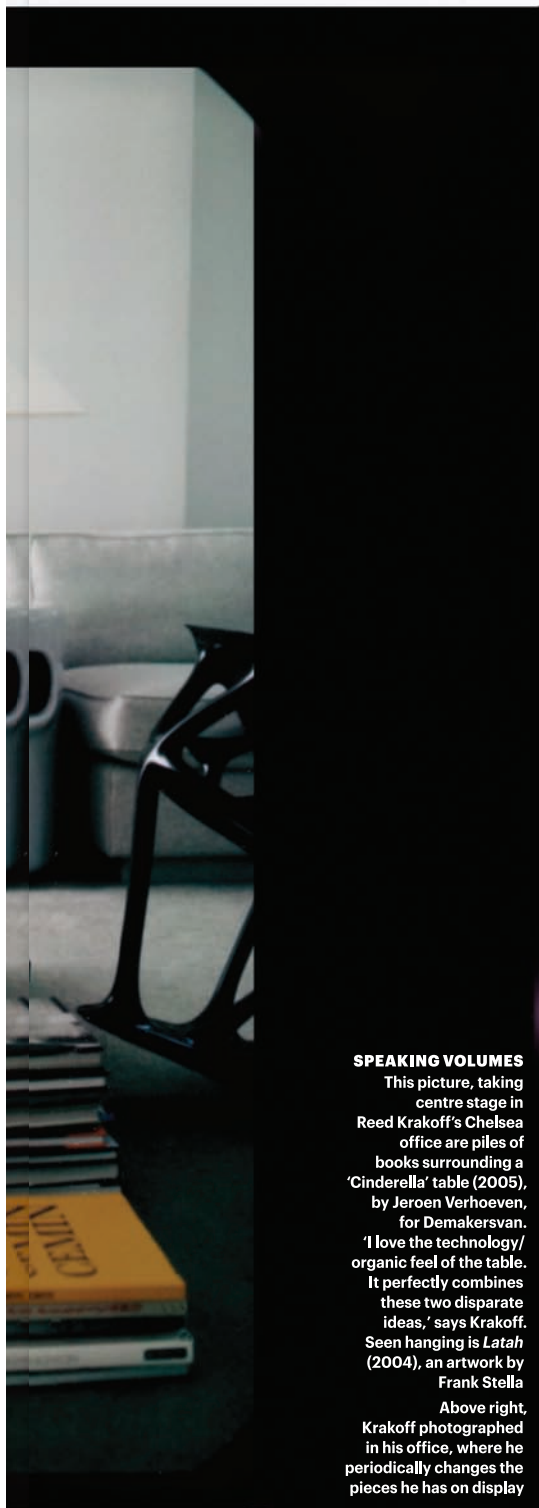




THE COLLECTOR

Believing design always has a story to tell, fashion designer Reed Krakoff turns to the treasures in his NYC office for inspiration

PHOTOGRAPHY: REED KRAKOFF PRODUCER: MICHAEL REYNOLDS WRITER: SHONQUIS MORENO



SPEAKING VOLUMES

This picture, taking centre stage in Reed Krakoff's Chelsea office are piles of books surrounding a 'Cinderella' table (2005), by Jeroen Verhoeven, for Demakersvan.

'I love the technology/organic feel of the table. It perfectly combines these two disparate ideas,' says Krakoff. Seen hanging is *Latah* (2004), an artwork by Frank Stella

Above right, Krakoff photographed in his office, where he periodically changes the pieces he has on display



For many in the fashion world, form must follow the human body in order to function. For American fashion designer Reed Krakoff, however, it is the dictum of the industrial design world – form follows function – that really rules the runway.

Krakoff, 48, who rose through the ranks at Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger to become the creative director of leather accessories label Coach, has taken the brand from a \$500,000-a-year outfit to a \$4bn-a-year handbag house in 15 years. He still heads up Coach, which now accounts for a third of high-end handbag sales in the US, overseeing design, store concepts and marketing. But in 2010, Krakoff also launched his own, eponymous luxury label.

Autumn/winter 2012 will be the ninth outing for Reed Krakoff Collection, if one counts resort or pre-collections; a New Jersey boutique has already been added to stores in Tokyo, Las Vegas and New York's Madison Avenue. Krakoff's west Chelsea office, however, demonstrates not so much the ambition and scope of his fashion collection, but of his furniture and art collecting.

