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DEPARTMENTS

FEATURES

ON THE COVER: Huge Sudeley bench by Pablo Reinoso, 2010 THIS PAGE: Detail of *Untitled* by Helen Pashgian, 2012-2013

It Doesn't Even Have to Rhyme

NOT LONG AGO I ATTENDED A POETRY reading at New York City's 92nd Street Y. As I listened to the magnificent, often mellifluous (sometimes cacophonous) words of the four young poets who read (winners of the *Boston Review*'s annual Discovery Contest), I began to think about the ways in which poetry and design are related. They are both reductive, taking a larger whole and finding something smaller—a chair, a rug, a bowl, a pot—that represents it. Both disciplines rely on metaphors and other leaps of the mind to impart ideas; in one case, poetry, it is actual words, and in the other, design, it is implied. There is yet another connection: while the novelist and the architect might share the (right or wrong) belief that they are creating for a larger audience, most poets and many designers—primarily those whose work is bound for collectors, galleries, or museums—do not harbor such an idea.

I may have stretched this comparison as far as it will go, but lately I have been pondering the place of imaginative thinking in design, the magic and romance of it—the poetry of it, if you will. This came to mind during a visit to the entirely enchanting New York studio of Gaetano Pesce. It is in an unexpected location in a skinny old building on Broadway in Soho, and the studio itself is long and narrow and crammed—skinny floor to tall ceiling—with examples of Pesce's always brilliantly imaginative work. Pesce is the subject of a major retrospective at the MAXXI museum in Rome this summer, where it will be possible to bathe in the thoughts and dreams of his career, which now spans a half-century or so.

In this issue, too, we feature the eye-catching Miami Beach apartment of Philip Michael Wolfson, the London-based designer and architect whose work includes interior spaces, furniture, objects, and sculpture much as Pesce's does. For the most part, the similarities stop there. Pesce is overtly romantic, and his work exudes emotion—ripe forms bursting with brilliant and unexpected color. Wolfson is restrained and minimalist, his work abstract and theoretical.

But in the past year or so, both designers (without knowing each other well and without knowing each other's plans or intent) have produced a series of tables, both shown first at galleries in London, that pay homage to the lake—to actual lakes and to the idea of lakes. Pesce's lyrical Water Table series, shown last year at David Gill Galleries, included tables called Lake (above), Lagoon, Ocean, Pond, Puddle, and River and seemed almost like memories, fragments of a whole. Wolfson's Lakes series pays homage to some specific places—Lake Zurich (left), Lake St. Moritz, and the Red Sea— as well as more abstract notions; the others in the series are called Geo and D-Rill. They were shown at Themes and Variations Gallery in London.

Aesthetically (though both rely on what might be considered "new materials" such as resin) the two sets of tables, like the two designers, are really quite different. Yet there is a shared impulse—to take something powerful and translate it while at the same time making it both ponderable and impenetrable—that brings me back to the original conceit of this letter, that poetry and design can both, at times, dig deep into the universe and teach us much in just a few metaphors.

Beth Dunlop

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TOP: JOHN ROHRER PHOTOS BOTTOM: MAXIM NILOV PHOTOS

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This page: **After he moved into his mid-century building in Miami Beach, Philip Michael Wolfson began to scour open-air antiques sales, flea markets, and thrift shops to fill it—thus many of the pieces in his apartment lack specific provenance. Italian glass and an acrylic sculpture sit atop a table that Wolfson calls an "homage to Noguchi."** Facing page: **The Eero Saarinen Tulip table and chairs were a thrift shop score from a period when the demand for modern furniture was not as strong.**

IN 1957, WHEN BELLE TOWERS OPENED, the apartments came fully furnished (if you wished) with interiors by a society decorator no less. There was seven-day maid service, a round-the-clock doorman, modern all-electric "dream" kitchens, plus "speed" elevators, car washers, and porters. "Belle Towers apartments are not to be compared to any other apartments," read one 1957-era advertisement that expounded: "A private estate would serve as a better comparison...the quiet seclusion required for refined gracious living is zealously guarded by the carefully selected staff of Belle Towers."

A Well-Stated Place

The London-based designer Philip Michael Wolfson filled his mid-century Miami Beach apartment with treasures of its own era

Conceived as a luxury rental building with a lot of panache, the building itself is a bit of a Miami Beach icon, designed by Robert Swartburg, whose other works include the famed Delano Hotel and the just-renovated Vagabond Motel. Another advertisement pronounced it the "Established Address of Prestige." Today in the lively

By Beth Dunlop Photography by Robin Hill

The living room sofas were a kind of hand-me-down from an apartment Wolfson designed for Swiss clients in a nearby Miami Beach condominium. When the clients sold their apartment, he was able to reuse the large-scale Italian sectionals. The rug, a junk-shop find, is Scandinavian.

