

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO STYLISH LIVING

FIRST-CLASS  
INTERIOR  
DESIGN IN  
FIVE REAL  
HOMES



APPLES  
HOW TO GROW  
THEM; WHAT TO  
COOK WITH THEM

DAVID HICKS  
MARY FOX LINTON  
REMEMBERS HER  
FRIEND THE  
MASTER DECORATOR

## HOT OFF THE PRESS

BEAUTIFUL FABRICS AND WALLPAPERS -  
ALL DESIGNED TO DELIGHT AND INSPIRE



## people | specialist



have a team of very nice, very talented people, utterly lacking in egotism,' says Ian.

The balance of creativity and professionalism at Based Upon is remarkable, but what is more remarkable still is the alchemy at its heart - the application of liquid metal to a base of timber, metal or glass to create unique, beautiful and luxurious surfaces for wall panelling, furniture and artworks.

Ian and Richard discussed collaborating for many years before forming Based Upon. Both worked in business consultancy until their late twenties, when they each exchanged their respective jobs for something more hands-on; Ian wrote a novel, and Richard emigrated to Australia to work as a landscape gardener. At a family Christmas in 2003, after living on opposite sides of the world for two years - 'the longest time we have spent apart', notes Richard - they decided it was time to develop their own creative voice. All they needed was an idea.

'As soon as we decided to go ahead, we started noticing the right sort of things,' says Ian. One of them was a liquid metal material, called Axolotl, which Ian heard about through a friend. A visit to the Sydney-based manufacturers convinced the pair of its enormous potential. 'At that stage it had only been used as a substitute for metal; we wanted to use it as a material in its own right,' explains Richard.

The original plan was to offer a service to

architects and interior designers, and their early experiments were intended to illustrate how the material might be used. 'The days were for sales, and the nights for making. There was a lot of sleeping in the workshop on bubble-wrap mattresses,' recalls Ian. 'There was so much uncertainty; we made it up as we went along.'

To their surprise, people elected to buy their finished creations rather than design with the material they were offering. 'It was not what we intended, but we realised that what we had made was interesting and decorative in its own right,' says Richard.

The range they subsequently developed involves numerous extremely complex techniques, all of which are a closely guarded secret. Suffice to say, the key is in how the substrate is prepared, and how the metal is applied and then worked. 'Rather like ancient craft techniques, it is all about layering it up, and then sculpting it back,' explains Ian.

Most Based Upon pieces are now site-specific; all are made entirely by hand - in other words, extremely labour-intensive. The longest, most demanding commissions are the artworks created to integrate with the existing architecture of a building, sometimes spanning whole walls. For these, the research alone can take months.

Their first design of this sort was for the Crystal Room of the May Fair hotel. It depicts a cherry

tree in blossom, its leaves scattered by the wind, and comprises 270, one-and-a-half-metre-square panels. 'It was a real turning point for us,' remarks Richard.

Current projects include a kitchen cabinet with walls and doors decorated with shoals of fish for a house in Mayfair, the owners of which have a large private aquarium. 'Our designs are based on locations or taken directly from nature. We spent six months studying footage and photographs of fish before we were confident we could capture the subtle way they move,' says Ian. 'We also like to inject a personal element,' adds Richard. 'One of the panels we created for the hallway of the house has a fine resin vein containing mementos of the birth of the clients' first child, including its identification tag from hospital and fragments of photographs.'

Although Ian and Richard relish the challenge of these large works of art, they have recently developed a range of smaller and more affordable, off-the-peg pieces - including a 'Cracked' coffee table costing less than £5,000. 'We do not want people to say, "Based Upon only works for billionaires,"' says Richard. 'We want as many people as possible to enjoy our work.' It commands a hefty price tag, but it is worth every penny □

*Based Upon surfaces cost from £250 a square metre; integrated art, from £1,500 a square metre.*

*Based Upon: 020-8320 2122; www.basedupon.co.uk*

ABOVE FROM LEFT Panels - lacquer and metal, and metal, respectively - for a house in Mayfair, depicting shoals of fish. A 'just applied' resin leaf. A bespoke dining table. BELOW FROM LEFT A detail of a sample panel, featuring a map. A cast of tree bark. A bespoke table and bench. A panel detail





## Specialist profile Based Upon

Jennifer Goulding meets Ian and Richard Abell, of Based Upon, who have perfected the application of liquid metal to timber, metal or glass bases, creating unique and luxurious surfaces



There are no prizes for being a lone, starving artist,' says Ian Abell. And if there were, Ian would not win any, in part because his company, Based Upon, is extremely successful, but also because his design partner is his twin brother, Richard.

The success of Based Upon is partly down to Ian's and Richard's belief that art is most effective when it is channelled through good business practice. This manifests itself in the company premises, which comprise a smart office-cum-reception and two very large, well-ordered workshops, where a team of 19 specially trained makers - all of whom are graduates of Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, Goldsmiths or the Royal College of Art - are diligently occupied with a variety of projects. 'We are lucky to >

Richard (left) and Ian Abell stand in their London studio