

GALERIE MAY

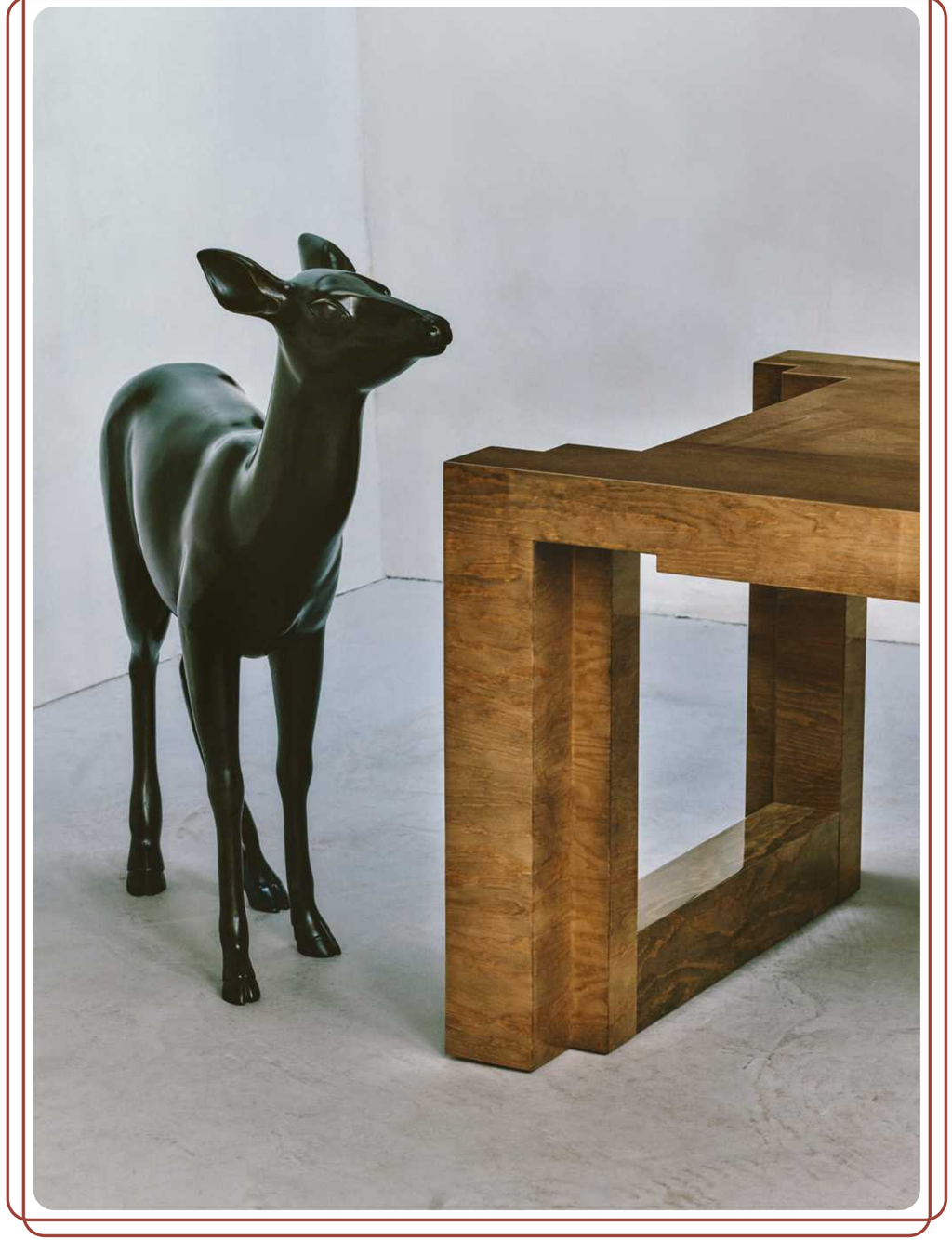
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Crafting a Legacy

The design duo behind Galerie MAY, Maylis and Charles Tassin, have created an ECLECTIC and deeply PERSONAL venture that mixes their own designs, inspirations from other eras and the best CRAFTSMANSHIP France has to offer.

ARPP *console*.



LA BICHE, *May Edition by Stéphane Gérard.*

“We don’t follow trends – we make our own, we do what we love, and that’s all.”

Maylis Tassin

INSIDE THE LACQUER-PAINTED, wood-paneled walls of Galerie MAY’s private salon on Paris’s Left Bank, Maylis and Charles Tassin, the duo behind the interior design and decorative arts studio, are pondering how to articulate what it is they do.

“Designers? No. Decorators? Yes, but rather, creators…,” says Charles, sitting on a sofa the couple created. “*Ensemblier* – how do you say that in English?”

