

THE DESIGNERS



TWIN STARS
Brothers Nikolai, left,
and Simon Haas in Los
Angeles atop a brass
stool of their own
design.

OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, 27-year-old fraternal twins Simon and Nikolai Haas have become the wonder boys of the Southern California design world. Together, they've conceived and fabricated everything from Cubist club chairs and globular brass vases to custom ceramic light fixtures and angel wings for Lady Gaga. It's only when pressed for a title that the pair admit to being furniture designers. Perhaps that's because they see design as a broader calling: simply put, making things people haven't seen before.

The Haas brothers' sprawling industrial studio in downtown Los Angeles is half science lab, half art studio. There, they experiment with raw materials like resin and metal, pushing these substances into shapes that seem to defy nature. And experimentation is what facilitated their arrival as rising design stars: Simon and Nikolai used flat hexagonal brass tiles—typically able to adjoin only on a horizontal plane—to clad the rounded surfaces of a footstool for a recent showing of the functional *objets d'art* at Manhattan's R 20th Century gallery. "We'll find a material we like and do

TWO OF A KIND

Twins Nikolai and Simon Haas are using their combined talents—a wild eye for artistry, traditional carpentry skills and a deep Hollywood rolodex—to build one of the most innovative furniture lines around

BY STINSON CARTER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA EISNER

everything wrong with it until something comes out right," says Simon. In creating his "fungus accretion" vases, Simon brushed the rough surface of a ceramic vase with a clay-and-water solution until it built upon itself like a hand-dripped sand castle.

Despite their often-flamboyant style, the Haas brothers's work is steeped in solid craftsmanship. Raised in Austin, Texas, both Simon and Nikolai worked at their father's stone-carving business and furniture company every summer. "I would be the one up at 6 a.m., working all day long, and Simon was always the one who would wake up at noon and come in to do special projects," says Nikolai. "If there was a chip in a fireplace, I would fill it in and Simon would faux-paint it." They were always 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. But they always found common ground in creative projects. "As kids we always complemented each other, so if one of us was bad at something, the other one got really good at it," says Nikolai.

IDEAS & PEOPLE

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WHITE PARTY
A music video for the L.A. band ESP, with production design by the Haas brothers.



PLEASE TOUCH
An unfinished brass table designed to collect fingerprints.

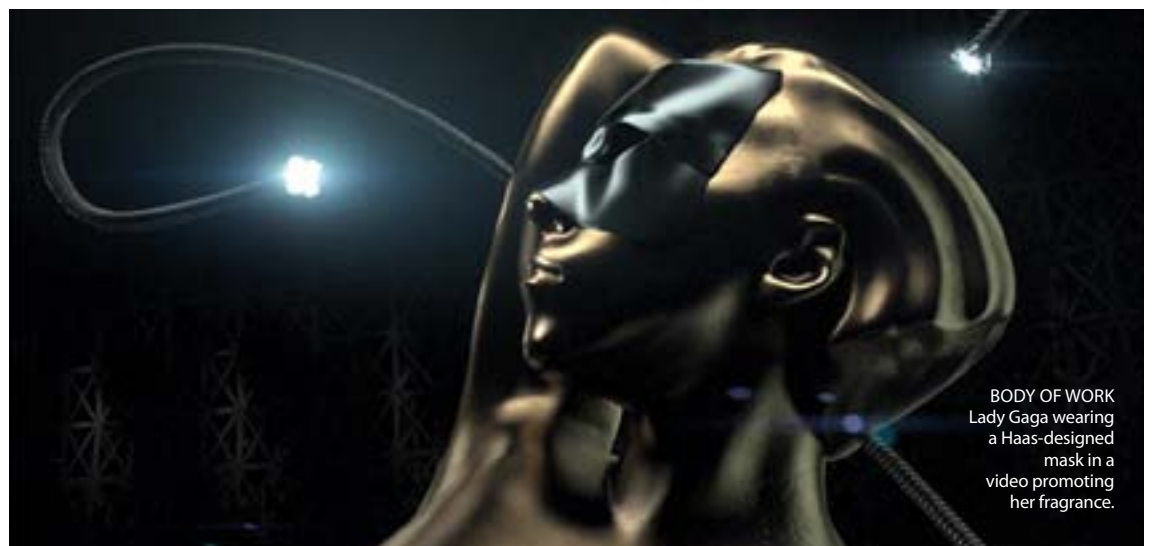
After living apart for a few post-high school years, during which Simon undertook formal art training at the Rhode Island School of Design and Nikolai toured in a band, they both ended up in Los Angeles, where their brother Lucas had already become famous as a Hollywood actor. At first, Nikolai worked as a house manager and personal assistant to one of Lucas's A-list wingmen and Simon as a restaurant cook. It wasn't until a powerful friend extended an off-the-cuff invitation to collaborate on a remodeling project that they decided to rent out a work space in downtown L.A.

Once the shop was up and running, word-of-mouth advertising was very good to the Haas brothers (their instinctive charm has helped them take advantage of a network of influencers available to them through their brother): Actors commissioned their furniture for party pads; Mario Testino used their one-off accoutrements for photo shoots; and Peter Marino and Johnston Marklee based interior designs around their visions. Business quickly grew to a point where they could no longer make everything alone, so they hired friends skilled in carpentry and ceramics to help out. Now they limit their time in work gloves for applying finishing touches—mostly to free up as many hours as possible for prototyping. “We’re basing our work on a fashion model,” says Simon. “There are things that are ready-to-wear”—like their lucrative furniture line—“and then we’ve got the couture,” like the honeycombed brass stool, which took them two intensive weeks to craft. They’re planning to move to a larger shop in order to keep pace with demand.

The Haas brothers love L.A. for its abundance of raw materials, and will often scour factory warehouses and special effects shops looking for anything that intrigues them. “Our relationship to material is so intimate,” said Nikolai. “What happens if we throw iron into resin and catch it on fire, or inflate a weather balloon inside panty hose and pour plaster into it?” What happens, in the latter case, is a vase resembling a bronze stalagmite. So far, the weight of success hasn't taken the fun out of their work, and if they have their way, it never will. “We’ve only professionally been in a relationship for two years, but it’s really been our whole lives,” says Nikolai. “It’s not any different than it was when we were kids.” ♦



SITTING PRETTY Clockwise from above: The Haas's solid walnut Animal chair; hand-stitched Missoni-print wool chair and ottoman; teak club chair upholstered with Belgian linen.



BODY OF WORK
Lady Gaga wearing a Haas-designed mask in a video promoting her fragrance.