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SHOP TALK

WEXLER GALLERY

This Philadelphia specialist in modern and contemporary design is as much a sculpture gallery as it is a furniture shop, offering pieces that blur the line between art and function and push the boundaries of materials and form.

By JoAnn Greco | Photographs by Josh Gaddy

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SHOPPABLE STORY

Lewis Wexler says he's "always been a furniture guy at heart." But to refer to the pieces typically on display at Philadelphia's Wexler Gallery — which he co-owns with his wife, Sherri — as mere "furniture" would be like walking onto the grounds of Giverny and remarking on the pretty flowers.

Consider Vivian Beer's elegant steel bench, *Anchored Candy, No. 7* (2014), which features the swooping contours of a stiletto pump and is coated in a custom-made, deep ruby-red paint usually reserved for cars. Sure, you can take a seat on it — but what you really want to do is stare, touch and circumnavigate.

Then there's Brian Gladwell's charming but enigmatic *Rocking Horse* (2010). The form is familiar, but the material — corrugated cardboard — isn't, playing with notions of function and durability. The two works are part of "Gallery Selects" (on view through September 27), an eclectic assemblage of contemporary works that the Wexler team has identified as current favorites.

Husband-and-wife team Lewis and Sherri Wexler opened the design-focused Wexler Gallery in a light-filled corner space in Philadelphia's Old City neighborhood in 1999.





The pieces really cement the transition from studio furniture to design that we began about eight years ago,” Sherri says. “They’re less about the precision of craftsmanship and more about exploring technical processes and using unusual materials.” This focus brings the couple a long way from their beginnings in the New York art world. The two met at Christie’s, where Lewis was the assistant vice president of the 20th-century decorative arts department and Sherri an administrator and junior specialist in Latin American works in the prints department. She would soon leave to pursue a career in video production, while Lewis eventually joined the Madison Avenue gallery of Anthony DeLorenzo, specialists in French Art Deco. When the couple decided to relocate to Philadelphia, where Sherri had family, and open their own gallery, it seemed natural that they’d gravitate to French design (especially works by Lalique, Daum and Gallé).

 **The Dominant Sophia**, 2014, by Joanna Manousis, a wall sculpture made of crystal and 24-carat gold-plated mirror, and the **Fauteuil II** armchair, 2012, by Philipp Aduatz, are part of the gallery’s current exhibition, “Gallery Selects,” on view through September 27.



But when Peter Joseph, a prominent New York dealer for the white-hot studio furniture movement, died in 1998, leaving masters like metalsmith Albert Paley and furniture maker Wendell Castle without a place to exhibit in the region, the Wexlers switched gears to fill the gap, opting to focus more on studio furniture and decorative glass. They ended up in Old City, which was at

last coming into its long-heralded promise as Philly's "Soho." In choosing an empty storefront with huge windows that hadn't let in daylight for years — the space was formerly a celebrated nightclub — they put a much-needed gloss on the four-block area when they opened the gallery in 1999.

Today, the spacious gallery lights up the prominent corner of 3rd and Race streets,

juxtaposing statement pieces by such top names as Castle and glass artist Harvey Littleton against emerging conceptual designers and fabricators including Beer and Timothy Schreiber.

 Sculptural seating at Wexler includes, from left: **Melting Chair Black Chrome**, 2012, by Philipp Aduatz; **Anchored Candy No. 7** and **Anchored Candy No. 6**, 2014, by Vivian Beer; and **Morphogenesis Chaise**, 2010, by Timothy Schreiber.



In the gallery's center, Vivian Beer's stainless steel **Black Bridge Bench**, 2011, sits beneath a 2010 **chandelier** by Michael Biello made of new and vintage Venetian glass.

Vertical Wave, 2014, a bent poplar plywood screen by New York artist Aswoon/Susan Woods, communes with a sculptural **mirror**, 1975, by Wendell Castle, and the corrugated cardboard **Rocking Horse**, 2010, by Brian Gladwell.



The eclecticism that's become their signature has been there from the start, when they tossed smaller Art Deco pieces into the studio mix — sensuous glass vases and lamps from masters like Lalique and Daum — and began to work with the glass artist Dale Chihuly on selling his works on the secondary market, a specialty of Wexler that still exists today.