Krakoff wears his hair close-cropped, his glasses thick-rimmed and shirts button-down. He has an easy-going nature and on a bitterly cold winter day, he is deeply reclined on a lush linen couch in his office, a cross between a well-appointed Upper East Side living room and a white-box downtown gallery.

The space is kitted out with a flock of black Allan McCollum paintings, a monumental 'Bell' lamp by the Bouroullec brothers, a rapid-prototyped artwork by Frank Stella and a low chrome coffee table by the Swiss designer Mattia Bonetti. This is flanked by a sinuous black armchair that is part of Dutch designer Joris Laarman's 'Bone' series. On the facing wall, a midcentury modern shelving unit by Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé looks all the more sculptural because it is devoid of books; instead,

volumes are piled in the centre of the room, at the base of Jeroen Verhoeven's 'Cinderella' table. They resemble offerings at an altar to both creativity and commerce – in the form of a laser-cut wooden desk with a cascading silhouette that could almost be that of a dress.

If you came back in a few months' time, though, there would be an entirely different collection of treasures to take in. Krakoff irregularly rethinks his office space and more regularly 'edits' the smaller pieces on display. His inspirations seem to come from anywhere but the fashion world: instead he looks to architect Walter Gropius, artists Tom Sachs, Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson. With the same catholic tastes that these names suggest, the way he describes the new label is rife – but rich – with contradictions: it represents luxury that is unstudied and unpretentious, both masculine and feminine, and that plays with the pop and the patrician by treating sumptuous materials casually and manipulating industrial materials in lavish ways. He recast the highbrow and the low in last season's Reed Krakoff Collection tote, the 'Boxer', which takes the design cues for its belt-like closures from the tape-wrapped fists of a fighter. (It also happens to – unconsciously – echo Coach founder Miles Cahn's first bag design, which was based on a baseball glove.)

In almost every piece, Krakoff knits together the refined and the spontaneous, the boutique and the blue collar, discipline and serendipity – and it is a formula that is working better with each season. Ask the critics: in two years, reviews have gone from abysmal to admiring.

Spring 2012 was riddled with disparate references, from Ron Arad to James Audubon. But the collection felt seamless and uncluttered because Krakoff edits ceaselessly, a lesson learned early and manifestly applied at Coach. He paired oversized Audubon prints with acid tones influenced by Bauhaus colourist >>

