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La Rédaction



When u think of modern design masters, u think 'bout one of the pioneers in curating those masterpieces: François Laffanour. His life's work can be found,for over 25 years now, @ the Laffanour Galerie, Downtown, Paris.



Besides collecting timeless treasures w/ worn leather charm & collaborating w/ names like Kris Van Assche from Berluti, he also writes books highlighting the social factor of the 20th century furniture in leisure, practicality, and economy. Talk 'bout double, triple, infinite threat.

The gallery is filled w/ timeless pieces, non-conventional ideas & leather sofas that make u wanna spend the whole day there. So, take a sit on ur favorite piece of furniture for reading our chat w/ François:



First things first, can you tell us how did you go from being an art dealer and collector to working with furniture?

At the very very very beginning, I was a student of History in Paris. My family is not in the business of art, I only had a cousin and an uncle that were amateur painters & liked to collect art, but didn't have any money for it and, to be absolutely honest, that time I didn't imagine that it was possible to collect. At the university, I was more focused in the quality of the painting & the identity behind the art than the idea of the market, it was really lately that I understood that it could be absolutely amazing.

François, you were one of the first ones to notice the true importance of furniture in architecture. What made the furniture universe stand out for you?

Now, becoming a little bit older, I think each of us have some motivation, but don't know exactly its origin. This motivation is maybe your experience in life with your family, friends, the country you live in, all those things, so I don't know where exactly it's coming from.

When I was a student I read books with a lot of artists and intellectuals talking about their specialties and when I started working I thought I was very lucky to have the possibility to buy that kind of treasure myself. I was really excited to be able to get easily a big quantity of something that I considered extraordinary and really special. When I was young, I used to go to the free market, but I didn't have any money and at that time I was able to buy things from names in every book from the 1950s til 1970s that nobody was looking for. And that's the way I started: buying, not collecting.



What was your goal at the beginning of your career that is still the same up to now?

To buy something which is not conventional. For example, when I started buying Jean Prouvé's furniture — which, in my opinion, contains a lot of intentional simplicity, honesty, and non-conventional way of thinking, something just to be true and out of all traditional way of thinking the life, art and everything — that was something important for me. That period was also after the revolution of 1968, so people were looking for something new, like a new way of living.

Do you agree that the social context that we live in impacts the way we create? And how do you think the world impacts creative people nowadays?

I totally agree with that point of view and that's the reason I'm not fed up with buying and selling pieces, because it feels like I'm not selling just a piece of decoration which is fashionable and could be finally put into garbage after a few years, it's more like I'm selling a way of life, of thinking, of how we can transform our lives and social relations with a piece of furniture.

Of course you have a lot of people writing books, painting, like Picasso with Guernica, and talking about war and all the disaster of the world. But it's also interesting that with a piece of furniture, like a chair, a table or a lamp you can help people live better and maybe transform a little bit their relationships. When you create something, it should be linked with your environment. How can you create something and not think about what's happening today? Today is gonna be the social condition of many people, immigration, war, pollution. I think all types of creation reflect on that.



Would you say that this is maybe a mindset that makes you dedicate your life to these creators and pieces?

Maybe you will think it's a little bit pretentious, but I felt that if I had to be in a relation with that kind of thing, it gives my life something. If your life is just making money, there's a better business than that with this kind of furniture. It did help me make a living, but I was happy to make money and also do something that I believe in, helping people understand this kind of creation.

So I thought it was a great opportunity in my life not to make a fortune, but to make something that I would love and has also allowed me to meet people that I would never met in my life. It's interesting to see why the people I meet are collecting, why they like that kind of thing, and how they live with the industry, the same with meeting artists and creators or museum directors. It's a totally open society.

And how is your relationship w/ the ppl who buy from u?

They teach me so much, because, when I started, I just focused on it because it was an opportunity, because I liked it, but I didn't know much about it. By then I had met a collector that came to me and said "I want to buy a Jean Prouvé's piece because I love this guy and I wasn't rich enough when I was younger and I really want to have something of his". He told me about his life and why that artist was so interesting for him. You discover and learn from the people you are supposed, sometimes, to teach—they teach you back.

Do u think the choice of materials impacts the pieces?

I think the choice of the material is the expression of the idea behind it. You are in a country where the wood is very famous and, for example, Zanini, the way I understand it, wanted to pass an idea of something that wants to promote the quality and to link woman and wood. I think it's a way to use the wood. And if you take another example: Jean Prouvé used metal not just because it's metal, but because it was a technique that was comfortable to create something cheap, that you can easily ship by plane, boat or train' cause everything was dismountable. So, the metal was coming to help his way of finding a new technology or a new way of building something and, for Zanini, the wood is the expression of something very natural, something close to nature. Leather is also something very close to nature, it's comfortable, it has life. The choice of the material is the result of the original reflection.



Speaking of modernity, what's the one thing you believe the future of design will be about?

I have two daughters, one is becoming an architect and the other, an interior designer and their main preoccupation is the social responsibility. What can we do in terms of social architecture, social design, everything which concerns the way we help people to survive or to find solutions for those who have been totally ruined by things, like a big storm or tsunami. Nowadays, we always have to be concerned about what's happening in our society and find new solutions with new technologies and ideas. I think the young generations will totally change their way of buying and of using all the materials. And I guess the young designers should be concerned about that.

That's one thing we really need to ask: where do we go from here?

Because we are in a world of brand, we have some paradox: if you look at the TV, you see all those young singers and rappers coming with brands like Louis Vuitton & Gucci, but there is also exactly the opposite, people who want to live without new things and with no brands at all. We are in a time of big changes and it's exciting. I feel a little bit destabilized, because I would love to be part of the change and I feel that it's not my generation that's gonna do it, but, at the same time, I'm excited with the thought of what the future and the way of changing our relations could be.

Well, maybe you are not the one who's gonna actually do it, but with your experience and background you could possibly help these people, couldn't you?

Absolutely! I understood that a few years ago, but in life it's interesting to see that you have some time for discovering, for developing, and for learning in a way and, after that, for really expanding and for, finally, transmitting [the knowledge], that's also nice. You feel a little bit peaceful in yourself and your life and you like to communicate with and to learn from the people. I appreciate them both.



Last question: you were one of the first ones to see furniture in a different way, to give it more value. Do you consider furniture as art?

It's complicated to say. No, we cannot say that furniture is art, because when you make a piece of furniture you have some control, you have some rules to follow, so I don't think it has as much freedom as a piece of art does. But when you put this freedom in a piece of art, what do you do with your freedom? I think what's interesting with a piece of furniture is that those limits are fascinating: you are able to build something and to also express your freedom through some rules. I think those domains are linked and it's not so far from being a piece of art, but I don't wanna make a frontier between them. They collaborate with each other, but I think a piece of furniture brings something totally different, even if it's intellectually. However, it's not the same thing.