“It was really *the* term during the ’40s,” continues Maylis, resting in an armchair, another Galerie MAY creation. “They drew the house – the interior of the house and sometimes the exterior – and the furniture. The best ones were from the ’40s, and they’re our masters. They had a way of putting a fresco on a wall, and then a Giacometti piece, and then some of their own work, and then a Boulle commode. And they had their own shop, their own gallery, where they could very ornately, very decoratively, showcase some ensembles. They mixed their furniture with antiques and other objects. We love the mix.”

By contrast, the words fly thick and fast when asked what Galerie MAY is *not:* “Herd mentality,” says Maylis. “That which everybody wants and puts in their homes.”

“Like the Banana sofa!” laughs Charles, referring to the ubiquitous Vladimir Kagan design. “It’s a joke because you can find 10, 12, 20 models like it.”

“A ‘total look’ isn’t Galerie MAY, not at all,” Maylis continues. “What’s most important to me is to never be trendy. We don’t follow trends – we make our own, we do what we love, and that’s all.”

It’s this pursuit of a specific aesthetic rather than whatever is popular that makes Galerie MAY such a singular and distinctive creative force. They draw inspiration from different eras, be it nods to antiquity or the medieval period, the modernity of the 1940s, or the natural textiles and colors of the 1970s, which makes their furnishings feel at once familiar yet wholly original.

Each creation is brought to life with the expertise of artisans based all around France. “They aren’t necessarily big, famous names,” says Charles. “They don’t come from great *maisons*. They’re highly skilled craftspeople, but they’re very discreet and work for the greatest.”

“They’re proper geniuses,” Maylis continues. “So, we’ve built such a relationship with these people, whereby when we design something, and we tell them about it, their expertise will push the design forward. We can’t work on a piece without their feedback, their opinion.”



Such was the case with the ARPP console, which Maylis designed around 2015, inspired by a Jean Arp painting during a visit to the Musée National d'Art Moderne. She was intrigued by the idea of treating the piece of furniture as a sculpture. "I think a console, which you put in a hallway, must be a spectacular object," she says. "It isn't necessarily of much use, but it must be a sight to behold when you arrive. I wanted to make one that would be both massive and light."

The duo drew on the expertise of David de Gourcuff, who has a foundry in Auvergne. "An art historian, specialized in the Middle Ages, he has a deep knowledge of craft," Maylis says. "And he has been able to assemble a fabulous community of craftspeople around him in Auvergne, with model-makers, sculptors, cabinetmakers."

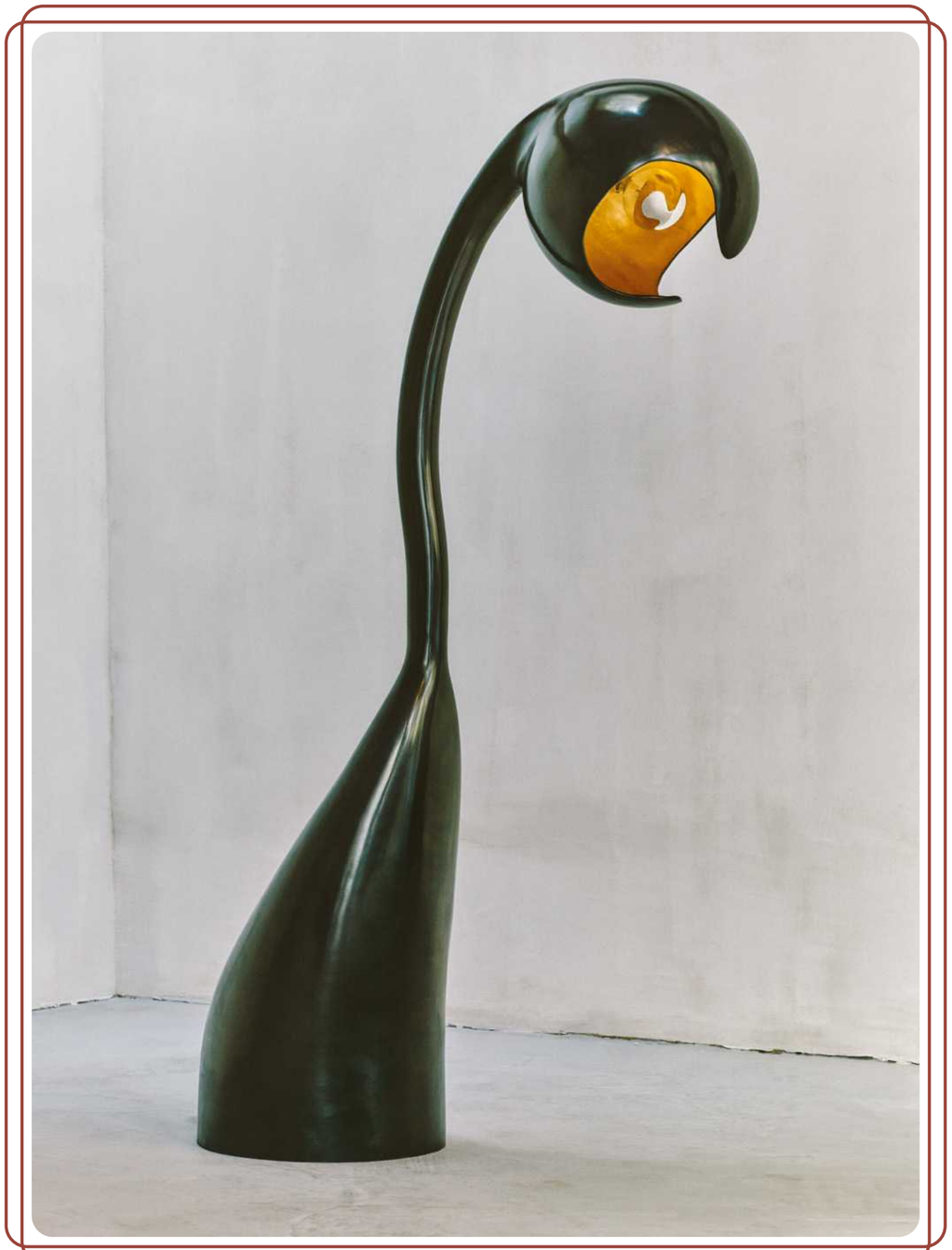
ARPP's two-meter-long marble countertop, sourced from Italy, rests not on legs, but on a bronze structure reinforced with steel. Cast aluminum shapes covered in a mix of resin and marble powder appear suspended beneath the marble, hanging like stalactites or floating entirely, attached by hidden beams. They are at once light yet sturdy. "It was very challenging to build," she says. "The first two versions didn't work out. I think we got it by the third one."

