

CULTURED

GEORGE LINDEMANN REMEMBERS WENDELL CASTLE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAUDIA URIBE TOURI



GEORGE LINDEMANN WITH A WENDELL CASTLE COFFEE TABLE AND CHAIRS; AN UNTITLED WORK BY ANSELM REYLE IS ON THE WALL.

Sam Roberts wrote a lovely obituary in the *New York Times* for Wendell Castle. He quotes design guru Glenn Adamson who said, "Wendell is the most important postwar American furniture designer, by a long shot." Glenn knows his stuff. He was the Executive Director of the Museum of Art and Design in New York. So my question is simple: Why does a great talent need to be old or deceased for the art world to recognize brilliance? The new has been worshiped for the last fifteen years or so. I get it. People want to "discover" the next great thing. And recently, say the last three or four years, there has been an effort to "rediscover" artists who have been overlooked by curators or by the market. Carmen Herrera, H.C Westerman, Ruth Asawa are all examples of artists who are finally, after long careers, being recognized more fully by the art market. But what I don't understand is that the design world is smaller than the art world.

There are less important designers out there than artists. Over the last decade, Wendell and his artist-wife Nancy Jurs attended

countless art fairs where they met with collectors and curators. Wendell was always his unassuming, accessible, pleasant self. He never behaved like a superstar. Wendell was a life-long art teacher. His body of work spanned decades and was collected by the most important museums in the United States. Wendell continued to produce work

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throughout his career, whether people wanted to buy it or not! For years at Art Basel Miami Beach, he and Nancy would stay on the living room floor of a friend's apartment! They had to stretch to make the trip, but being an artist and participating was the crux of who he was. If there was a big new design fair he was going to attend no matter what it took to get there and no matter where he had to stay! And yet, it was only during the last several years that he was uniformly heralded as a master; and only in his *New York Times* obituary is he referred to finally as "the most important postwar furniture designer." Fifteen years ago Wendell was obviously the most important living American furniture designer!

I first met Wendell when I was just out of college and I attended an opening he had at a gallery in Boca Raton called Habitat. Around 2000, I bought a home in Miami Beach and wanted some new furniture. I found Wendell's number in the Rochester phone book and asked my architect to call him and see if he would consider a commission. He was not represented by a gallery at the time. His career was in a lull. When we first met to discuss the commission it was obvious to me that he was a creative genius. It was also obvious that his work was meant to be both art and furniture. I showed him my pair of small-cantilevered chairs he had made in the sixties. I can't remember how long I had owned them, but I never sat on them because I thought they were too delicate. He was offended and proceeded to step up onto one of the chairs and jump up and down! He assured me that all of his furniture was designed to last and look good. Wendell's career sure did last, and he made a lot of people feel good!

So thank you *New York Times*. Thanks for putting Wendell's career in perspective. I only wish he could have read his own obituary.