

Bros & co

Artist, musicians, furniture designers - no matter what they turn their hands to, the multi-talented Haas brothers achieve lift-off

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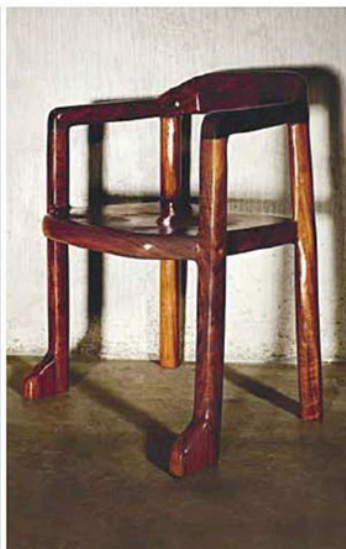


Los Angeles has been good to Simon and Nikolai Haas. The 27-year-old twins moved to the city six years ago, after a spell in New York and a childhood in Austin, Texas. Nikolai was playing in bands and Simon was a painter, but both enjoyed what Nikolai calls 'creative construction', the skills which they learned from their father, a stonemason.

'We've been in construction since we were ten or 11 years old, sanding stuff in the wood shop or helping our dad to do stonework,' says Nikolai. 'I later became a master carver, and Simon went to the Rhode Island School of Design and studied bladesmithing and a bunch of other trades.'

Once friends in the music, art and film industries discovered that the twins were skilled craftsmen, Simon and Nikolai would frequently find their phones ringing with requests. In 2010, the dancer and choreographer Ryan Huffington commissioned them to help him with a project he was working on at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art. Simon remembers the call: 'Hessid, "Hi, I heard you guys can build stuff. I want you to sing in drag, or naked, and make us some weird shiny thing." We were like, "OK, what can we make?" The resulting pyramid structure, which appeared to reveal Simon wearing only silver body paint, was the centerpiece of Huffington's parade.

Simon's boyfriend, the director Chris Coats, asked the twins to collaborate on a video for L.A. rapper Busta Rhyme; bands such as TV On The Radio and Neon Indian have also enlisted their creative input for



60/60 IDEAS
Clockwise from top left: 'Paper' chair with lacquered ash legs; 'Black Leg' table - built from solid maple, then burnt with a wetting torch - and highly lacquered bare bones Zenner chair, carved from solid walnut.

videos. Nikolai's fiancée, DJ Ana Bui, is a stylist. While working for the fashion director Nicole Frosinietti, she mentioned that Nikolai and his brother were adept at making things, and soon Frosinietti's assistant was also on the phone. Among other projects, he commissioned a pair of angel's wings that were worn onstage by Lady Gaga's harpist, and sterling silver art mount photographed by Mario Testino for *V Magazine*.

'LA is a rad place,' Nikolai says.

'We have this amazing group of friends around us. Many of the brothers' collaborations come from compatibilities within their management company, Stardust Brands, an eclectic network formed by the cultural catalyst Victoria Bryman. Nikolai also cites the fashion designers THW Atelier and the band Peaking Light as influences. 'It all transfers into furniture eventually.' Asked if they consider themselves West Coast designers, the response is unequivocal. 'Yeah, man. Old school.'

But don't imagine for an instant that they're stereotypical West Coast stoner dudes. An effort of being surrounded by incredibly successful, creative people is that the bar is raised very high in terms of ambition and commitment. Both Nikolai and Simon played for many years in Vincent Gallo's band, BRILLIGEE. 'His work ethic is beyond anybody I've ever met,' Nikolai says. It has completely inspired what we do now. I played with Gene Lennon a couple of times, too, and his grace and goofiness and sweetness has transferred into our work.' Adds Simon: 'There's a spirit in LA that is good and joy



bad—people just don't care what you're doing. Ever you in New York it's always really watching each other. That's also what fine tunes people there, makes them really sharp. In L.A. you can do whatever you want to do. No body's going to judge you for it. To me, it's such an open city, and so available.'

That freedom has translated into a design practice that is remarkably eclectic. Aside from set designs and wearable art, they have produced ceramics, bronze vases, a brass door handle and colourful plinths in drippy resin. Increasingly, they are concentrating on furniture design and production, including carved walnut chairs and duckly upholstered pouffes and sofas. But they have no intention of narrowing their range; they refuse to be pigeonholed.

'We're open to doing everything. The defining factor is more to do with whether it's interesting to us, whether it's a product we really want to work on. We just want to do whatever's the most fun, the most inspiring,' Nikolai says. 'Fun' is a word that comes up a lot in conversation with the effortless duo. When I ask them whether they fear becoming jacks of all trades and masters of none, Simon

points out that they have both already reached points in previous endeavours, be it music, painting or stone carving, at which they could reasonably call themselves masters.

Their influences come more often than not, from outside the design world. 'I'm really into sci-fi,' says Simon. 'I'm obsessed with David Cronenberg, listening to Yes records and looking at the album art.' Counterbalancing this futurism is an old-fashioned sensitivity to materials. When they approach a project like a walnut chair, for instance, they ask themselves, 'What does the walnut want out of us?' They like their work to retain a handmade quality. They chose not to coat their brass coffee table with a protective lacquer, opting instead for a finished brass top, although it picks up fingerprints, can be buffed up at any time with a rag and some polish. 'We left our fingerprints on it when we first put it down,' remembers Nikolai, 'and the client liked it—luckily! We like to let it live and just be the material that it is.'

Right now, their company is growing at an remarkable rate, and they are planning to move out of their current Downtown L.A. studio into one that

POLYFIC PIECES

ABOVE, THE 'YOU'RE GRASS AND CROWN,' AND 'FLOW COUNT,' all upholstered with wool and finished with hand-stitched Angora wool seams

is three times the size. They are also collaborating with architects such as Peter Marino and John Coxon Marklee.

In addition to one-off commissions for clients, they are developing lines of limited-edition furniture with names like 'Ghost,' 'Animal' and 'Cartoon'. Naturally, it will be a challenge to retain the individually handmade feel of their objects as they are forced to delegate aspects of the production process.

Simon says they're undaunted. 'We only outsource simple jobs. We make the prototypes and we do the finishing. A project is in our hands at its conception, and it's always in our hands before it leaves the workshop. Everything we've ever built we've touched at some point. We don't have any interest in just drawing something and sending it off to China to be made. That will never happen!'

Their quality control is meticulous. 'We'll lose money hand over fist before we let a project go away,' says Nikolai. 'And we have,' adds Simon, wryly. 'If the expert on facts, then so be it, because we know that we can't make living doing what we're doing right now. And we're having a blast doing it!'

By Alexander Ross for *entire.com* and *redbook.com*



BRASS FIDUCIES

The pugs, bowls, and table float in their brass cube, hand forged from single pieces of metal that were casted in brass and the 4 built table ceramic bowls.

Opposite: "Buster" coffee table consisting of solid 2" x 2" x 1/2" block.