Charles and Maylis met in 2008 – he had a background in interior design, and she, in art – and together, they opened the gallery's doors in 2012. Yet the company that is now Galerie MAY predated this launch. Earlier, it had been Charles's eponymous interior design business; before that, it had belonged to his mother, an antiques dealer, and before that, to Geneviève Prou, daughter of René Prou, a central figure in the Art Deco movement. "He worked on the Normandie streamliner and the Compagnie des Wagons-lits trains, like the Orient Express," recounts Charles. "Geneviève was my mother's best friend. She bought the shop from Geneviève before I was born. When my mother retired, we kept the shop and rebuilt is as Galerie MAY. And the story's not finished."

Today, their children work at the studio. "Manon is in charge of production, and Georges works in sales," Maylis says. "Geneviève makes videos for me, but she has another job, too. Edgar is 11, so he hasn't joined in yet," she jokes. "And Sophie, my sister, works with me. It's a family affair." One that both hope the next generation will continue.



TESS AND OTTOMAN *armless chair.*



VORR *floor lamp*.

A sense of patrimony runs through the office and the work they produce. Galerie MAY is decidedly French, drawing on a tradition of French artisanship and savoir-faire, yet, according to Charles and Maylis, 90 percent of their clients live overseas. “If I had to give a sociological analysis, I would say that, very oddly, French people don’t feel very proud about their past achievements,” says Maylis. “We place ourselves in an ultra-French universe. We want to bring back everything from the great French decorating style. Americans don’t have any issues with that – they know what they want, they know what they’re looking for when they come to France, and I think that fortunately they find it in our shop.”

Adds Charles: “There’s an American impetus that just makes it work – there’s no doubt about it. They have big projects, with an American vitality that’s just commendable. The French are more cerebral, more complicated…”

Each new project is a blank page, Charles says. They never impose their vision on a client; rather, they see them as coauthors in a story they will write together. “It’s very technical and physical, but the result is a big, big, big satisfaction,” he says. “It’s like playing God on Earth.”

Maylis concurs: “When you see a piece that you’ve designed two years ago, and you see it in real life, and it’s even more beautiful than you imagined, it’s absolute bliss. Also, what I love is to work with the craftspeople – the human connection.”

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Charles Tassin

“It’s one of the most beautiful jobs in the world,” Charles beams.

“People are going to live with this – with our mirrors, our chairs – and it will bring them joy every day,” adds Maylis. “You can’t get happier than doing this job.”

“There’s a great French poem,” says Charles, before beginning to cite a verse by the 19th-century writer Alphonse de Lamartine. *“Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme…”*

Maylis finishes the phrase: *“qui s’attache à notre âme et la force d’aimer?”*

It means: Inanimate objects, do you have a soul that connects to our soul, and the power to love?

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