

# HOME

## DESIGN & DECOR

### A STUDY OF WELLS MASON: *CONCEPTUAL ARTIST, FURNITURE MAKER & 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PHILOSOPHER*

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Whether you are moving into a new home or refreshing your current one, designing the interior can be one of the most daunting of tasks. Fortunately, artists like Wells Mason of Ironwood Industries make the arduous process that much easier and discernibly enjoyable by creating one-of-a-kind showpieces that are the focal point and inspiration of any room.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Wells has had a significant impact on the Austin art scene for over two decades now. He studied English Literature at the University of Texas and graduated with Honors. As a maker with a plethora of accolades, he's created innumerable furniture pieces and sculptural objects that beautifully adorn homes all across Texas.

"I grew up around woodworking and metalworking. My dad had a wood shop and my grandfather had a machine shop, so I was exposed to those tools early on. During college, I built my first chair. It was beautiful, but it collapsed when my girlfriend at the time tested it! Back to the drawing board," he laughed, remembering.

Thankfully, this first "bust" didn't slow him down, and Wells continued to build furniture throughout college and beyond, moving into it full-time in the mid-90s.

A man of many passions and talents, Wells pulls inspiration from the world around him — from other artists he admires, such as Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi, who helped inspire his Umasi Collection, to music, poetry, architecture, philosophy and the like. According to Wells, the Umasi Collection blurs the lines between furniture and sculpture. "I don't stay in any lane. I get off on a deep path," he said.

Another series Wells has been working on for years, called the Mirror Series, was born of the phenomenon created by social media and plays with the idea of how we view ourselves versus how we are perceived by others. "I'm going after the jugular on certain ideas that have to do with mental health and emotion and distill them down to

their essence, using bold colors and simple shapes," he explained.

When it comes to finding the ideas for his artwork, it seems to come quite naturally. "Ideas happen all day long. They happen to me in unexpected places — while driving, walking, sweeping the shop floor. If you're present and mindful, you're more open to these epiphanies, and that's when wonderful things happen," he mused.

Out of the avalanche of ideas that are constantly beaueguering Wells, there are those that almost literally "scream" at him for attention. As he circles the idea, suddenly, everything becomes crystal-clear and he just knows what to

do and how to do it. Then, he says it's a step-by-step process to actualize the concept. "I don't know if the ideas are choosing me or I'm choosing them, but sometimes it's like a bolt of lightning that says do this thing because it's that important for your growth," he added.

As an example, for years Wells admired a chair designed almost a century ago by the Dutch furniture designer and architect Gerrit Rietveld. But he also perceived flaws in the original design. So, he reimagined the chair with his own solutions to these perceived flaws. After "circling" the idea, dreaming about it, studying it and putting pen to paper, he says the best path seems to magically appear — although it's obvious that a lot of thought process and mental acuity facilitate his solutions.

"These days, I think of myself as a designer and sculptor. Some of my work is functional and some is not, but it's always original, always conceptual. There has to be an intellectual component to it," he noted.

For years, Wells did commission-based work, but those years are long past. Today, he's blessed to spend his time creating whatever it is he's inspired to create — his signature furniture designs and his small-scale and large-scale contemporary sculptures.



Umasi Table IX, antique longleaf pine, stainless steel  
Photo by Jim Tobac



Mirror Series, "Smile/Frown," bronze  
Photo by Jessica Mason