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by
**Véronique
Vienne**

The

ALLURE

of LEISURE

The myth of the leisure class is alive and well in France, where it's considered bad manners to discuss financial arrangements or work issues with friends and acquaintances. Unlike in the United States, where sports metaphors are popular tropes in business circles, being overtly competitive here is offensive. On the other hand, kicking around ideas while lingering over a five-course meal in a convivial restaurant is deemed the ideal business call. But pretending to ignore the clock is more than a strat-

egy; it's an aesthetic. French designers try to flaunt a culture of stylish nonchalance. And now leisure, key to the art de vivre, has a new champion: Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance, a 35-year-old designer who creates environments and furniture that reinforce the impression that there's no need to rush, because you've already arrived.

Duchaufour-Lawrance is part of a generation for whom respect for nature, not overt professional success, is a top priority. One of the emerging French designers on

Courtesy Bernhardt Design

Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance's furniture—fluid, curvaceous and seemingly handmade—harks back to an old and noble French tradition.



CORVO
BERNHARDT DESIGN

Here in Bernhardt's North Carolina plant, Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance gives his creation a last finishing touch.



the European scene, he is for the first time confronting the U.S. market, where success, not sentiment, is the main measure of excellence. "He's a unique individual," says Jerry Helling, creative director of Bernhardt Design, for which Duchaufour-Lawrance designed the Corvo chair, to be introduced this spring at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair. "Unlike so many designers, Noé doesn't interpret differences of opinion as criticisms. He appreciates our ideas as much as we appreciate his." The work with Bernhardt not only tested Duchaufour-Lawrance's adaptability and creative resilience; it also tested the resilience of his chair. "I was glad I wasn't my chair," says Duchaufour-Lawrance, laughing. "I would have buckled under pressure. I couldn't believe the pounding, pushing, pulling, and kicking it took in the testing stage. The American norms are so much more strenuous!"

Trained as a sculptor, like his father, and raised on the Brittany coast, he spent hours on the beach observing the changing light over the water and the storm clouds gathering over the horizon. A graduate of the prestigious Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, he knows how to draw. To develop his ideas, he begins by tracing on paper fluid lines as soft as dunes. His furniture looks at first like it has been carved by the surf or shaped by the wind. What he calls "nature"—the source of his inspiration, he says—is the eroding and soothing power of time. What he enjoys most about his craft is the time it takes to develop an idea from start to finish. He loves the shuttling back and forth between the drawing table and the

Shown in his studio, Duchaufour-Lawrance enjoys the tactile part of the design process. Fabricated almost entirely by hand by five cabinetmakers, the pieces of the Corvo chair, above and right, are assembled by a single worker.

computer, the 3-D views and the digital files, the technical detailing and the prototyping, the testing and adjusting, and, of course, all those leisurely discussions with furniture manufacturers in a congenial atmosphere in Tuscany, Burgundy, or North Carolina.

Duchaufour-Lawrance's trademark is products and furniture whose forms are hewed, chiseled, beveled, and burnished. You want to touch them. Handle them. Take your time enjoying them. Wood is his material of choice, though he manages to turn upholstered chairs and porcelain vases into things that look like buffed seashells, polished pebbles, or smooth driftwood. His style has been compared to Art Nouveau (his company is called

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OTTOMAN LIGNE ROSET

Upholstered in one or two colors, with a network of support seams forming a decorative pattern, the seats are both snug and slightly edgy.



Corvo, courtesy Bernhardt Design; Ottoman, courtesy Ligne Roset/Cinna

Roseau, courtesy Ligne Roset; Derby, courtesy Zanotta; Air France Lounge Tokyo, courtesy Nacasa & Partners

ROSEAU LIGNE ROSET

Duchaufour-Lawrance loves vases because "their function is not forcing you into complex shapes." These tall biomorphic vases are as fluid as the branches of coral polyps.



There is a range of formal expression in Duchaufour-Lawrance's work, but all his designs have one thing in common. They take possession of the space unapologetically.

Néonata, a name that suggests new, newborn, and nature), but this analogy is somewhat misleading. His forms don't look like they've been recently hatched but give the impression of having been elaborated on slowly. Whether fabricated in Italy or the United States, much of his furniture is hand-made the old-fashioned way, by craftsmen using traditional methods.