Wallpaper*



1



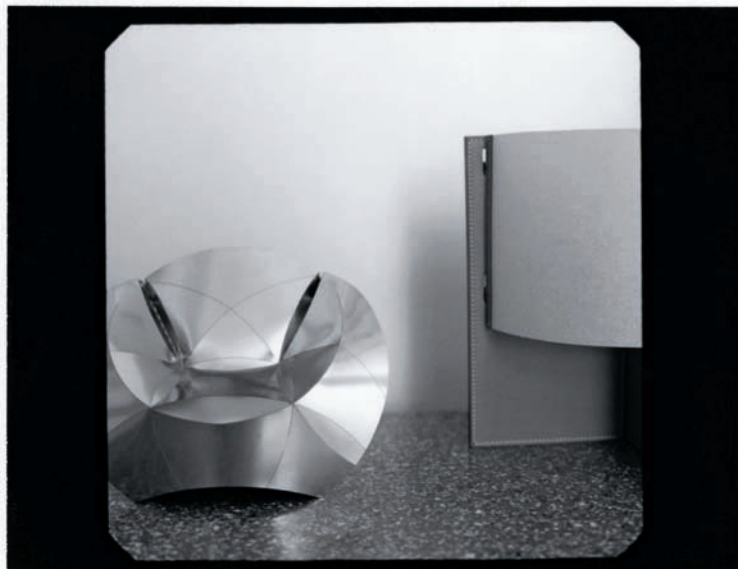
2



5



6



9

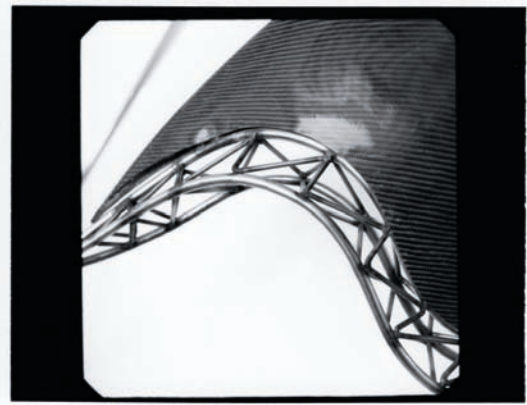


10

Wallpaper*



3



4

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

- 1.** On wall, around a third of the pieces from *384 Plaster Surrogates* (1982-1990), by Allan McCollum. Krakoff bought the whole work: 'It's actually 18ft long... the rest is in our NYC house.' In foreground, 'Bridgè' table (2010), by Joris Laarman
- 2.** 'Nuage' bookshelf (1958), by Charlotte Perriand; side tables, by Mattia Bonetti; chair, by Pierre Legrain
- 3.** Chairs, by Rei Kawakubo, for Comme des Garçons. 'I love how the raw industrial feel of the chair is offset by a bright cobalt lacquer finish,' says Krakoff
- 4.** Detail of *Latah* (2004), by Frank Stella
- 5.** 'Pollen' jacket, \$2,490; skirt, \$1,190; shoes, \$895, all by Reed Krakoff Collection. Chair, by Pierre Legrain
- 6.** Stella's artwork hangs above a Jean Prouvé table, on which are two vintage Hermès lamps and a maquette of the 'Asimov' chair by Joris Laarman, given to Krakoff by the designer
- 7.** 'Reed Audubon' top, \$990, by Reed Krakoff Collection
- 8.** Vintage Hermès clock and vase by Hella Jongerius
- 9.** Maquette of the 'Asimov' chair by Joris Laarman, and a vintage Hermès lamp
- 10.** 'Gym II' bag, \$1,490, by Reed Krakoff Collection



7



8

Josef Albers and robust, wholly contemporary, graphical shapes. One clutch was inspired by the reflective, biomorphic forms of Anish Kapoor sculptures, while, for the pre-fall 2012 collection, artist Robert Motherwell's use of charcoal in his *Open* series was translated into black outlines on clothing, bags and shoes.

But Krakoff is not about trying to impress with wilful obscurity. In the end, he wants to make beautiful things that people will love as much as he knows, from personal experience, it is possible to love things. 'Any successful designer has created desire,' he says. 'In collecting too, you fall in love with something. You're creating a thing, first and foremost, that people want and if you have to explain why it's good, it's not working.' Instead, he prizes emotion and effortlessness. 'For me, it's not all about the concept. I'm not that much of a purist.'

His palette, then, is extemporised and instinctual: 'I'm a big believer in there not being

one way to do things,' he insists. 'I know I can always change it as I work. The spring collection had a Delft blue in it for a while, and a viridian green, but they just fell out in the end. It's super-organic, this process.' And in the belief that one can't begin to understand the limitations and opportunities of one's materials without handling them, it is also hands-on. Krakoff will make crude models by cutting materials up and pinning them together or, as with the 'Punk' series, slashing and smashing them with tin snips and a hammer before casting the pieces.

Krakoff is no tortured artist, though. For Coach, he sometimes creates products that can 'accomplish' something for the line: he is a brand builder, a privileged pragmatist who, depending on one's perspective, is either an oracular dowser of popular tastes or the opportunistic author of 'Hermès for housekeepers'. And some industry kvetches seem to think that someone whose qualification is merely good taste has no right

to don the designer's mantle. In some sense, even Krakoff distances the new label from Coach; the two, he says, are 'totally unrelated'. But if he is capable of catering to the masses, the deepening quality of his recent collections has proven that he is also entirely his own man.

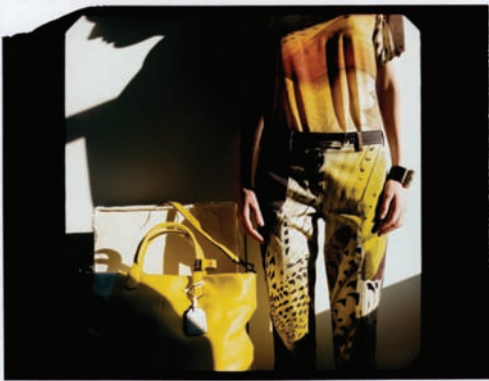
Krakoff's design process is usually anchored in proportion, colour and shape. 'I don't think about fashion inspiration, or a certain period or look. I don't put together mood boards,' he explains. 'What I think about is creating things that are evocative. I start picking things up from around my office,' he says, pointing, 'that console there, the Stella sculpture, or the piece by Christopher Dresser. They tell a story.'

