

THE INVISIBLE STORE OF HAPPINESS AT CLERKENWELL DESIGN WEEK

Sculptor Laura Ellen Bacon and furniture designer / maker Sebastian Cox collaborate to create an elaborate installation out of American hardwood

The Invisible Store of Happiness is a celebration of wood and craftsmanship. It brings together two of the UK's brightest talents – furniture designer/maker Sebastian Cox and artist Laura Ellen Bacon – who will fuse their ideas and skills to create an installation for the Clerkenwell Design Week out of American hardwood.



Sculptor Laura Ellen Bacon with designer/maker Sebastian Cox

This three-metre high wooden sculpture – made out of American maple and cherry, consists of a mighty steam bent frame that gives way to thinner, weave-able strips manipulated to twist and flow into a whirlpool of texture and shape – will be showcased in the dramatic archway in front of the historic Museum of the Order of St John in London's Clerkenwell neighbourhood 19-21 May 2015.

The American Hardwood Export Council is sponsoring this project because, "The core of what we do is to celebrate the potential of our timbers. By supporting installations for events like CDW we can be experimental and do unusual things with our timbers through exploration of design and craftsmanship. Sebastian Cox, as one of the UK's foremost makers, challenges the way wood works in a way nobody else does," says David Venables, Director of AHEC Europe. "Laura Ellen Bacon, with her artistic sensibility coupled with her wonderful sculptural work in willow wood, is the perfect complement to Sebastian's approach. We want to ignite new thinking and excite designers about new ways to use wood."

Sebastian Cox conceived the project and led by his growing passion for Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), took it to AHEC as a proposal. Cox is best known for making handmade furniture with sustainable materials from the UK's woodlands, but his passion for the progressive research AHEC are conducting into LCA led him to Venables. He asked Laura Ellen Bacon, whose poetic willow sculptures he has always admired, to join him for the project.

"The starting point is the material. Laura works in a material that allows her to make form but the material for Laura is secondary. She is a sculptor first and foremost. I think materials first, structure later," says Cox. "So there was a huge discussion about the challenge between design and sculpture."

"There is a blur here between sculpture and furniture. My work typically carries of a notion of growth and momentum and I always like to question how and why a form comes into being. When creating a form brings so much joy in the making, then the form will always carry this joy within it," says Laura Ellen Bacon. "For me, forms are always created in respect of what is possible with my bare hands. Alongside Sebastian, we've tried to use this material in as pure a way as possible, letting the form convey both the properties of the wood and what is possible with our bare hands."

CRAFTING THE INVISIBLE STORE OF HAPPINESS

The maple and cherry have been crafted into an elliptical-shape frame that showcases fine craftsmanship and impeccable cabinetry on a grand scale with huge arcs of steam bent wood, hand jointed together in mostly glue-less draw-bore mortice and tenon joints.

Through complex machinery the components of this solid frame are effectively shredded into strips and made supple and weave-able from time spent soaking in the River Thames beside Sebastian's Woolwich workshop.

These strips are boldly manipulated by hand, flowing and twisting into the space to create a whirlpool of texture and shape, all held within its mighty external frame.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

American hardwood forests are sustainably managed. Furthermore, for several years now, AHEC has invested in environmental profiling in the form of environmental Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of its projects through independent experts, the Germany-based company PE International. The Invisible Store of Happiness will also be profiled, using the latest LCA modelling techniques.

David Venables says: "We can now produce accurate scientific profiles for each project we get involved in. The fact that we can collect data and mathematically model wooden products is as important as the numbers themselves. Why? Because it shows industry what is possible and also alerts the design community as to what is around the corner. I can envisage a time in the not-too-distant future when all products will be required to carry an environmental rating based on scientific life cycle."

Sebastian Cox says, "We can also use data from AHEC and the US Forest Service to calculate how quickly timbers we use get replaced in the U.S. forests through natural regeneration.

I was fascinated to see the speed at which the timber I used in the Wish List project [for the London Design Festival 2014] was regenerated in the American woodlands. I believe the entire design community should be more aware of LCA and we should be dedicated to measuring the environmental impact of the things we design and make. Similarly, people should be able to know the true environmental impact of the things they buy and have in their home. Projects like this demonstrate the importance of things like LCA”.

As an example of the sustainability of American hardwood forests, for AHEC’s Endless Stair, made out of tulipwood CLT, it took less than two minutes for the 100m³ of logs used in the project to be replaced in the forests. All the timber to make the ten pieces produced for last year’s “Wish List” project took two seconds to be replaced. Of course, it is the sheer scale of forests, which cover the same landmass as England, France and Italy put together that makes this possible, together with the fact that every year growth far exceeds harvest.