For Ceccotti, the first company to produce a line of his residential furniture (starting in 2006 with the unusual Manta desk), the fabrication process is so time-consuming that only a handful of the dozens of designs he has created are assembled monthly. The Tuscan furniture maker (whose motto, borrowed from Lawrence Ferlinghetti, is "constantly risking absurdity") not only taught Duchaufour-Lawrance some of the finest techniques in wood carving; it also helped him shape his own sensibility. The recent Buonanotte Valentina line, which includes a bed whose headboard looks like a striated wave; the Obi tables, lanky with spindly legs; and the Estate lounge chairs, broad-based

DERBY ZANOTTA

The leather back and upholstered seat of this chair embrace each other like two pieces of a puzzle.



AIR FRANCE LOUNGE
Waiting for a flight in a space that combines zones for socialization and privacy can be useful, not just a waste of time.

yet wispy, are all evidence of Duchaufour-Lawrance's enduring love of curves.

It's no secret that the Ceccotti furniture challenges the laws of gravity—and those of the market. The company's business philosophy consists in blatantly ignoring trends. Even though it seems that the collaboration between Franco Ceccotti and Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance would be a perfect match, the young Frenchman is not wedded to the elitist approach and "high theatrics" of his Italian mentor. The work he's done in the last year for Bernhardt shows that this virtuoso of the serpentine line is a solid pragmatist after all.

Helling remembers the preproduction phase of the Corvo chair as "a challenge because of the bevels, the tapers, the transitions. Nothing could be done on routing machines. It was a steep learning curve for us to figure out how to make the chair by hand at an affordable price." In the end, the North Carolinian cabinetmakers use no fewer than 13 different tools to





TOTEM REMANENCE BACCARAT

This "chandelier" is a flat, playful LED lighting fixture. The etched motif is a drawing of a design originally done for the last tsarina of Russia.

MAGMA UNDER GOLDEN MOON PIERRE BERGÉ

This art piece represents "the gold reflection of the moon on an oil slick," says the designer, who sometimes likes to create "beautiful objects inspired by ugly phenomenon."



"Noé thinks like an ensemblier, like someone who orchestrates ensembles rather than elaborates singular icons," says Gérard Laizé, director of VIA.

manufacture this handmade chair. But Corvo was a design that Bernhardt had been searching for over the years. The company needed a versatile guest chair that was modern yet traditional, Scandinavian-looking yet contemporary—reassuring yet hip. "There is a pleasing symmetry to the work of French designers," Helling adds. "Noé designed for us an attractive chair that feels unique, whether in natural wood or lacquered ebony."

There's a range of formal expression in Duchaufour-Lawrance's work, but all his

ESTATE AND BESIDE YOU

CECCOTTI

Made of solid walnut, each piece is unique. The side tables (Beside You) are in the current collection, while the Estate chairs are part of the exclusive Edizioni Speciali.

designs have one thing in common. They take possession of the space unapologetically and invite you to do the same: stop, sit down, lean back, and relax. Gérard Laizé, director of VIA (Valorisation de l'Innovation dans l'Ameublement), an influential nonprofit that promotes French designers, says that Duchaufour-Lawrance's special talent is his mastery of the third dimension and his uninhibited attitude toward ornamentation. "Noé is young and cutting-edge, yet he is a direct descendant of the *grands artistes décorateurs* from the thirties who were denigrated by the Modernists but are now rehabilitated. He thinks like an *ensemblier*, like someone who orchestrates ensembles rather than elaborates singular icons."

Duchaufour-Lawrance made a name for himself in Europe designing exclusive restaurants and clubs. In 2002, he was one of the designers of Sketch, a tony yet edgy London restaurant-club with a trendy bar and gallery space. He created a sensation with the restrooms, a cluster of freestanding white pods on the landing of a double-span grand staircase, their futuristic silhouettes visible above an igloo-shaped barroom. Suddenly, the

SENDERENS

Once a somber, wood-paneled, three-Michelin-star Parisian institution, the new Senderens restaurant is a lighthearted hall of mirrors, with unexpected "couture" touches.



