

## Wendell Castle

**Barry Friedman Ltd.  
and Friedman Benda**

Sliding into one of Wendell Castle's latest bowl-shaped chairs is a melt-worthy experience. The polished ash or walnut cradles your lower back and thighs, negating the "hard" in hardwood. These scooped-out chairs and settees, along with tables bearing bases that resemble

piled warheads, were the focus of "Volumes and Voids" at Barry Friedman. To make the works, Castle carves stacked-and-laminated boards into solid, biomorphic forms; the grain of the wood creates looping patterns across the surfaces.



Wendell Castle, *Like an Echo*, 2012, stained walnut with oil finish, 26½" x 43½" x 38½". Barry Friedman Ltd.

Most pieces are stained black, but rather than having ominous overtones, they project a spirit of lightheartedness.

Castle expresses his quirky humor in the legs of his furniture. Seats like *More Is More* (2011) and *What We Know* (2012) rest on fat supports that resemble elephant limbs, and the equally stubby *Like an Echo* (2012) faces upward like a dog begging for a treat. Others look as though they're teetering on clown shoes. Castle avoids treading into cartoon territory by focusing on the balance between delicacy and weightiness in his rounded abstract structures.

Downstairs, the show at Friedman Benda centered on *A New Environment* (2012), an installation that was more art than design, although it was still perfectly functional. Suggesting a Space Age bachelor pad or an adult playhouse, the all-black installation is made up of three bowled chairs, a couple of end tables, a totem-pole-like column topped by pinhole lights, and a spine-shaped staircase leading to a private, shag-carpet-lined pod with portholes. Everything rises from scratched wooden tiles that provide a textural counterpoint to the smooth, organic furnishings.

*A New Environment* is a kind of sequel to Castle's *Environment for Contemplation*, another sculpted domain from 1969, though the new one was set up for socializing rather than meditation. That's not to say this double exhibition was a nostalgic repetition of Castle's established forms. Instead, it showed the shape of things to come from this furniture-design lion.

—Trent Morse

Morse, Trent. "Wendell Castle", *ARTnews*, March 2013.

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