

IT'S OFTEN SAID THAT FRIENDS ARE OUR CHOSEN FAMILY, BUT THERE ARE PEOPLE FOR WHOM ACTUAL FAMILY MEMBERS ARE NOT ONLY FRIENDS, BUT ALSO SOURCES OF INSPIRATION, POSSIBLY LIFELONG COLLABORATORS. WITH NATIONAL SIBLINGS DAY THIS MONTH (APRIL 10), WE MEET THREE SETS OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHOSE TIES EXTEND WELL BEYOND FAMILY.

FAMILY



Simon, left, and
Niki Haas amid
their creations

Words PHOEBE REILLY

AFFAIR



Brothers of Invention

NIKOLAI AND SIMON HAAS

VISIT THE BASS MUSEUM IN MIAMI BEACH this month and you'll encounter an array of neon palm trees, oversized mushrooms and whimsical, biomorphic creatures that would be at home in a Björk video or a fever dream. This lush, surrealist tableau, the creation of artists Simon and Nikolai Haas—a.k.a. the Haas Brothers—is part of their "Fergully" show, which runs through April 21. On this

evidence, the 34-year-old, L.A.-based fraternal twins have clearly given each other permission to let their imaginations run wild.

"Our pieces are meant to engage the viewer," says Simon with a smile. Over the past decade, he and Nikolai (who goes by Niki) have gained notoriety for their tactile, irreverent, sometimes anatomically suggestive pieces that take cues from furniture but go playfully off the rails. One chaise on view at The Bass museum resembles an oddly elongated dog crossed with a caterpillar. Its sheepskin covering can be parted to reveal that the item is definitely a boy. "The main intention is never functionality," explains Niki.

OPENING PHOTO: JOE KRAMM / COURTESY OF R & COMPANY

“The main intention of our pieces is never functionality.”



Left: Myriad beasts from “Ferngully”
Below: Spotty Cru chair from the Afreak series



“I see their practice very much as a sieve of today’s culture,” read a recent statement from Marianne Boesky, whose New York gallery now represents the brothers, “drawing on the swirl of information we experience every day and recasting it in ways that push and question the definition of art.” Clients so far include Lady Gaga, who commissioned them to design sleek black masks for backup dancers, and L.A.’s trendy Ace Hotel, whose lobby bears a series of penciled murals depicting iconic pop-cultural moments, like Britney Spears’ head-shaving.

Despite their closeness, the twins (whose

older brother, the actor Lukas, first gained fame opposite Harrison Ford in *Witness*) are very different. As a youngster, Simon preferred dresses and describes himself as “brainy and undeniably gay,” while Niki “played hockey and dressed exclusively in Umbro.” By the time they were teenagers, their divergent paths had become a source of stress for Simon. “When I went to college, I fell into a depression because half of me wasn’t physically there,” he says. He toyed with the idea of becoming a chef, a painter, a dancer, until Niki pitched the idea of collaborating in the arts. “I think he saw me struggling to cope with adulthood,” says Simon. “I was in the throes of alcoholism, and he gave me a way forward.”

Now, the brothers spend most of their days working together in their exposed-brick downtown L.A. studio, coaxing ideas into existence amid shelves of their ceramic *Accretion Vases*, which resemble inebriated sea anemones and are hand-painted in colors you’d expect to find in a coral reef. For the most part, Simon tinkers with materials and establishes a philosophy for each project, while Niki sketches and sculpts objects alongside their 10-person creative team.

In addition to mentoring gifted adolescents for YoungArts, they’re currently working on an exhibit called “Madonna,” an “homage to the future,” according to Niki, which will debut in New York later this year. It features a Virgin Mary statue as well as what Simon calls the “fantasy ecosystem” that has become their signature. “Niki and I are always building a kingdom, where he is the fauna and I am the flora,” he says. “It’s not like we finish each other’s sentences, but we finish each other’s creative process.” >

Unexpected Pairing

ANDRÉA AND ROBIN MCBRIDE

YOU ONLY HAVE TO LOOK AT WINEMAKERS Andréa and Robin McBride to know they are sisters, but they grew up on different sides of the planet, unaware of the other's existence. The half-siblings, who share a father, were born in Los Angeles nine years apart. Robin spent her childhood among the hillside wineries of Monterey, California, while Andréa moved with her mother to New Zealand and worked on her uncle's vineyard. Their father disappeared from their lives early on and eventually passed away, but his dying wish was for his daughters to meet.

In 1999, when Robin was 25 and Andréa was 16, relatives connected the two women. "There's not a manual for that," says Robin, who was initially wary that the news of her sister might be some sort of hoax. She recalls their first face-to-face encounter at New York's LaGuardia Airport: "We hugged, tears came, but there were no words." Both were overjoyed to discover they were not only children, but particularly Andréa, who gets emotional when discussing how, at six, she lost her mother to cancer.

In addition to a shared love of barbecue sauce and Aaliyah, the pair soon discovered their mutual proximity to the wine industry. Andréa moved to California to attend college and soon, she explains, "Robin and I were doing this thing called 'drive and dream,' where we would drive with no destination in mind and just talk. We kept coming back to the McBride Sisters wine company. Like, how crazy would that be?" she laughs.

The sisters started out with an import business, launched in 2005, bringing wine to the States from New Zealand. Despite skepticism from a predominantly white, male industry, the McBrides opened their own sustainable winery in New Zealand in 2010, and later expanded to California, becoming among the first female African-American vintners in the U.S. "We've had to be the best because we don't get a lot of slack," says Andréa, 36, who recalls one gatekeeper's backhanded compliment about their

"We've had to be the best because we don't get a lot of slack."