In putting together such a mix, “We were ahead of our time,” Lewis says. “But there was certainly a segment of Philadelphia-area buyers who were excited about what we were offering,” he says, describing how very early on a collector came in looking for Jean Prouvé furniture and walked out with lots of other pieces. “That’s been typical for us. We’re still interested in breaking down the barriers between design, furniture and craft.”

WEXLER GALLERY |

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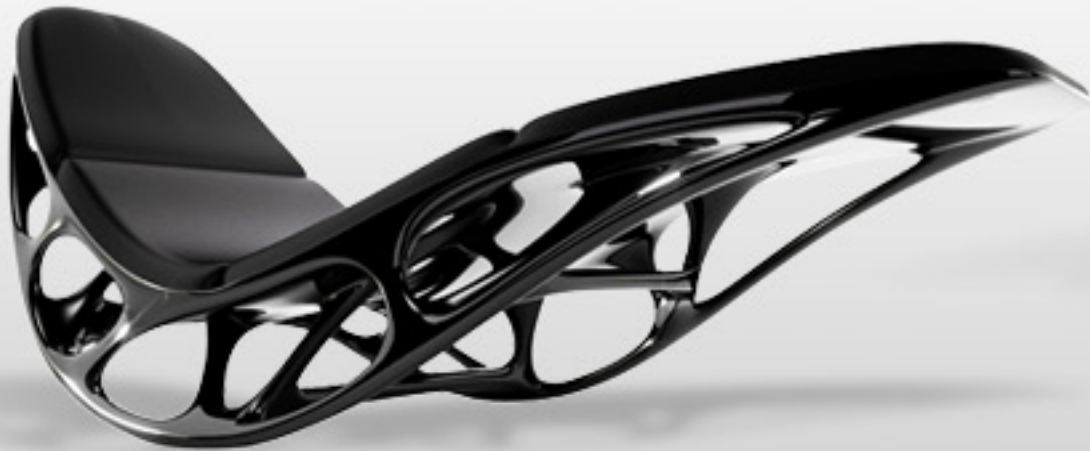


VIEW THE STOREFRONT

TALKING POINTS

Lewis and Sherri Wexler shares their thoughts on a few choice pieces.

1



1. MORPHOGENESIS CHAISE, 2010, BY TIMOTHY SCHREIBER

Timothy is a talented young designer and architect living in Singapore. We love this piece, which is sculptural, functional and well-crafted — the perfect trifecta. There are heavy architectural influences, and the piece appears to be in motion even when it is still. It is just a sexy piece of design.

2



2. FORMS IN NATURE, 2013, BY HILDEN DIAZ

When a work of art causes a visceral reaction, you know the artist is on to something. Smart, innovative and captivating, this 3D-printed chandelier instantly transforms any space into a mystical, enchanted forest. The Denmark-based artist duo of Hilden Diaz has given us a mechanism for escapism right in our own homes.

3



3. ROCKING HORSE, 2010, BY BRIAN GLADWELL

Gladwell's nostalgic and iconic Rocking Horse begs the question of why the artist chose to use corrugated cardboard. Is the object meant to be admired and not used? Is the degeneration of the cardboard over time part of the piece's intent? That it forces the viewer to ponder the relationship between functionality and ornament makes it an interesting and challenging piece.

4



4. MIRROR, 1975, BY WENDELL CASTLE

This piece is a sweet gem from Wendell's work from the '70s. It has everything we love from the time period: the naturalist shape, the beautiful grain of the wood and the sense of history.

6



5. INFUSION BLOCK IN ORANGE, GOLD, BLUE AND CHERRY, 2014, BY JAMIE HARRIS

Sometimes the best results come from experimentation. Such is the case with Jamie's glass Infusion series, in which he's played with detailed layers of color that mimic the movement and experience of working with hot glass. You can feel one color enveloping another. Jamie has created paintings in glass: subtle, sensual and beautiful.

5



6. ILLUMINATED SCULPTURE, 2014, BY ANDY PAIKO

Andy is one of the most talented young artist/designers we have had the honor of representing. This piece has it all: hand-blown glass elements, fiber and metal. It can be reconfigured to meet the client's needs. Andy's design process is thorough and well-executed, and this piece so unique and beautiful, it's inspirational.