Totem Remanence, courtesy Baccarat; Senderens, Roberto Frankenberg; Magma Under Golden Moon, Brice Vandermeeren; Estate and Beside You, Riccardo Bianchi

Sketch, Ken Hayden; Buonanotte Valentina, Riccardo Bianchi

loo at Sketch became a destination for London's fashionable crowd.

In 2005, Duchaufour-Lawrance transformed the venerable and stodgy Lucas Carton restaurant in Paris into a softly glowing venue. His decor, which included subtle couture overtones such as "embroidered" light fixtures and billowing ceiling canopies, attracted a lot of attention because, as legend goes, the restaurant's renowned chef, Alain Senderens, decided to give up his Michelin stars in order to open a more relaxed contemporary eatery. "I love to eat," Duchaufour-Lawrance says. "That's why I like doing restaurants. But I also appreciate the fact that restaurants are not pressured

environments. Unlike stores or showrooms, where the idea is to display merchandise and encourage people to poke around, restaurants are first and foremost poetic places. As a designer, once you've dealt with the logistics of food service, your main concern is to allow customers to enjoy themselves."

At first, doing interiors appealed to Duchaufour-Lawrance because he didn't like the idea of dissociating objects from their surroundings. "Now what interests me is creating products that have a place in the preexisting environment of a brand," he says. His collaboration with each new client is an opportunity to discover a new visual vocabulary, new techniques, new markets. Totem Remanence, a light fixture for Baccarat, was a foray into a new universe of opulence and excess, but it also gave the company a chance to move in a more contemporary direction. The LED-based virtual candelabra grew out of a project Duchaufour-Lawrance undertook with Baccarat for Senderens. "We were eager to explore a noncrystal, nonincandescent alternative to our traditional chandeliers," explains Chantal Granier, Baccarat's creative director. "Noé etched on glass the archival drawing of a piece we had done for the last tsarina of Russia and sandwiched it between two one-way mirrors. When you turn on the light, the image is repeated at infinity."

When he was decorating VIP lounges and restaurants continued on page 105



SKETCH

An elite London destination, this whimsical restaurant-club includes an igloo-shaped barroom with a wraparound flight of stairs leading to a cluster of individual restrooms nestled in glowing white pods.

BUONANOTTE VALENTINA CECCOTTI

Introduced in 2008, the beds come in four styles, all with distinctive high headboards. The model shown here, with its gently curved wooden slats, is the most popular.



(for Air France in Tokyo, the Maya Bar in Monaco, Sénéquier in Saint-Tropez, or the Maison & Objet pressroom in Paris), Duchaufour-Lawrance was also designing furniture. He worked with Michel Roset, creative director and vice president of Ligne Roset, in 2007 on a lounge project for the W Hotel chain in Marrakech, Morocco. “Noé is an opinion leader,” Roset says. “I like the fact that he is young, a very nice guy, and that he is the designer of the Sketch restrooms!” When the W venture fell through, Roset decided to pursue the idea he and Duchaufour-

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Lawrance had been developing, a chair inspired by traditional Moroccan poufs. The Ottoman line, which will be launched in the United States during ICFE, is the result. Padded and deeply quilted, with seams forming a starlike pattern reminiscent of Arabic motifs, the chairs and sofas can be upholstered in two colors to create a younger look.

The originality of Duchaufour-Lawrance’s neo-Nouveau approach was acknowledged in 2007, when the Maison & Objet jury named him Designer of the Year. Since then, his practice has grown into a network of new projects as intertwined as the forms of his most complex creations: an extension of the Derby line for Zanotta, a perfume bottle for Paco Rabanne, a second lounge for Air France, a line of coffee tables for Ligne Roset. He keeps sending his ideas around to furniture makers to find the right distance between what he dreams of designing and what manufacturers are ready to put up with in terms of production headaches and marketing challenges. That’s the way it goes in this business. Ligne Roset receives 15 to 20 unsolicited ideas a week from top designers—what Michel Roset describes as “the results of artists’ insomnia.” Reflecting on the glut of new concepts and innovative designs, Duchaufour-Lawrance says that “none of us need more furniture, but we can all use new opportunities to dream.” ■ / *