



Buyer's View: Beauty that's skin deep

Leather artisans demonstrate the vast skill, time and patience that go into creating bespoke products by hand.

L'atelier Bettenfeld-Rosenblum

Piecing back together a collection of tools said to be the largest of its kind in Europe was no easy task for David Rosenblum, but his determination to resurrect his father's leather workshop inspired this task for 12 years.

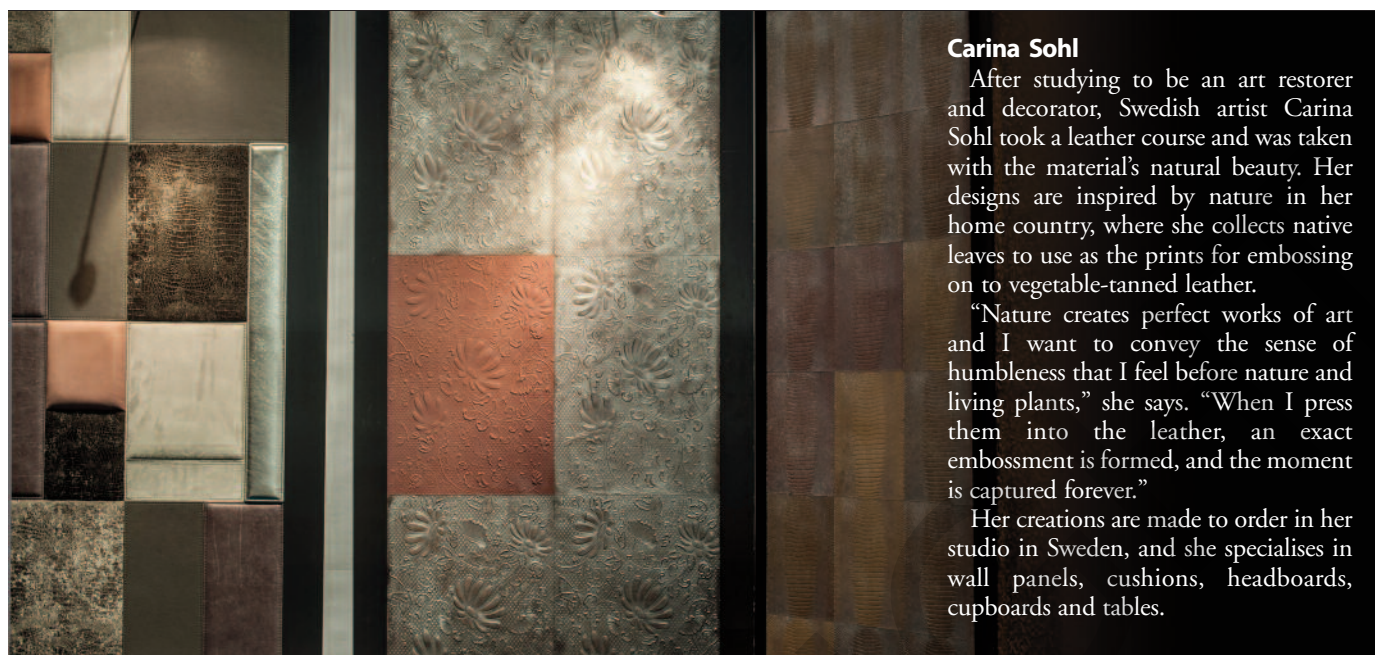
Master leather craftsman Bernard Rosenblum had been forced to shutter L'atelier Bettenfeld-Rosenblum after running into financial difficulty in 1994, almost 100 years after it was established. He was renowned as one of the most skilled leather workers of his generation, repairing and restoring artefacts for museums across the world, as well as for Charles de Gaulle, King Hassan II of Morocco and the court of Iran. He passed these skills and love for the material on to his son, who, after recovering the 4,000 tool collection and motivated by a desire to honour his father following his sudden passing, reopened the business in 2010.

Today, David's clients include fashion houses, interior designers and private clients who arrive at the studio in search of original furniture hand-crafted in leather and gold. He also restores antiques for museums and recreates objets d'art for collectors.

"Leather has richness and with its structure, colour, subjectivity and sensuality, the ability to create an atmosphere that no other material can offer," he says. "It is a material that is sensual and seductive from the first contact, you immediately fall under its spell."

The leathers he uses are sourced from Spain, Italy and Belgium, and include embossed and exotic leathers such as python, crocodile and shagreen. He hand dyes the skins himself and uses a minimum of 22 carat gold for the gilding.





Carina Sohl

After studying to be an art restorer and decorator, Swedish artist Carina Sohl took a leather course and was taken with the material's natural beauty. Her designs are inspired by nature in her home country, where she collects native leaves to use as the prints for embossing on to vegetable-tanned leather.

"Nature creates perfect works of art and I want to convey the sense of humbleness that I feel before nature and living plants," she says. "When I press them into the leather, an exact embossment is formed, and the moment is captured forever."

Her creations are made to order in her studio in Sweden, and she specialises in wall panels, cushions, headboards, cupboards and tables.

Atelier Mardini

Shoe designer Taher Mardini was born in Beirut where he became an apprentice for a bag manufacturer before moving to France in 1985. After 10 years at Paris-based footwear company Atelier Voisin he launched his own brand, Taher Mardini, and the small workshop quickly made a name for itself with its semi-bespoke approach.

Five years later, his first store opened in the Marais district of Paris, and, in 2009, the launch of larger-scale production gave the company a new status and new resources. The custom offering means Mr Mardini works with a wide variety of leathers, but his preferred materials include crocodile, snake and fish. The workshop produces limited edition collections and prototypes for designers, creates individual models for clients and produces its own hand-made collections.

Christophe Fey

Christophe Fey is from a line of leatherworkers: his grandfather was an upholsterer and he has been in business with his father since they were granted a patent on their leather slabs in 1996. The company now produces custom furniture, walls, headboards and floors and the made-to-measure approach means it offers a wide range of dimensions, colours and materials.

Mr Fey is renowned for his creative approach: using lacerated, buttoned, rhinestone and gilded leathers, and working with a range of skins, including ostrich, crocodile, goat and stingray, all sourced from French tanneries. He worked with Louis Vuitton on a store front and with Swarovski on a collection of leather panels. His showroom is steps away from the Bastille, next to the antique dealers of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, who turn to Mr Fey to restore artefacts to their former glory.

Maïté Wustner

Customers who enter Maïté Wustner's boutique and workshop in a Paris side street will be struck by the smell of the leather and the rustic feel of the work space. The former Hermes apprentice specialises in one-of-a-kind handbags and offers clients the chance to sketch their own designs. "I like to breathe life into the material," she says of the leathers, which she sources mainly from French tanneries and small skin producers. She is the designer, the artisan and the sales woman, and concedes she could do with more time as waiting lists grow. ☺

These five companies were exhibiting within the Bespoke section at Le Cuir a Paris leather event, February.

All images courtesy of Le Cuir.