Krakoff has been working this way for more than 25 years. While studying ready-to-wear at Parsons, New York, he began to buy design pieces from the Tepper Galleries auction house nearby: Mission-style furniture by Gustav Stickley; fashion illustration by the likes of René Gruau >>



1

Hair: Stephen Rose at Art Department. Make-up: Sandrine van Slee for Chanel at Art Department. Model: Flynn at Wilhelmina. Photographer's assistant: Carl Vuong



2



3

NEW YORK STORIES

1. Jacket, \$1,890; skirt, \$1,150, both by Reed Krakoff Collection. On table, tureen (c1800), by Christopher Dresser. 'Atmos' clock (2008), by Marc Newson, for Jaeger-Le Coultre. In foreground, 'Bridge' table (2010), by Joris Laarman; 'Its polished surface is hand-finished to a mirror-like reflection, which took a year to complete,' says Krakoff. In background, *Plaster Surrogates* (1982-1990), by Allan McCollum

2. 'Gym II' bag, \$1,490; 'Reed Audubon' top, \$990; trousers, \$1,290; cuff, \$690, all by Reed Krakoff Collection. 'This James

Audubon-inspired print is the first figurative idea to make its way into my collection,' says Krakoff.

3. 'Bone' rocker (2008), by Joris Laarman

4. Detail of the 'Cinderella' table (2005), by Jeroen Verhoeven, for Demakersvan

5. Lacquered resin side table, designed by Mattia Bonetti for the Reed Krakoff stores

6. 'Nuage' bookshelf (1958) by Charlotte Perriand; chairs, by Pierre Legrain; 1940s American sculpture. 'Pollen' jacket, \$2,490; skirt, \$1,190, both by Reed Krakoff Collection. 'The range's yellow palette was inspired by the work of Josef Albers,' explains Krakoff

Wallpaper*



4

and Jean Cocteau; and 'knick-knacks' from Louis Comfort Tiffany. Ten to 15 years ago, few people collected design. It demanded enormous amounts of research in order to really, as Krakoff says, 'discover something'.

'I liked the education, the process of learning why people did what they did,' he explains. 'Through design, you could study a cultural map of what was happening at different times, what came before and what came after, who collected and why. Design tells as much about what was happening historically as political movements or how people dressed.'

Like his clothing, Krakoff's collecting is driven by sets of opposites and pieces that are rooted in the concerns of their time – that are timely instead of timeless: the shape of the 'Bone' pieces, for instance, is the result of using recent advances in optimisation software to mimic the way bones naturally accrete material where strength is needed but eliminate it where it is not. 'Our digital age makes it possible not only to use nature as a stylistic reference, but also to use its underlying principles,' explains Joris Laarman, who met Krakoff through his Manhattan gallerist Marc Benda of Friedman Benda. 'Like me, I think Reed sees conceptual parallels between his work and other fields like furniture design. He is always looking for a play between function and aesthetics, for a reason why things look like they

do.' Krakoff feels enriched by contradiction: Laarman uses digital techniques to achieve the ultimate in analogue. Joseph Beuys, whose 'Felt Suit' Krakoff owns, imbues the industrial with humanity. The contradictions are fertile because they describe us to ourselves.

Barneys' former creative director Simon Doonan (now the store's creative ambassador-at-large) has watched both of Krakoff's collections evolve. 'There's a direct link between Reed's obsession with furniture design and objets d'art and with his designs,' he points out. 'He's a cultivated guy with a rigorous, refined design sensibility. And that's how one might describe the Reed Krakoff Collection: it's rigorous and refined, very connoisseurial and very high design.' The sensibility that makes Krakoff such an aesthete is the same sensibility that will give his new label its growing, as Doonan puts it, gravitas.

The collecting, then, is both practical and romantic – opposites again – which happens to describe both the man and his work. Beyond careful calculation and the fashion retail formula lies the welcome unknown. 'Things that are a bit of an accident are good for design. You have to let go to get what you need, because that's where newness and surprise come in,' Krakoff says. 'It's hard to make something new by sitting down and thinking about making something new.' ★ www.reedkrakoff.com; www.coach.com



5



6

Wallpaper*