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ISTANBUL STYLE

**THE VERY RICH
HOURS OF
NATHAN MYHRVOLD**

**THE HAPPIEST
HOTEL ON EARTH**

**BENTLEY'S NEW
CONTINENTAL GT**

A black and white close-up portrait of Jaime Tresserra. He has dark, curly hair and is wearing glasses. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a thoughtful expression. His right hand is raised near his face, holding the temple of his glasses. He is wearing a dark shirt and a watch on his left wrist.

Style

Barcelona-based Tresserra concocts fantasy furniture with "an element of perfection" that sets his pricey pieces apart.

The • Movie Lover

FOR JAIME TRESSERRA, FURNITURE IS DRAMA. BY JOSHUA LEVINE

Furniture designer Jaime Tresserra grew up in the gray landscape of Franco's Spain as a movie-crazy kid. "Movies were my windows," he recalls, "the hope that another life exists, and that it's in Technicolor. When I watched those old films about ancient Rome, I didn't identify with the Christians, I identified with the emperors—all those beautiful togas, all those grapes!"

Style



Opulent, with a wow factor irrefutable from top: The Nueva York bumper; the Dos Sentidos ('Two Senses'), a six-foot-high desk chest of drawers with mirrors and cast; the signature Butterfly desk; Tresserra filling it all top to the

If those Roman emperors were alive and reclining today, it's not hard to imagine them popping grapes on one of Tresserra's Nueva York stainless steel-and-leather lounge chairs (around \$32,000 with foot rest, \$25,000 without). Or sitting down to a prime plate of lark's tongues around his Velden dining table (from \$55,000). In Tresserra's case, the child is most definitely father to the designer.

Tresserra doesn't have an identifiable style. He's more of a gifted magpie, taking the best bits of Art Deco and the Arts and Crafts movement to fashion a luxe look that might be called haute ocean liner. Whatever style Tresserra is reimagining, this is rich-guy, feel-good furniture, mostly mirror-polished stainless steel and the kind of leather you could eat. It may not break new ground, but it does make you go, Wow!

Oddly, given that he comes from Barcelona—one of the world's great Art Nouveau towns—he doesn't much go in for frills and curlicues. On the other hand, if he has to... "The Japanese just keep saying, 'Gaudí, Gaudí, Gaudí,'" he huffs in mock exasperation. "So I finally told them, you want Gaudí, okay already, here's Gaudí." That would be Tresserra's Butterfly desk (\$18,000), whose top leaves unfold like butterfly wings while two steel hinges pop up like little antennae. It's become one of his best-known pieces.

Tresserra's god is most definitely in the details. There are ingenious hidden drawers and metal locks that are so satisfying to use you could spend all day clicking them open and shut. That, too, comes from Tresserra's childhood, when the boy would become mesmerized while manipulating the glove compartment in his father's Mercedes.

Tresserra built a couple of prototypes of his Bolero billiard table before he found out how to get just the right sound for the ball when it hits a pocket—more of a loud wooden *clack!* than the dull thud of a traditional pool table. Why? Because he likes it that way.

Is a good clack worth \$136,000? It is to the uncompromising people who buy Tresserra, people like Olivier Metzner, one of France's most fearsome litigators. Metzner owns a Bolero, along with somewhere between 20 and 30 other Tresserra pieces. "There's an element of perfection in his pieces that you don't really find anywhere else," says Metzner.

Tresserra originally agreed to make the billiard table as a piece of pricey whimsy for one of his regulars, who demanded a pigskin surface instead of felt. (He refused. "I told him, you can be an idiot if you want, but not me.") And he never expected to sell more than one or two of them. Since the table went into his line four years ago, he says he's sold more than 25.

Jaime Tresserra is in his 60s now, but the excitable kid he used to be keeps bubbling out. We were chatting in his showroom on Barcelona's elegant Josep Bertrand street. (He also has a gallery on Paris' rue de Rivoli.) The words pour out in a mischievous stew of Catalan, Spanish, and French.

There were always actors and designers passing through his childhood home, and Tresserra's father had the good taste to buy Eames chairs without knowing what they were. But to actually earn a living





as a designer? "They would have sent me to a psychiatrist," says Tresserra. Instead, his parents packed him off to law school. Bad idea. "Studying law was like reading the phone book," recalls Tresserra, who dropped out after his first year.

After some wandering years, he put together a prototype collection of furniture for an industrial fair in Valencia in 1987, and a handful of orders followed. "I looked around and said to myself, My god, now we actually have to make this stuff!" Tresserra knew what he wanted, but he had no idea how to build it, so he made the rounds of Spain's best craftsmen. They mostly turned him down flat. The only carpenter willing to tackle his intricate blueprints was José María Balaguer, who had a small wood-working atelier outside of Barcelona. It was a fortunate meeting: Balaguer still crafts Tresserra's complex furniture today, along with a staff of some 17 other artisans.

Tresserra doesn't bother with the business end of things, either. His wife, Lola, handles that. They met at a disco in 1973 when they were both married to other people. She's the hard-headed one, leaving Jaime free to chase the butterflies of his design fancy. (He claims he doesn't even know his own prices, and you're half inclined to believe him.)

Clockwise from top left: The enigmatic, Rubik's Cube-like Formulas, with math equations carved into the wood; the Balaguera pool table; and the Velho dining table.

ately those fancies have turned even more fanciful. Some of his newest pieces are really sculpture masquerading as furniture. Formulas (\$81,000) is a flat grid with mathematical equations whittled into the wood (math being a bugaboo from Tresserra's inglorious school years). The grid rotates like a Rubik's Cube to reveal a complex patchwork of storage compartments. Not your average chest of drawers.

Even less practical is Dos Sentidos—"Two Senses." It's a six-foot-high wall of teak, with 21 three-inch-by-three-inch drawers down the middle and 21 along each side. Each of the middle drawers has a small brass nose for a handle; each of the side drawers has an ear. Tresserra made 12 Dos Sentidos and has sold seven (at \$70,000 apiece). One American woman asked him what a three-inch-by-three-inch drawer could possibly be used for. Tresserra turned to her with his straightest face. "Condoms." ■

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