The McBride sisters in one of their Napa County vineyards. Below: Robin, left, and Andréa

wines being "actually good." She tends to focus on the marketing and corporate side of the business. "'No' is not really an answer for her, and that's worked in our favor," says Robin, 45, who keeps a closer eye on the winemaking process.

Today, McBride Sisters Wines is headquartered in Oakland and operates six vineyards along California's central coast, as well as two in New Zealand. "Our travel schedule is off the hook," Andréa says. "What's really cool is that today our sparkling brut rosé from New Zealand uses a pinot noir [grape] from a vineyard I planted when I was probably 11."

Together they oversee a mostly female staff, which will expand once they open an urban tasting room in Oakland in the fall. "We're big believers in making wine accessible to people," says Andréa. To that end, McBride Sisters offers a Black Girl Magic collection at under \$25 per bottle, and has also partnered with a nonprofit benefitting female vintners to create a She Can line of canned wine.

Looking back, the women, who both have families of their own now, believe their childhood separation made them better-suited to working together. "There was no weird sibling rivalry, no 'You were Mommy's favorite' stuff that went on," says Andréa with a laugh. "We're so much in sync, but because we're missing this period in each other's lives, we're still learning about each other every day." >



Sisters in Arms

PHOEBE AND ANNETTE STEPHENS

THE STEPHENS SISTERS HAVE A shortcut for spotting incompatible romantic partners. “Sometimes people are weirded out that we’re together so much,” says Phoebe, 42, “but whoever we’re with just has to understand.” Annette, 33, chimes in: “They’re dating twins.”

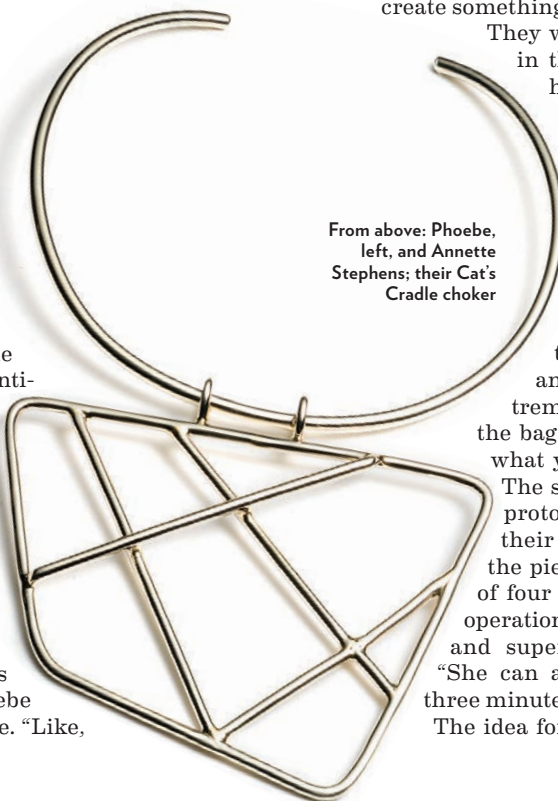
While not technically twins, the half-sisters’ connection is just as intimate, especially after a decade spent designing jewelry together as Anndra Neen. The pair specializes in accessories that seem elegantly fit for either a red-carpet soirée or a sword fight: Hammered silver chokers, thick helix cuffs and the aptly named Athena necklace conjure gladiatorial strength, and their designs have attracted powerful women (Michelle Obama has carried their metal clutches). “Phoebe can see into the future,” says Annette. “Like,

this might be on trend today, but she wants to create something that will last forever.”

They work together out of a studio in the trendy Juárez neighborhood of their native Mexico City and mesh so well that they share credit for each creation, sometimes finishing each other’s sketches, which are often inspired by trips to places like Kashmir or Rio de Janeiro. Their taste can lean toward the risky, like their signature Cage clutch, an unusual see-through accoutrement. “The philosophy behind the bag is that you decorate it with what you put in it,” says Annette. The sisters spend time with each prototype before committing to their seasonal look book; later, the pieces are produced by a team of four artisans—a relatively small operation. “Annette is highly creative and super-organized,” says Phoebe. “She can answer 16 emails in under three minutes.”

The idea for Anndra Neen was born >

From above: Phoebe, left, and Annette Stephens; their Cat’s Cradle choker





after their first solo trip together, to Japan in 2009. Based in New York at the time, Annette, a struggling actress, and Phoebe, who'd worked in fashion and PR, weren't particularly happy. Inspired by the craftsmanship and street style on display in Tokyo, they locked themselves in Phoebe's apartment for a month; six months later they were setting up their Mexico City workshop to meet the demands of upscale New York City boutiques.

"Sometimes people are weirded out that we're together so much."

Their designs are in part an homage to their paternal grandmother, Annette Nancarrow, a painter and jewelry designer whose art deco pieces were worn by the likes of Frida Kahlo and Peggy Guggenheim. "We heard all sorts of amazing stories," says Phoebe, including that Nancarrow and Kahlo's pet monkeys enjoyed mating with one another. Raised with three brothers in Mexico City's San Angel neighborhood, Phoebe and Annette formed an alliance despite their age difference, which they suspect also saved them from petty rivalries. "I don't think we ever experienced the jealousy thing," says Annette. Phoebe adds

From left: The Stephens sisters' grandmother Annette Nancarrow designed this necklace worn by Frida Kahlo; Michelle Obama with an oval hammered clutch by the sisters

that, because Annette is gay, "we never had that thing of liking the same guy."

Currently, the sisters are preparing to launch Anndra Neen's first home collection, which includes a Cage mirror, due later this year. And both are finally in a relationship with people who respect the intensity of their bond. "Sometimes, when we spend the weekend away, we're not there to reality-check each other and we're like, Oh, my God, we're going nuts," says Phoebe, laughing. "We think it's healthy." **AW**

The Miranda choker and Cage clutch

