

FORT GANSEVOORT

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Both Sides Now
By Liz Hirsch



THE ARTIST-CUM-FURNITURE designer Sam Stewart's best-known pieces may be the curved-edged, mod-hued tables at the fashionable downtown Manhattan hangout Dimes, but he still draws upon the more traditional techniques of Appalachian woodworking that he first encountered in his native North Carolina. This month, a collection of Stewart's retro-futurist works will go on view at Fort Gansevoort in Chelsea. A five-foot-tall floor lamp upholstered in orange vinyl and set into burl wood base bends like a tree limb to reveal a shining LED bulb (above), while another

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piece, a playful bed-table combination that recalls both Richard Artschwager's Formica minimalism and Mary Heilmann's offbeat riffs on midcentury modern, features a white tufted leather mattress wedged beneath a veneered wooden slab. But it's a pair of asymmetrical chairs that are simultaneously the most homespun and high-tech pieces in the show: Stewart fashioned them from dried maple and beech branches he charred with a propane torch and then encased in a translucent vinyl cocoon. "The petrified wood accidentally created drawings on the inside of the vinyl," says Stewart. For him, it's a happenstance that, as with any folk tradition, tells a new story.

– Liz Hirsch