Mr. Moritz. “No one’s an expert at getting awards made.”

Sometimes he’ll deal directly with a CEO who has come up with a DIY design “that doesn’t comport with the laws of physics.” But he’ll try to make it work, even if it’s ugly.

“No one’s going to see it but your company,” he says.

At Society Awards, the priciest custom designs top out at \$10,000. That’s nothing compared with the sterling-silver trophies made by Tiffany, which produces awards for the Super Bowl, World Series and Nascar that reportedly cost as much as \$50,000.

Then there are trophies for the rest of us. In the cluttered workroom behind the Crown Trophy retail showroom on East 38th Street, workers assemble shiny plastic trophies from lengths of tubing and cardboard boxes of parts shipped from China. It’s like building with Legos.

Franchise owner Marc Taub reads off some of the carton labels: “Dog and cat, table tennis, victory torch, wheelchair, fishing, karate, female karate.”

Crown sells thousands of \$2 medals and \$30 trophies that Manhattan’s schools and athletic leagues use to recognize kids in spelling bees and volleyball championships. Business is booming, says Mr. Taub, “because everybody gets a trophy now.”

He is a fan of this practice.

Trophy inflation helps, too. For a time, the city’s basketball leagues competed for participants by awarding taller and taller tournament trophies. They topped out at 7 feet.

The trend is reversing, however. “It was hard for a 12-year-old kid to take them home on the subway,” says Mr. Taub.

A third of his business is corporate—sales and retirement awards being the most common. His showroom is packed with mementos celebrating life’s small victories: “NYC Department of Investigation Outstanding Performance by a Manager” or “25 Years of Service, [Procter & Gamble](#) .”

But he also gets some oddball commissions. The biggest award he has created was for performance artist Marni Kotak, who gave birth in a Bushwick gallery and awarded her baby a 12-foot trophy.

“I don’t know what she was doing,” says Mr. Taub.

The saddest customers are perhaps the grown men who come in and commission a towering sports trophy for themselves.

”They’ll often say it’s to replace a trophy that was lost or broken,” says Mr. Taub.

But he knows better. “Sometimes, you know, they just want a trophy.”

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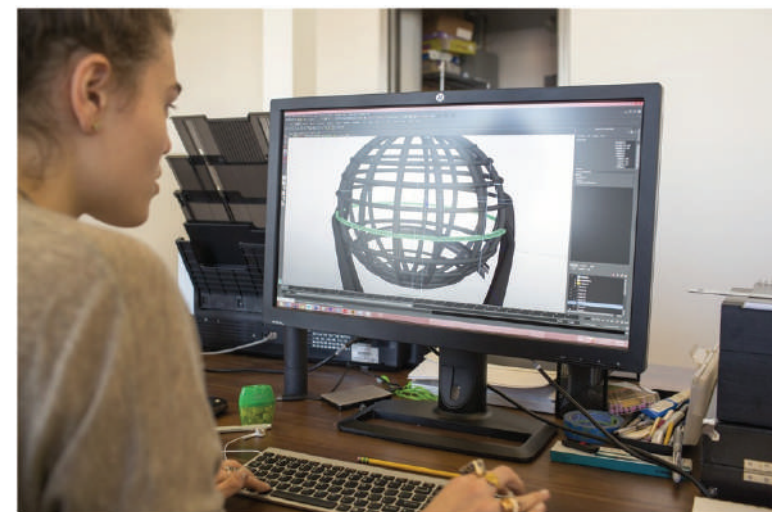
9 of 9 Society Awards creations include the Emmy Award, left, the Billboard Music Award, center, and the ALMA Award, given in recognition of American Latino contributions to music, television and film. JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



7 of 9 The National Magazine Awards Ellie sits on a conference table at Society Awards. The trophy is a licensed Alexander Calder sculpture. The sculptor's initials and an individual number are engraved on each award. JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



6 of 9 The New York Festival's World's Best Radio Programs Award, center, is flanked by an Ariane space employee award, left, and a World Dog Award to honor star pets in a display at Society Awards. JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



4 of 9 Sculpture designer Vicky Fotopoulou creates a three-dimensional model with wire frame for the Super Clio at Society Awards in Long Island City in Queens. The Super Clio will be awarded to the best commercial airing during the ... JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



5 of 9 Ms. Fotopoulou's design sketches of the Super Clio. JULIE PLATNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL