



ROOMS STUDIO
ALUMINIUM
SILVER STREET
BENCH, POA

DESIGN

STEELING BEAUTY

Be seduced by silvery details, says *Clara Baldock*

Upon arriving in Mumbai as creative director of the collectable design gallery Æquô, French designer Florence Louisy snapped up as much steel tableware as she could find, enamoured by its simple, silvery charm. She used the pieces in her new home and at the gallery, stacking shelves with little metal cups, which caused some confusion among visitors. “In India, these are usually reserved for the workers,” she says, “but I think white metal is fresh, elegant and, for me, very novel.”

Many designers would agree. While gold is synonymous with luxury, its cool-toned companions (from chrome to aluminium, stainless steel and silver plating) are proving their worth. For Ascha Pedersen, who offers a curation of silver-coloured midcentury and art deco pieces through her online store Pouf Copenhagen, the allure of such metals “lies not only in their timelessness but in the



Right: a vintage silver-plated caviar server sold by Pouf Copenhagen. Below: STUDIO HAOS waxed aluminium, zinc and cowskin armchair, POA



way they allow for playfulness in texture, form and adornment, without appearing too heavy or dominant”.

Max Radford, founder of the eponymous gallery in east London, has seen a similar shift, observing a move towards sleek, streamlined luxury. “People are rediscovering references such as high-tech architecture to which stainless steel is innately more suited,” he says. “It’s less about the actual finish and more how it’s used – and how impressive that is.”

Radford’s gallery collaborates with London-based designers working in the sphere of collectable design, where, he says, “silver metals seem to be all that people are using – particularly in more forward-thinking practice”. Recent shows include Lewis Kemmenoe’s *Metallurgy*, which exhibited a series of wood furniture spliced with metals, representing an exploration of the natural and industrial, along with the work of Amelia Stevens, whose stainless-steel forms sit at the intersection of architecture, interiors, furniture and art, and include sculptural ashtrays, floor bolsters and plinths.

Stainless steel, an industrial material known for its durability and recyclability, is often associated with the utilitarian – who doesn’t have a set of inexpensive steel cutlery in a drawer? “But while the material may be commonplace, or less exotic than others, working with fabricators who know their craft can be expensive, and that’s where the value is found,” says British designer EJRBarnes, who continually returns to the metal in his work. For his debut solo exhibition, *A Room on East 79th Street*, at the Emma Scully Gallery, New York, in December, he presented sleek new works including the stainless-steel and glass Four Man Punch dining table and the Emergency Best Friend cocktail plinth, constructed predominantly from folded stainless steel. “It’s become a bread-and-butter material,” he says.

Studio HAOS founders Sophie Gelinet and Cédric Gepner point to a long line of designers with similar design instincts, such

as Dutch furniture maker Gerrit Rietveld and his crate chair, and minimalists such as Donald Judd. “There is a particular kind of elegance that lies in the ability to express or evoke emotions with restraint and purposely limited means,” explains Gelinet – who says the more humble the metal, the more the designer moves the focus to shape and form. “Our aim is to navigate away from

mechanised mass production and opulent craftsmanship, and by doing so I believe we address important concerns of our era.”

In 2023, the Lisbon-based studio produced seven new ascetic works employing just two metals: zinc sheets and waxed aluminium tubes. The latter is light, easy to cut and recyclable, and “takes on different shades from one piece to the next, which was a crucial characteristic for the designs”, says Gepner. The forms of the furniture were guided by the materials – and the duo played around with different positions to highlight the calm, repetitive geometry created by the aluminium.



Barnes, meanwhile, developed a style of polishing that achieves the same reflections as real silver. “These finishes have more warmth and dreaminess than you’d expect from stainless steel, which can be seen as hard and cold,” says the self-taught designer. To add further softness, he punched holes into the steel dining table legs, which lightened the appearance of the slabs. “It’s a small detail that didn’t feel too decorative but lifted it from the purely industrial,” he says.

In a similar vein, Colombian designer Natalia Criado applies colourful stone accents to her silver-plated tableware to lend a jewel-like quality to the industrial shapes. Her pieces include a metal milk container embellished with a simple sphere of lapis lazuli and a handmade plate accented with lava stone. Criado studied industrial design in Milan, and her work embodies the principles of functionality and minimalism – with a twist. Her Duality Objects collection draws inspiration from pre-Columbian artefacts [the visual arts of indigenous peoples of the



EJRBARNES
aluminium, birch and mahogany veneer Bolt Section dining chair and stainless-steel and glass Four Man Punch dining table

Above: EDDIE OLIN aluminium Bullnose low table, £5,200, in the office-showroom of gallerist Max Radford and Stanley Quaia, studio director of Béton Brut



ÆQUÔ
ALUMINIUM
TAVIT ARMCHAIR
BY FLORENCE
LOUISY, POA



Above, from left: NATALIA CRIADO metal Triangular Bowl 26 Green, €348, metal Triangular Bowl 13 Green, €226, and metal Fruit Bowl 18 White, €356

Caribbean from as early as 7,000 BCE], creating vessels that are fused together to deliver one function; her Mucura vessel, for example, resembles two conjoined teapots mixing hot and cold water within one object.

Nata Janberidze and Ketil Toloraia, behind Rooms Studio, also explore their cultural heritage. Growing up in Tbilisi, Georgia, in the ’90s, they experienced societal shifts in

a post-Soviet era. For the ongoing Street Series, including the Silver Street Bench and Dry Bridge Daybed, they reimagined and “monumentalised” vernacular objects from

around their home city, where modernism and brutalism are common. “The choice to cast these objects in aluminium references Soviet mass production, architectural elements and building decor,” says Janberidze. “In this particular series, the context dictated the choice of material.”

Craft also tends to steer the choice of material at Æquô, where Louisy introduces designers from around the world to the rich diversity of Indian craftsmanship, much of which focuses on metalwork. The gallery often refers to a book titled *Handmade In India*, which charts more than 500 different handicrafts to specific regions. It worked with a silver-plating workshop in Jaipur to create its large Dyad table, created striking screens featuring Bidriware – an old metal inlay art form – with illustrator Boris Brucher, and introduced French designer Wendy Andreu to a street-side vendor in Mumbai who makes shiny tiffin lunchboxes that inspired her stainless-steel pieces.

Louisy, who first worked with the Campana brothers in São Paulo, has also created objects for the gallery herself. Chrome-plated candle holders, an aluminium stool, chair and chunky floor light, and chrome-plated brass handles make up her tactile Tavit collection, which showcases the finishes achieved after sand casting. While most pieces were also finished in bronze, Louisy first had to cast the moulds in aluminium and included these as part of the collection. “It was interesting to exhibit the aluminium and bronze chair together as a process story, but also as a statement about aluminium,” she says. As experimentation continues and perceptions change, silver metals may yet reign supreme. ■ **HTSI**

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INTERIORS

Counter culture

Clara Baldock rounds up the best kitchen finishes – in chrome, zinc and steel



This semi-customised brushed-stainless-steel kitchen was created by Italian brand Alpes Inox in the Paris apartment of interior architects Kim Haddou and Florent Dufourcq.



A new addition to an ’80s apartment overlooking Sydney Harbour. Designers Handelsmann + Khaw leaned into the hard materials of the decade, inspired by the adaptation of *American Psycho*.



A stainless-steel counter and corrugated metal Sing Sing chair by Shiro Kuramata for XO in a Covent Garden holiday rental, a look created by interior designer Hollie Bowden.



This floating stainless-steel kitchen contrasted with pastel-pink walls was designed by Rodolphe Parente for the Canal Saint-Martin project in Paris.



A stainless-steel kitchen paired with Calacatta Viola marble countertops – inspired by spaceships and laboratories – designed by the studio Love Is Enough for an apartment in Chelsea, London.



This bespoke bar designed by Daytrip for Cromwell Place Café in London is clad in naturally patinated zinc buffed to a silvery sheen – with a deep, cantilevering bullnose.