

WHERE TO GO IN 2022 • THE HEMI Q&A WITH BRIAN COX

Hemispheres

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Ask The Expert

[Bring a Hollywood interior designer into your home with Jake Arnold's online platform](#)

By Sahar Khan

When British-born interior-designer-to-the-stars Jake Arnold found himself on his own in Los Angeles during the pandemic, he temporarily moved in with his best friend, tech entrepreneur Leo Seigal. “I was like, I’m not going to live alone,” says Arnold, who has designed homes for Rashida Jones, Aaron Paul, Sophia Bush, and Chrissy Teigen and John Legend. “I thought the world was ending.”

One day, Seigal was going through his roommate’s Instagram messages—“because he’s so nosy,” Arnold says with a laugh—and noticed that he had hundreds of messages from people around



the world asking for design advice. “He was like, ‘I can’t believe people are just asking you expecting to get an answer,’” recalls Arnold, sitting alongside Seigal during a recent call with *Hemispheres*. That moment sparked an idea that has turned the bespoke interior design industry on its tufted leather headboard.

Last February, Arnold, 31, and Seigal, 30, launched The Expert, an online platform that connects design-challenged clients with high-end interior designers for Zoom advice sessions. These calls range from 25 to 115 minutes and cost anywhere from \$400 to \$2,500, depending on the designer. Many of the 130 names on The Expert’s roster can also be found on *Architectural Digest*’s AD100 list—the industry’s equivalent of the Oscars. Among the standouts are Brigette

Michael Clifford



Opposite page, from top: Jake Arnold (left) and Leo Seigal; an interior by Brian Paquette, one of The Expert's designers; this page, from top: Arnold's design for actor Aaron Paul's home; his work on the home of actress Sophia Bush

to democratize personalized design. Nowadays, Arnold says, "most people, regardless of whether they have a design background or they've had an experience with an interior designer, are aware of their favorite designers in a different way than they used to be." The Expert makes getting to work with them an achievable dream for many.

Along the same lines, Arnold says that he's inspired by the sense of community that's evident in his venture. "I feel like so much time is spent on trying to make your brand or your business bigger and better than other people in your industry," he says. "This brings people together and builds a platform for them all to succeed."

Of course, one could question how a business that was created to meet the conditions of a pandemic will do as life returns to normal. Seigal, for one, isn't concerned. "People's obsession with their homes," he observes, "isn't going to go anywhere."

Romanek (whose clients include Beyoncé and Demi Moore), Ariel Ashe and Reinaldo Leandro (Jake Gyllenhaal and Seth Meyers), Martin Brudnizki (Soho House Group, Four Seasons Hotels), and, of course, Arnold himself. (A consultation with Arnold—a self-taught maestro whose very first home project, for actress and dancer Julianne Hough, landed on the cover of *Better Homes & Gardens*—runs \$1,700.)

The sessions can cover a single room or an entire home, and can include guidance on furniture placement, paint color, shopping resources, and more. Some clients even book meetings to discuss space planning before they break ground on their homes. "We have one designer who literally had someone pay for, like, 20 sessions, and they've done their entire house," Arnold says, adding that this still comes out much cheaper than a full-service contract with these same designers, which can run hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"Designers are loving it," says Seigal. That may seem counterintuitive, but Seigal notes that the majority of project inquiries they receive don't justify a full-service client relationship. "No one likes to turn away business, and they think we've given them the ability to do a quicker iteration of what they do with their full-service clients."

The Expert has proven so popular that Seigal and Arnold, who plan to keep their list tightly curated, have more than 1,000 applications from designers who want to join. Clients also clearly love the service, with thousands of customers signing on for sessions over the past 11 months. Investors, too, are seeing the promise, including Gwyneth Paltrow, who joined the ranks last spring.

Perhaps the best explanation for the platform's success is that it is helping