Wolfson's prototype RSVP candleholders are from 1996.

Wolfson, making a point over a maquette of one of his Ikebana vases. The painting in the background is by Purvis Young.

South Beach, "quiet seclusion" is a glimmer of a memory. But the eight-story Belle Towers, now flanked by bigger and taller buildings, remains a prime and almost-untouched example of Miami's best mid-century architecture.

In fact, it was one of the few buildings that the London-based designer Philip Michael Wolfson considered when he shopped for an apartment in Miami. And though Wolfson's formal interests as a designer revolve around the dynamic forms of futurism and its contemporary interpretation in furniture and sculpture, he wanted to live in the Miami of a particular era—and in a building that was an icon of that time. A great aunt had lived in Belle Towers back in the "refined gracious living" days, so he had strong childhood images of it. "The building is exactly what I remembered about Miami," he says.

An American by birth, Wolfson had moved to London when he was still in architecture school and stayed. But the time came when he yearned for "a place in the states." At Belle Towers, he found a one-bedroom unit that was basically unchanged. It still had its original bathrooms and kitchen, which featured (and still does) a Frigidaire Flair Custom Imperial countertop oven and range. "It's still the original apartment," he says. "Really, I just stripped the floors."

He filled the space with fine examples of modern design—much of it found through serendipity at Lincoln Road's Sunday antiques and collectibles market or in thrift shops, pieces more readily nabbed by astute buyers in the 1990s—to create a rich but spare aesthetic. "Absolutely, I found treasures," he says. "Everyone did. Those were the days." The furniture ranges from an Eero Saarinen Tulip dining table and chairs to two Wendell Castle Molar chairs in the living room and a Castle chair in one corner of the bedroom. There's an Aldo Tura side table, Swedish chests, an American 1950s desk, a set of Noguchi "homage" tables, a table by Richard Schultz for Knoll, and two Charles and Ray Eames Aluminum Group chairs for Herman Miller. The porch features a few family hand-me-downs from his cousin, the collector and museum-founder Mitchell Wolfson Jr.

To all this, Wolfson added in "lots of objects," in wood and glass especially, plus works by African, Cuban, and African-American artists, notably Gilberto Ruiz, who is Cuban-born but works in New York, and the late Purvis Young, who despite fairly widespread national recognition continued to work as he always had in his back-street studio spaces in central Miami. "I was drawn to their figurative qualities," Wolfson says.

Wolfson spent his childhood in such cities as Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles—wherever his father's career as a rocket engineer took the family. In his third year at Cornell University, he decided to study abroad and enrolled in the Architectural Association in London. "And I realized that the AA was what I wanted—more design-oriented and less engineering-oriented."

As luck would have it, he was hired for a summer job by a then-little-known emerging architect named Zaha Hadid, a professor of his. He was one of two designers she hired for her tiny office that year, and the work was largely competitions (most of which they won). "That summer," Wolfson recalls, "was a very important summer." One thing led to another and Wolfson stayed as Hadid's career grew, then

The enclosed porch features family furniture given to Michael Wolfson by his cousin Mitchell Wolfson Jr.

The designer of the mid-century American desk is unknown; the chairs are Charles and Ray Eames Aluminum Group for Herman Miller.

The Frigidaire Flair Custom Imperial range and oven has most likely been a part of the apartment since the beginning.

Cuban-born Gilberto Ruiz painted the toreador who presides over the Wendell Castle Castle chair in the bedroom.

founded his own firm, Wolfson Design. London became home, along with Zurich, where his longtime partner Beat Raaflaub, lives. Miami makes three.

His career has taken Wolfson around the world. The Shanghai gallerist Pearl Lam has long represented him (and has displayed his work at Design Miami shows). Not long ago, he created the furniture for Robert, the restaurant in the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. In recent years he's shown his work in such divergent locations as London, Lake Como, and Miami. There's a range, from interiors to furniture to what he likes to call "functional sculpture" (most typically one-off or extremely limited editions) to sculpture itself. "Futurism is what interests me most, and postwar abstraction, the development of contemporary art from its beginnings," he says, "mostly minimalism and motion. The dynamic of motion interests me, and the fluidity of it. I just like to give it more speed."

For the most part, one might not sense that from his Belle Towers apartment, where only small pieces of Wolfson's own design, some RSVP candleholders and a maquette among them, are on view. Yet when he sits just so in the living room and looks past the Molar chairs and the bronze sculpture and catches a glimpse of the Noguchi-esque tables, he sees a "continuation of the dynamic," he says. "It's all there." M