



HIDDEN

Meanings

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"We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us really happy is something to be enthusiastic about." These are the words of historian and novelist Charles Kingsley and they aptly seem to sum up the philosophy of Based Upon, a London-based company with an international clientele seeking one-of-a-kind furniture pieces or installations that tell a story and speak of timelessness, provenance, resonance and preciousness.



Luxury is a quality historically revered in France and as a result a sense of style can be seen to permeate almost every aspect of French life. Napoleon was possibly one of the most influential figures in the creation of the world of luxury, as he himself had a taste for it. His 10 years in power witnessed a highly influential period of development for the arts and crafts in France and the French leader employed some of the best artists in Europe during his reign.

Conversely, the concept of luxury in modern day culture relates to mass produced handbags, scarves and products that have somehow seemed to have lost their core identity and edge from what they used to represent. Luxury, in this day and age, is something of a misconception. As Dana Thompson states in her book 'Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster': "...the luxury industry has changed the way people dress. It has realigned our economic class system. It has changed the way we interact. It has become part of our social fabric. To achieve this, it has sacrificed its integrity, undermined its products, tarnished its history and hoodwinked its consumer. In order to make luxury 'accessible', tycoons have stripped away all that has made it special."

Ian Abell, co-founder of London company Based Upon, creators of one-of-a-kind, unique furniture pieces, surface installations and sculptures, describes the nucleus of his philosophy, which for the beholder of his company's creations, is likely to provoke a rethink of the concept of luxury, perhaps harking back to days of yore: "In remembrance of timelessness; inspired by nature; rooted in provenance; beginning with resonance; and drawn from preciousness."

Based Upon was formed in 1994 by Abell and his twin brother Richard, when they acquired the rights to the world's leading liquid metal technology. Almost immediately they began collaborating with architect David Collins on the then new Nobu in London's

Berkeley Street. More than two decades on, Based Upon's list of clients is broad and includes Gordon Ramsay, Fortnum & Mason, Comme des Garçons and Donna Karan, to name but a few, not to mention Russian billionaires, Arab Royalty and Greek shipping tycoons. The company has become celebrated for its highly innovative approach to luxury design, creating handmade art pieces and sculptures with provocatively striking surfaces and exquisite detail. "Our work ranges from sculptural forms and large scale wall installations to personalised artworks which incorporate mementos and precious objects to create a new kind of portrait," states Abell. "It is constantly evolving, as most of our private commissions challenge us to create a one-off or something very bespoke."

Based Upon's approach to its work is highly collaborative, both with its clients and within its team. The company is made up of fine artists, ceramicists, photographers, illustrators, sculptors, furniture designers and graphic designers, each of whom is committed to creating pioneering work, made with love.

A graduate of Philosophy from Oxford University, Abell states that most of Based Upon's ideas are primarily derived from philosophical concepts. "Things start as ideas and then gradually manifest visually; the name Based Upon is reference to the fact that everything is based on something, and everything has its influence in something. This is the first step in developing a piece of work."

Once an idea is formed, it then gradually evolves into existence and throughout the process, quality is never compromised, resulting in an intense level of craftsmanship and a highly covetable final product. Based Upon customers seek quality, intention and meaning in the pieces that they commission, and the artists and designers involved in the creation of each of these pieces go far beyond the realms of expectation in order to achieve just that.



In nature everything evolves and constantly changes, whether it is the colour of the leaves on the trees, or the erosion of oils and rocks. "The pieces and surfaces that we have made also change and evolve with time. We did a staircase for Nobu in London, the surface of which has evolved through different layers and textures which can show marks of time and tell a story."

On March 3rd 2015, two monumental cast bronze sculptures created by Based Upon, were unveiled to the public. The sculptures, entitled 'A Grain of Rice', are the first major public commission by the British creative studio - the first sculpture stands at over 10 metres high on Queens Road Central, Hong Kong, whilst the second stands at 6 metres tall at 8 Canada Square in London. The works were commissioned by HSBC to commemorate its 150th Anniversary. Embodying a harmony on yin and yang, and a congruence of East and West, the 'Grain of Rice' sculptures symbolise the two beating hearts of HSBC in Hong Kong and London.

The creative team at Based Upon, led by Ian Abell and Alex Welch, were tasked with creating a form which would resonate with both Eastern and Western cultures alike, and in so doing, they identified a solitary grain of rice as the starting point for these striking pieces. "In both Chinese and Western cultures, this single entity is rich in symbolism; untradeable alone, but of limitless value when combined as part of a greater number. The rewards of a bountiful rice harvest begin with regard for each and every grain," notes Abell.



A Grain of Rice, Hong Kong, 2016



Abell states that going back to the source of origin has great importance when creating a legacy piece for a client, a reflection of the provenance in a piece. "Provenance is about taking the concept of bespoke to a real extreme. If we're doing a piece for a Hong Kong client, we want the elements incorporated to have come from the streets of the city."

Although some pieces have taken longer than others to manifest, Abell is adamant in claiming that there is a sacredness to the whole process, the crafting almost a form of meditation, so the time taken to put a piece together is irrelevant for the most part. "In ancient times, it was all about the process and not necessarily the final object," he notes.

In June 2016, 'Based Upon' revealed its second public sculpture in London. 'The Lost Fragment (a prosthetic fallacy)' is over three metres in length and is comprised of five tons of granite and bronze. Following its preview at Masterpiece London, the piece was then displayed on a lawn in Berkeley Square for the remainder of 2016.

The sculpture's stone and bronze form recalls a primitive tool. Conjuring notions of early human production, the fragmented work questions whether the making and trading of things created a fissure in man's connection with nature's wholeness. Arrow-like in its form, the sculpture pointed toward the Isle of Skye, the work's conceptual

and physical origin, provoking reflections on displacement and homecoming.

The finely sculpted cast-bronze 'fixes' the rock's severed edge, highlighting the preciousness of imperfection and asking whether human attempts to fix the cracks of nature are futile; a cosmetic, prosthetic fallacy.

An apparently harmonious marriage of bronze and rock 'The Lost Fragment' hides a deeper truth within its vociferous crack. "The work is at once a monument to humankind's ingenuity and a melancholic musing on how easily we are distracted by our own deftness, missing the vast ever present truth as we focus on details we have invented to demonstrate our cunning," states Abell poetically. "This work mourns the loss of all that is ancient, the ancestral wisdom cultivated since the origin, stored within a lump of granite 50 million years old."

All told, the Abell twins have successfully played their role in redefining the idea of luxury, whether it be in the form of integrated artworks, single editions, legacy pieces or surface decorations. All their work is undoubtedly based upon many things and Abell sums his mission up in a nutshell. "We don't care what the canvas is, as long as what is ultimately created means something."

