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how to spend it

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HOW'S THIS FOR AN OPENER?



WHEN THE ABELL BROTHERS PATENTED A UNIQUE METAL FINISH, THEY STRUCK GOLD. BETHAN RYDER MEETS THE MEN WITH THE MIDAS TOUCH

the alchemists

Twin brothers Ian and Richard Abell, 32, are the new darlings of the interiors scene, with their metallic creations already gracing some of the most stylish interiors in London. The slinky titanium columns and burnished walls of Nobu Berkeley were conceived in the brothers' Deptford studio. Likewise, the gilded, graffiti-carved school desks at Dover Street Market that sold out within weeks.

Since forming their company, Based Upon, in 2004, the brothers have built up an impressive client portfolio. They have recently produced installations for Donna Karan stores in America and the new Nobu Milan. Even Judy Blame's Iggy Pop-inspired teddy bear has been given the gilt treatment and sprayed gold for posterity.

And when the (extremely) high-end property developer Candy & Candy was looking for a dramatic mural for One Hyde Park, its ultra-luxe apartment complex, it turned to Ian and Richard. "We wanted to capture the spirit of the park, so we started by collecting leaves and twigs," says Ian. "Then we thought about what a leaf looks like through a microscope. The piece is based on that, but represents London more generally." So while the striking finished piece is inspired by the magnified veins of leaves, it is also a bird's-eye view of the streets of London.

The secret to Based Upon's success is a new liquid metal material called Axolotl, which Ian first discovered in ►



Based Upon the Hara Chair, made by coating Giorgio Gurlotti's Hara chair in an Antique Silver alloy



► Sydney. Realising its potential, the brothers bought the patent for Europe. They began exploring the possibilities for this malleable spray-on alloy by coating iconic furniture classics, such as a Verner Panton chair and the Campana brothers' Favela chair, in metal patinas. The latter fetched an incredible £17,700 at auction – possibly the largest sum ever paid for a rusty old chair.

But it's not simply a case of spray-and-go. A 16-strong team of sculptors and metallurgists hones each product, customising different alloys with a variety of textures, from rusty and sandblasted to sleek pearlised and polished. "A piece like the Candy & Candy textured mural might take four to five months from conception through to completion, with three months devoted to actually making it," says Richard.

"At first, we messed around doing some jokey stuff, such as a blinged-up golden urinal called Based Upon Taking the Piss £100,000, and a cut diamond covered in rust called Based Upon Priceless," says Ian.

The fun soon developed into something more serious as the duo began exploring notions of genuine priceless. "We thought about composing art from things with no market value but that have enormous personal value – a kind of emotional preciousness," Richard says.

The results are metallicised bas-relief artworks, such as the composition they designed for a Notting Hill family, which interweaves their palm lines with the sentimental detritus of their lives: ticket

stubs, certificates, the children's first toys and so on.

Becoming a parent inspired Ian to design his own version. "I knew when my daughter, Mia, was born that I wanted to make a piece," he says. "I was going to do something much more graphic about the goriness of birth and contrast it with the fluffy-bunnies public image of birth. I meant to collect lots of bloody things, but I didn't, as it was all too weird."

He later composed an art piece

featuring items including the pregnancy-test result, the first scan and Mia's hospital bracelet, all interspersed with palm lines taken from a photograph of her hand when she was just one week old.

"It's something we enjoy a lot now, making these personal pieces for people," Richard says. "We find

it really satisfying, and feel we have discovered something that, in these times of luxury, is really meaningful and has an emotional connection, as well as being impressive."

If £20,000 for your own bespoke piece of alchemy – say, a mural measuring 2½ square metres – sounds a bit steep, then ready-made decorative metallic surfaces are available in Based Upon's off-the-peg range. There are a dozen styles, and each can be produced in three to five different tones or alloys. They range in thickness from 0.33mm to 3.5mm and cost £300-£750 per square metre – and will end up being worth their weight in gold. □

www.basedupon.co.uk; 020 8320 2122

From left Ian, left, and Richard founded the design company Based Upon in 2004; the duo originally created humorous pieces, including a urinal called Based Upon Taking the Piss £100,000; the sculptural bench Based Upon Number One; and a close-up of details on the Butterfly table. Background picture: The surface of the Crack table