

AD INNOVATOR: CHRISTOPHER SCHANCK

An inventive, fast-rising Detroit designer finds luxurious potential in the most unlikely materials

Text by Dan Rubinstein

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Looks are deceiving when it comes to the furniture of Detroit-based designer Christopher Schanck. The pieces from his signature Alufoil series appear to have been chiseled from hunks of precious metal. In reality they are crafted using bits of steel, industrial foam, and the same kind of aluminum-foil sheets you find wrapped around a chocolate bar. But as his practice proves, even humble materials can yield objects of uncommon luxury.



Christopher Schanck in his Detroit studio with a 2014 chair from his Alufoil series.

Photo: Christopher Schanck

"If you make a commitment to something very ordinary, you can still realize something special," Schanck says of his trademark technique. Some of the most important names in the worlds of design and fashion have taken notice. Architect Peter Marino recently commissioned an Alufoil circular bench for the Dior boutique in Manhasset, New York, while fellow AD100 luminary William Sofield selected a desk and chair from the line for the Tom Ford flagship on Madison Avenue. And Schanck's largest piece to date, an armoire standing more than eight feet tall, is on view in a group show at Paris's Almine Rech Gallery through October 11.

Each design begins as a simple metal frame, which is then filled out using industrial foam and occasionally scraps of particle board before it is sprayed with polyurea, a material often used

for truck-bed liners. Overlapping layers of aluminum foil are then applied and sealed by hand using anywhere from three to six coats of resin. "In every piece I try to fight a sense of good taste and push more obscure proportions," the designer says. "There are no straight lines, no perfect angles."

After attending the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and Central Saint Martins in London, Schanck worked as a sculptor and modelmaker and then studied photography and 3-D design at the Cranbrook Academy of Art outside Detroit. He moved to the city following his graduation in 2011, purchasing a storefront and starting his atelier, which now employs some dozen local artists, students, and craftsmen. Schanck views his famously struggling adopted home as a kind of mood board in transformation—one from which he draws constant inspiration. In life as in work, he reflects, "imperfection is the standard." *For more information go to christopherschanck.com.*