American hardwoods have a low impact on the environment at all stages of their life cycle right from the point of extraction. Forest management in the sector is not intensive, one outcome of the fact that most American hardwood forests are owned and managed by individuals, families, or small companies rather than large timber corporations. Forest holdings are relatively small, mostly under 10 hectares, limiting the size of harvesting operations.

The primary motivation for owning the land is usually not timber production or economics, but simply the enjoyment of forest ownership. Because timber production and economic return to shareholders are not primary objectives, the owners of American hardwood forests tend to manage less aggressively and to grow their forests on longer rotations. Selection harvesting is typical, involving removal of only a few trees per hectare, rather than clear-felling. After harvesting, forest owners usually rely on natural regeneration, which is abundant in the deep fertile forest soils of the United States. There is little need or incentive for addition of chemical fertilisers. No non-native “exotic” or genetically modified species are used.

ABOUT SEBASTIAN COX

Sebastian has been highly recognised for using the ancient technique of coppicing. By cutting and managing trees in this way provides an abundant source of timber, as well as creating a healthy and diverse woodland. He creates products that are simple in form, functional, unobtrusive, lightweight and durable. His work also shows a strong connection with the making process through visible joints, and honest construction. Manufacturing each piece by hand, his designs are mostly developed at the workbench rather than on a CAD program.

www.sebastiancox.co.uk

Twitter: @sebcoxfurniture

ABOUT LAURA ELLEN BACON

Laura Ellen Bacon is a British artist who lives and works in Derbyshire.

Her sculptures are most often created on site, in both landscape and cityscape settings that have included Chatsworth; Somerset House, London and New Art Centre at Roche Court. Laura's work is also created for interior settings, from private interiors to gallery spaces including, the Sainsbury

Centre, Norwich (2011), the Jerwood Space, London (2010) and The Saatchi Gallery, London for 'Collect' (2013).

www.lauraellenbacon.com

Twitter: @LauraEllenBacon

ABOUT AHEC

For over 20 years the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been at the forefront of wood promotion in Europe, successfully building a distinctive and creative brand for U.S. hardwoods. AHEC's support for creative design projects such as The Wish List for London Design Festival, FIVE at Clerkenwell Design Week 2014 demonstrates the performance potential of these sustainable materials and provides valuable inspiration.

www.americanhardwood.org

Twitter: @ahec_europe

ABOUT CLERKENWELL DESIGN WEEK

One of the best-loved events in the design industry calendar, Clerkenwell Design Week is a three-day annual festival gathering Clerkenwell's long-established design community together. Now in its sixth year, the event has increasingly become a must go-to showcase for the UK and international design community. Last year's show attracted over 32,000 architects and designers, and 250 brands from the UK and across the globe.

The name Clerkenwell comes from the Clerks' Well in Farringdon Lane, where London parish clerks performed the famous Medieval Mystery Plays throughout the Middle Ages. Since the Industrial Revolution, the area has housed craft workshops, printers, clockmakers and jewellers. Traditional crafts, such as printing and bookbinding still flourish, as do graphic designers. In the last two decades, Clerkenwell's unique variety buildings have been transformed into central studio and workshop spaces, attracting an unprecedented concentration of architectural, design and creative practices.

The global businesses that have made Clerkenwell their home have shaped the borough into the UK's most important generator of creativity and innovation. Serving an infinite variety of other industries easily accessible from across London, Clerkenwell has become home to a plethora of new media agencies, graphic and interactive design studios and more than 200 architectural practices - more per square mile than anywhere else on the planet. In addition, Clerkenwell houses over 60 design showrooms.

www.clerkenwelldesignweek.com

Twitter: @cdwfestival

#cdw2015

ABOUT THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

The Museum of the Order of St John tells a unique and fascinating story — the story of the Order of St John — from its origins in eleventh century Jerusalem, through to its role today with St John Ambulance and the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. This story highlights how, from founding a hospital to care for sick pilgrims in eleventh century Jerusalem, St John has maintained its caring role to the present day, working on numerous humanitarian projects worldwide.

The Museum occupies two sites in Clerkenwell: St John's Gate, which dates from 1504; and the Priory Church of St John with its surviving twelfth century Crypt.
www.museumstjohn.org.uk

For further information and images please contact:

Friends & Co

Belinda Fisher / Christine Samuelian

Belinda@friendsandco.co.uk / 07808 721 308

Christine@friendsandco.co.uk / 07957 203 037

Twitter: @friendsandcouk