

Issue Date: October 2010 Issue

A Lust for Rust



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Architectural Digest.

Wein travels to Dubai and LA the way others travel to Pittsburgh and Columbus and complains when he is served less than five-star food. He favors expensive fitted T-shirts and designer aviator sunglasses. It's hard to believe, then, that the times the artist feels most at home is when he's surrounded by garbage.

"When I was 8 years old, I was constantly embarrassing my parents by pulling stuff out of trash cans on the sides of the road," he says. "My job is to buy junk and remake it into art."

It was an aesthetic developed, in part, by a childhood spent delving through his uncle's car junkyard in Parma and melding things that were not supposed to go together, such as seat belts and door handles.

"I was recycling before it was cool," Wein says.

But not everyone saw the value in Wein's constructions. At Kent State University, Wein's art professors thought the Shaker Heights native, who suffers from dyslexia, might have a much brighter future as a mechanic. They simply didn't understand Wein's brain patterns.

"While everyone else is thinking linearly, going from a to b to c, Jason thinks x, w, b," says Dave Taylor, a Cleveland-area artist. "He has this unique ability to see how a scrap of, say, a doorknob can be completely reframed into a leg support in a table, for instance."

Wein only lasted a few semesters at Kent State before deciding he'd be more successful forging his own path. For a while, Wein believed his passion lay primarily in glassmaking. For inspiration, he decided to spend a few months in Alaska, studying the movement of water. "Glass, when melted to 950 degrees, has the consistency of a liquid," Wein explains. He wanted this hot glass to mimic the flow of water as he melded it into a lamp shade or a vase.

Success came accidentally. After his stint in Alaska, Wein stationed himself in an abandoned, unheated warehouse on West 25th Street. He didn't have any money to buy furniture or work tables, so he created his own, using remnants of industrial parts he found in scrap yards. Sanded floorboards became tabletops; barbed wire formed the cage of a boom light.

Visitors to Wein's workshop suggested that industrial design was the artist's true calling. In a world of mass-produced, big-box aesthetics, Wein's work stood out for its originality and authenticity.

These designs, which Wein refuses to call industrial art ("I see myself as a minimalist, modern artist," he says), caught on big in New York. His stark, streamlined pieces looked natural in Manhattan's lofted spaces with exposed brick.

In 2005, he opened his second Cleveland Art location in New York City, followed quickly by others in LA and Palm Beach, Fla., where the store sits on the same block as Chanel and Tiffany's. His work can sell for upwards of \$10,000.

"My work is timeless and classic," Wein explains. "It's constructed of material that was made to be indestructible and bulletproof."

And though Wein doesn't like to be typecast a Rust Belt artist, he has unintentionally adopted the Midwestern aesthetic of his forefathers: "I don't like to use materials that aren't American made," he says.

The headquarters of Cleveland Art, arguably the nation's largest brokerage house for recycled industrial art, is situated in an old, converted Tucker car dealership in the middle of Auburn Township.

Jason Wein, the boyish-looking, 40-year-old owner and founder of Cleveland Art, walks along the store's backyard, an acre-long scrap yard full of rusted bicycle frames, barbed wire, oxidized steel strips and old ladders.

"I bought this place in 1994 from a toothless hillbilly who used to burn tires for heat," Wein says. He has since rehabbed it into one of Cleveland's largest artist workshops and resale shops.

For 20 years, Wein has made a Rumpelstiltskin-like living turning Cleveland's industrial junk into gold. Steven Spielberg, Gwyneth Paltrow and Donald Trump all own furniture designed by Wein. Zach Braff just asked him to furnish his entire New York bachelor pad, which will soon be featured in a multipage spread in



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Conveyor Lights

Jason Wein uses the movement of water as inspiration in his work. He even spent a few months in Alaska studying icebergs and streams. When he melds lamp shades or vases, Wein wants the hot glass to mimic the flow of water. The lights in this conveyor lamp also draw inspiration from the natural world. They are as colorless as water, but when reflected on walls, give off a curved shape that is its own work of art. The lamp shades, on the other hand, are made from the conveyor belts of old, heat-treating factory machines. It is this juxtaposition of industrial toughness and natural beauty that makes Wein's pieces so interesting. Both Gwyneth Paltrow and Steven Spielberg own lamps created by Wein.