



Art House | Wendell Castle



Wendell Castle's installation "A New Environment" is on view at Friedman Benda in Chelsea. The cantilevered staircase at right leads to a treehouse-like pod.

The American designer **Wendell Castle** is known for his idiosyncratic, organic and slightly surreal furniture, which he has been producing in laminated wood, plastic and other materials since the 1960s, and which is highly collectible. Castle, who turned 80 in 2012, showed his work at Design Miami last month, and today his exhibition "A New Environment" opens at **Friedman Benda** in Chelsea. (Another Castle show, "Volumes and Voids," is on view just upstairs from Friedman Benda at the **Barry Friedman Gallery** through Jan. 26.)

The exhibition's centerpiece is a massive, arresting environment of stack-laminated, carved wood that is rasp-finished and stained black. It comprises a modular platform, three sculptural chairs, a totemlike structure studded with LEDs and a cantilevered spiral stair that leads to a podlike chamber, lined in

Viladas Pilart. "Art House, Wendell Castle", *New York Times Magazine*, January 10, 2013

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flokati carpet, which offers snug lounge seating for one, complete with reading light, shelf and several openings to let in light and air. It's kind of a treehouse for grown-ups — rich ones, that is. At this writing, the price of the environment had not been set, but Castle said that it would likely be in the vicinity of a \$1 million.

This is Castle's largest work to date. It is a follow-up of sorts to his 1969 piece "Environment for Contemplation," which also featured a pod but which was set on the floor. "I wanted to put something in the air," he said. A steel structure reinforces the central column and stair treads; as the designer explains, this is necessary to support the pod, which weighs about 1,000 pounds.



From left: the pod, which is lined in flokati carpet, has built-in lounge seating for one; three additional pieces in the exhibition include "The Light of Darkness," which combines a cantilevered chair, a table and a light.

On the fringes of the environment are three other pieces — a settee, a desk and a chair with its own table and light — with the same biomorphic forms or, as Castle calls them, "ellipsoids, kind of mushed together." He cites the artists Henry Moore, Joan Miro, Jean Arp and Constantin Brancusi as early influences, but it's clear that they've stayed with him. "I loved the idea of a 'soft' vocabulary, and still do," he said. Castle enjoys chewing over ideas that have provoked him for years, but now he's doing it with the aid of a robot, which he said will help to "carve some crazy-shaped voids," since it can work in smaller spaces than traditional woodworking tools.

Next on the horizon is an exhibition in the fall at the [Carpenters Workshop Gallery](#) in Paris. There will be at least one bronze piece in the show, and Castle is experimenting with even rougher textures. For now, however, he was busy putting the finishing touches on the environment before the opening party. And

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when told that the piece's outsized scale really called for its own, specially designed space, Castle replied, "I've thought about how to do that room."

"A New Environment" is on view at Friedman Benda, 515 West 26th Street, through Feb. 9.

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