

Haute Haas

by Jeremy Lybarger photography The Riker Brothers

How the Haas brothers got into design is one of those improbable L.A. stories featuring a celebrity, money, and the chance magnetism of talent and opportunity. It was 2010, and actor Tobey Maguire was renovating his office at Sony Pictures Studios. He asked then-twenty-six-year-old Nikolai Haas if he wanted to design furniture for the space just for fun. Haas agreed and invited his twin brother, Simon, to collaborate. Over the next several weeks, the pair produced a miniature chair, a pouf, a brass table, and a decorative sculptural block. With the money from the commission, the brothers launched a design company—and with it, one of the most provocative brands in furniture and fine art.

The brothers' success stems from their personal and creative differences. A profile in the *Wall Street Journal* last year described them as “yin and yang: Simon messy and Nikolai orderly; Simon the partier, while Nikolai drank his first beer at age 25; Simon gay and Nikolai straight.” Both share a meticulous design instinct honed during summers spent at their father's stone-carving shop in Austin. Still, making furniture full-time is something of a fluke. Nikolai toured sporadically as a session musician with artists such as Vincent Gallo and Sean Lennon; Simon briefly attended the Rhode Island School of Design but dropped out before graduating. Both migrated to L.A. in 2007, lured by their older brother, Lukas, an actor whose credits include *Brick*, *Last Days*, *Inception*, and *Lincoln*.

Once word of mouth spread after 2010, the brothers became cult darlings in the Southern California design scene.

Nikolai's girlfriend, a stylist who assisted Nicola Formichetti, scored them a gig creating props and set designs for Lady Gaga. Other high-profile commissions soon followed: designing custom accoutrements for Mario Testino; furnishing architect Peter Marino's Louis Vuitton Maison in Shanghai; creating pieces for Donatella Versace's home collection, including the infamous bondage bench exhibited at the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Venice; and exhibiting at Design Miami/with R & Company, a New York-based gallery.

From their sprawling industrial warehouse in downtown Los Angeles, the twins continue to produce work of startling originality and craftsmanship. Their signature pieces are zoomorphic ottomans and chairs upholstered in reindeer or buffalo fur, crouched on bronze camel hooves and sprouting ram horns. There are domineering phallic lamps; ceramic urns with vaginal slits; and cheetah-legged tables finished in a brass honeycomb motif. The designs are simultaneously whimsical and disturbing—a chic mash-up of fetishism, art, and taxidermy. Now fetching between \$9,500 and \$75,000, they are also status objects among more adventurous collectors.

Barely thirty, the brothers are just getting started, and furniture is only one part of the triple-threat empire they envision. As Nikolai told *BLOUIN ARTINFO* in 2013, “We want to do fashion. We want to blend the line between art furniture and fine art, and we will be doing some public sculpture and philanthropic work.” All of it, no doubt, inimitable.



Opposite: Simon (left) & Nikolai Haas
on July 31, 2014, at the Haas Studio in Los Angeles

This Page, Right:
Unique, hand-thrown Red Father Accretion vase with porcelain slip in Angelyne glaze with gold neck.
 Designed and made by the Haas Brothers,
 Los Angeles, CA, 2014
 H. 30.5cm D. 14cm

Below:
Grouping of Glowcano Hex lamps in brass tile, with slumped, fused plexiglass shades.
 Designed and made by the Haas Brothers,
 Los Angeles, CA, 2013
 Dimensions variable

Opposite, clockwise from top:
Unique, hand-thrown Long Hanging Dong Accretion vase with porcelain slip in Angelyne glaze with gold luster.
 Designed and made by the Haas Brothers,
 Los Angeles, CA, 2014
 H. 31.8cm D. 40.6cm

Unique Dolph Tall stool from the Beast series, with white Icelandic Sheepskin and four cast bronze long legs.
 Designed and made by the Haas Brothers,
 Los Angeles, CA, 2013
 L. 43.2cm D. 52.1cm H. 76.2cm

Unique, hand-thrown Furry Vagina Accretion vase with porcelain slip in Cloudy Deep Space glaze.
 Designed and made by the Haas Brothers,
 Los Angeles, CA, 2014
 H. 17.1cm D. 17.8cm

