

Rock Chalk Review

FRIEDMAN BENDA AND THE ARTIST/ADRIEN MALLOT



Portrait of Wendell Castle seated on 'Long Night' (2011), 2013

American master

Exhibition and book bring new perspective to sculptor's long, iconic career

Wendell Castle's upcoming exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City pairs the world-renowned artist's latest work with some of his first pieces, which launched a new sculpture genre in the 1960s and helped establish the Emporia native as the founding father of the American art furniture movement.

The new pieces were created with the old ones in mind, the 82-year-old Castle says. It's all part of the long process of re-examining a nearly 60-year career that lately seems to have come full circle.

"They're borrowing eight or 10 early pieces from the '60s and talking about how they came into being and how they were made," Castle says of the MAD show, "then skipping up until today to talk about what new things we've brought to the table."

What Castle, f'59, g'61, has brought to

the table—and the chair, cabinet, bench and other traditional furniture pieces—is a whole new way of thinking about what furniture and sculpture can be.

An early Castle dining room table featured a big hole in the table top. "The reason I did that," Castle says, "is that the sculptural part that's really open to a lot of exploring is on the bottom side of the table, not the top. So by opening up a table you can look right down and see what's going on below."

That piece will be joined by a table he is making now in his Scottsville, New York studio. "That also has a hole in the top," he says, "but that's where the similarity stops.

They're not remotely similar in any other way."

The restless,

inventive Castle has never been interested in repeating himself—even when it might have paid handsomely to do so.

"There have been times when I made something that has been very successful, and there would be buyers out there if I wanted to make a lot of them," he says. "But I don't want to make a lot of them. I want to move right on.

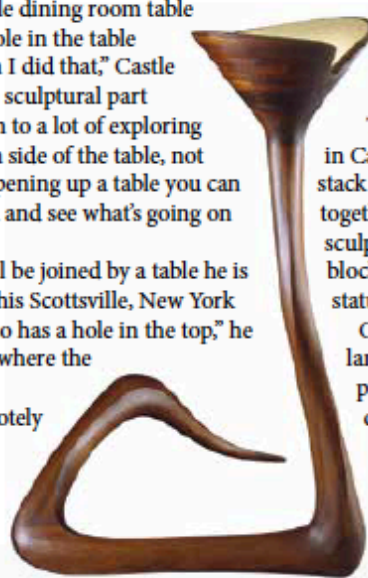
"I don't get anything out of repeating something. I don't learn anything. I want to learn something from my work. I don't believe it's true art if there's no risk."

"Wendell Castle Remastered," which runs Oct. 12 to Feb. 28 at MAD, is the first museum exhibition to examine work that Castle created using digital tools. Though he still favors handcrafting techniques such as carving, rasping and finishing, he has lately begun to embrace computer technology as well. He still prefers to draw by hand, but he also makes digital scans of handmade models and uses a computer-guided machining robot, freeing him to make large-scale sculptures that can be disassembled and moved.

"Pieces we're doing now we could not have possibly done in the '60s," Castle says. "The robot's doing a lot of things that we just can't do by hand."

Then and now the key technique in Castle's work is a process called stack lamination. It involves gluing together thin layers of wood and then sculpting the finished piece from that block, much like a sculptor hews a statue from a block of stone.

Castle says he first heard of stack lamination from KU sculpture professor Poco Frazier, f'29. He didn't explore the technique much until he left the Hill, and he found



Serpentine Floor Lamp, 1965

THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

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—Wendell Castle

FRIEDMAN BENDA/JON LAM PHOTOGRAPHY



The Secret of a Few, 2012

that it allowed him to make furniture without relying on classic furniture-making techniques like joinery.

"It immediately put me in a unique place," he says. Not bound by traditional woodworking techniques, he was also not bound by traditional furniture design. Anything went.

Just how far Castle has been willing to push that freedom is evident in *Wendell Castle: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1958-2012*. Due this fall from The Artist Book Foundation, the richly illustrated record of his life's work (with more than 1,100

color and 400 black-and-white photographs) includes every Castle piece that author Emily Evans Eerdmans could track down from private collectors and the more than 40 museums and dozens of corporate collections that hold his work. The book also includes essays by Glenn Adamson, Jane Adline and longtime Castle friend Dave Barry.

"In the book is everything they could possibly find, whether I liked it or not," Castle says with a wry laugh. "Some things I wished they hadn't found. But that's the way it goes. They're not all good."

FRIEDMAN BENDA AND THE ARTIST/MATT WITTMAYER



Dining Table, 1966



Wendell Castle: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1958-2012
by Emily Evans Eerdmans
The Artist Book Foundation, \$150

Indeed, according to Castle's own "10 Adopted Rules of Thumb," available on his website, wendellcastle.com, if you always hit the bullseye, the target is too near.

"If you make a perfect piece every time, you're not really growing," Castle explains. "You've got to put risk into your work, and that keeps you on your toes."

—Steven Hill



Environment for Contemplation, 1969-70



More or Less, 2014



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