

Wild Man

*Artist **Charlie Baker**'s favorite media are those created by nature*

by DAVID MASELLO





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Baker in his studio; his doors for NYC's 1 Hotel Central Park; a Baker lamp; an Hermès window display created by Baker.



well as companies like Hermès, ABC Carpet, Ace Hotels and Ralph Lauren. One of the creations about which Baker is particularly proud is the pair of doors flanking the entrance to New York's 1 Hotel Central Park. Instead of conventional glass panes, there are densely woven black locust twigs that appear to have grown in place.

"Those doors are composed of a couple thousand puzzlelike pieces," Baker explains, "and my intention was to make them look like they're naturally twisting around each other, braided that way." Baker gathered all the twigs himself, eyeing particular trees that had grown in certain light conditions. "The twistiness of a tree's branches are determined by the exposure to sunlight," he says.

For a client in the Hamptons, he was commissioned to fashion a garden bench that appeared to be composed of bundles of straight branches. To accomplish that, Baker admits to playing with nature by affixing the pieces of wood to a plywood structure he built. In a similar vein, he designed and built transparent planters, fitted with lights, in which trees and their complex root structures are presented as sculptures rather than simply natural elements in a landscape. "The idea was to make a tree look like a work of art growing indoors."

Much of his work is an amalgam of the natural and industrial. A coffee table, for instance, includes a color-coordinated composition of river rocks assembled in a steel rectilinear box, with driftwood as a base. His tree-branch chandelier is fitted with LED lights, and his custom pergolas and gazebos are as much architecture and sculpture as they are lattices for growing vines and shading inhabitants.

Despite his urban upbringing and choice to remain in New York City, Baker's time in nature is what most informs his creativity. "The best days for me as a designer," he says, "are those where I'm walking on a beach or foraging in the woods." Scavenger hunting never looked so good. ■

SOMETIMES CHARLIE BAKER will climb a tree to snap off a shapely branch that will work well in one of his designs. He'll wade into the surf to retrieve a piece of floating driftwood. He will kick through shed leaves in a forest, searching for shed antlers, and pull vines creeping up an abandoned factory wall.

"It's always a struggle for me to define the furniture and interiors and objects I make," says the 34-year-old from his decidedly urban industrial studio and home in Long Island City, N.Y., "but I guess the best way to put

it is that I'm a nature-inspired creative builder. I try to incorporate natural elements into places and things where they normally wouldn't be."

Soon after graduating from Washington & Lee University, the Manhattan born-and-bred Baker, imbued with natural good looks, worked as a stonemason and designer of garden structures before founding his own workshop. "Most of my sense of pride comes from completing something that is mine alone," he says.

The furniture and lighting fixtures he makes through Baker Structures, the mostly one-man company he established in 2007, are coveted and commissioned by individuals as

CHUCK BAKER