

FORCE OF NATURE

Artist David Wiseman's abstractions of natural forms forge bonds as strong as those he creates in his enchanted world of bronze, porcelain and plaster.

I FIRST MET DAVID WISEMAN IN 2015 WHEN he welcomed over 50 museum patrons into his cozy studio off Eagle Rock Boulevard on a sunny Saturday morning. Surrounded by his meticulously crafted crystal, porcelain, terrazzo, wood and bronze objects and furniture, the artist, who grew up in Pasadena near The Huntington's botanical gardens, and trained at the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), enlightened us on design process and theory.

Even then, his respect for the history of decorative arts, combined with his prowess for mixing classic forms with modern fabrication techniques, was exceptionally refreshing. David could converse about his practice as effortlessly with a 75-year-old collector as he could with a young, wide-eyed interior designer. "It's about integrity and awareness," offers his brother and business partner Ari Wiseman who, at that time, was the Guggenheim Museum's deputy director.

After five years, three major museum acquisitions, countless site-specific installations for international brands, public institutions and private collections and one exquisite retrospective monograph (from Rizzoli this April), David is bursting out of his current digs, and Ari has left the museum world to join him as the lead of the management and business development arm of Wiseman Studio. David continues to honor the timeless tradition of celebrating nature through interiors while relentlessly pushing the boundaries of materials, process and creative collaboration.

"In a world that is increasingly disposable and instantaneous, mine is the opposite approach. I take tremendous pride in having created a culture of openness and positivity and a reverence for materials and process," says David. "I feel so privileged that 14 professionals have shared their gift for creativity and sensitivity toward nature and materials with me in the studio. We have built all of this together, very organically."

The cast bronze branch and porcelain cherry blossom chandelier David Wiseman created for LACMA Trustee Florence Sloan's dining room unifies the juxtaposing interior architectural styles of her renovated modern-meets-classic Tudor home and provides a connection to the lush outdoor landscape.





Wiseman's very first commission was for philanthropist and former fashion ambassador Anne Crawford. The two, now good friends, pose in her stairway.

Ari likens David's practice to a series of concentric circles. "If you start closest to David, the most immediate community is his studio," he says. Artists who work in bronze and other complex materials often send their designs out to a foundry to be produced. But in David's case, each and every aspect of production is completed in-house by the assistants and craftspeople that share his vision and are invested in the creation of his work. "We are a community that has been built upon the process of making together," Ari explains. "David is in constant dialogue, day in and day out, with the fabricators and craftspeople in the studio—they are family."

David says that life in the studio imitates his art. Spanning continents and millennia, the cultural motifs that form the patterns traversing his bronze screens resemble the human mosaic that is Wiseman Studio. An Indian jali screen prototype intersects with a turn-of-the-century Viennese design the same way a recent RISD graduate works with a master foundry person from Puebla, Mexico. "Our foundry professional crossed the border 36 years ago and began by sweeping the floors in a bronze foundry until he eventually became a true renaissance master mold-maker. To have his skill set and 35 years of experience at our fingertips alongside the recent RISD grad, who studied 3D printing and modeling, is amazing," David says. "Intersecting one person or idea with the other creates this fascinating interrelationship. Each adds to the other to produce something they can't accomplish on their own."

David's studio family has grown exponentially and is about to relocate a mile away to a nearly-complete 30,000-square-foot manufacturing and viewing Shangri-la in Frogtown. As David describes it, the "outward-facing environment" will showcase the talents of the studio's craftspeople and provide opportunities for local community engagement. Outfitted with multiple galleries and an expansive production studio, the space will be adorned with a David Wiseman-designed gate silhouetted by a glass door that will open into a secret garden featuring the species—such as pomegranates, magnolias and cherry blossoms—that have informed David's work.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of David's practice is client commissions. He completes about 15 annually and views these projects as Venn diagrams: the intersection of the client (their ideas, the site history and personal background), David (his ideas shared from 15 years' worth of sketchbooks) and something brand new. Even when collaborating with clients, David insists on pushing his practice forward with every new work. "There is a personal dialogue and relationship built with collectors from the beginning with commissioned projects," says Ari. "The collectors and David get to know each other in a meaningful way because the work is being made for their homes and often has some biographical or contextual reference, even if it's metaphorical. It is very different from the way a collector might connect with a finished artwork that they acquire from a gallery wall."

David's very first commission was for philanthropist and former fashion ambassador Anne Crawford around 2005. "We had the great fortune to have David lying on our floor staring at the ceiling for the better part of a year. He became part of our family and an important part of our lives to this day," says Crawford. It was this project that brought David back to Los Angeles after a post-graduation stint in Brooklyn, where he was working with designer Todd Oldham.

Interior designer Rodman Primack—now the chief creative officer of Design Miami—had seen David's senior thesis, a ghostly forest made from found branches cast in resin that emerged and disappeared throughout the surfaces of an entire wall. He invited David to utilize the dining room ceiling of Crawford's 1920s Neo-Georgian house in Hancock Park as a blank canvas. "The project charter was to bring nature indoors, but also engage with history," David enthusiastically recalls of combining his signature method of low-relief wall ornament with the influence of decorative arts icons such as Grinling Gibbons and Hector Guimard. The experience solidified his passion for making functional and fanciful objects—whether a chandelier, garden gates or an entire bathroom of snakes—that celebrate nature and create connections between people.

"David's genius in capturing the beauty of natural forms evokes a sense of harmony and peace, an essential component of feng shui, which is an important part of my life," says prominent collector and arts patron Florence Sloan. Initially spotting David's work in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where she is a trustee, Sloan was personally introduced to David by interior designer Ernest de la Torre. For her renovated classic Tudor with verdant vistas of the Bel-Air Country Club and a seamlessly adjoined modern wing boasting an extraordinary contemporary art collection, David created two large-scale magical reinterpretations of nature. His pieces unify the juxtaposing interior architectural styles and provide a connection

to the lush outdoor landscape in which the home is nestled.

"The first thing I made was a mirror that the site was yearning for—it is the transition, connecting the historic wing to the contemporary wing," David explains. "It combines historic elements with augmented realities of porcelain that bring it to our generation's sensibility." He also created a chandelier comprised of porcelain cherry blossoms and two sweeping cast bronze branches that intertwine above a modern dining table to form the nucleus of a chic yet functional family area.

David reaches up to tweak one of the blossoms during our LALA photo shoot. "Am I baring my midriff?" laughs the designer, who in his youth envisioned becoming a professional soccer player or skateboarder. "Yes, you are!" responds his uncle, photographer Mark Hanauer. Their close friend and stylist, Gillean McLeod, jumps in to fix the wayward shirt. The playful atmosphere on set mimics the undeniable sense of joy that radiates from David's forms. Once you connect with it, you can't help but connect with him. Thereafter, we all begin striking poses under the chandelier.

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