



At Home With Martino Gamper, Who Gives Unwanted Objects New Life as Furniture

Home and Work

By MAURA EGAN FEB.11, 2016

It takes a very specific perspective to appreciate the beauty of linoleum — especially in shades of pea green and dishwasher brown. Where most would see cheap industrial material, Martino Gamper envisions endless possibilities. “I never feel limited by materials, techniques or color in my practice,” says the Italian furniture designer, who faced the kitchen cabinets of the East London apartment he shares with his wife, the artist Francis Upritchard, with just such linoleum. The result is an elegant jigsaw puzzle of jewel tones accented with brass handles.

“I like to use everyday materials in a different context to give them new life,” says the 44-year-old, who has made a name for himself over the last decade by repurposing humble materials and unwanted objects as well as reworking classic pieces by design icons like Gio Ponti and Carlo Mollino into his own wild, hybrid furniture. Take the turquoise-and-white swirl table that sits in Gamper and Upritchard’s kitchen. A few years ago, the Milan gallerist Nina Yashar came across several Gio Ponti-designed headboards and cabinet doors in an old hotel in Sorrento. Yashar wasn’t sure what to do with them so she offered them to Gamper, who remade them into graphic dressers and tables that resemble giant mint candies. “I admired that they were Ponti, but I also just liked the pattern and material, not just that it had this prestigious pedigree,” he says.

There are examples of his improvisational design throughout the 7,000-square-foot space, a former printing factory that Gamper and Upritchard have taken over in its entirety with a few friends and carved up into both living and working quarters. Gamper used pegboard in both his home and studio kitchen, where most days he and Upritchard make meals together for a rotating cast of assistants and colleagues. The massive puzzle-like table in the studio kitchen, which also serves as a communal work desk, is made up of smaller tables he salvaged from different schools, churches and offices.

The New Zealand-born Upritchard, like her husband, is drawn to weird, jolie laide color palettes like ’70s greens and neon oranges. Gamper tiled their bathroom in terra-cotta stone partly because it reminded him of his childhood in Italy but also because “white tile feels so cold.” And according to Upritchard, when her husband found a “vomit brown” sink online, she had to have it. They’ve added pops of other colors with art (there is no shortage of friends’ portraits of Gamper) as well as furniture from up-and-coming designers like Max Lamb and Bethan Laura Wood.

Gamper, who grew up in the Italian Alps, started out apprenticing with a cabinetmaker when he was 14 before enrolling in two art schools in Vienna where he studied both sculpture and design. Afterward, he returned to Italy to work for an architect but quickly found the world of industrial design too alienating. Besides, he explains, “Italy in the mid-’90s was dead. All the legendary design icons were gone.” Gamper was



Linoleum kitchen cabinets behind a repurposed kaleidoscopic table by Gamper and one of Upritchard’s bronze dinosaur sculptures. Nick Ballon.



Martino Gamper in the kitchen of the communal studio he shares with his wife, the artist Francis Upritchard, and three friends. The table of his own design is a graphic patchwork of salvaged desks from churches, offices and schools. Nick Ballon.

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Gamper's arrival in London marked the beginning of an expansively creative period for the designer. There were landmark shows like "100 Chairs in 100 Days" in 2007, where he reconfigured 100 abandoned chairs he had rescued over a two-year period, and "In a State of Repair" in 2014 in Milan, for which people were invited to bring their broken items — from bicycles to electronics — to be repaired by a group of artisans he had selected. Gamper has also played host with the Trattoria al Cappello project, a series of pop-up art dinners where, with the help of colleagues, he makes everything from the food to the furniture.

Since 2004, he has helped run a small publishing house called Dent-De-Leon that produces monographs for friends like Max Lamb, the fashion designer Peter Jensen and the artist Ryan Gander. "I never wanted to be an industrial designer because I don't care about multiples," Gamper says. Nonetheless, he works often with commercial clients. He's done patchwork bags for Valextra, window installations for Prada and colorful chairs for the Italian company Moroso, to name just a few. One of his steadiest collaborators, though, is Upritchard, whose crafty, domestic sculptures — otherworldly clay figures, strange bonelike weapons, lamps with pinched faces embedded in them — share a handmade quirkiness with her husband's designs. The couple met after Upritchard saw a poster for Gamper's "Confronting the Chair" show at the Design Museum in London in 2006 and decided to visit his studio. For their joint show at Anton Kern Gallery in New York, which runs until later this month, Gamper built linoleum tables to display her pieces and surrounded them with chairs from a shuttered ice cream parlor in Italy that he salvaged and reupholstered. "They're just everyday things," he says with a shrug.

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In the living room, their own work alongside eclectic paintings by friends like Peter McDonald (left) and Caragh Thuring. Nick Ballon.



The couple in their living room with a Luke Gottelier painting. Nick Ballon.

A dresser Gamper reworked from Gio Ponti headboards in Gamper and Upritchard's bedroom and a sconce by Bethan Laura Wood. Nick Ballon.

