

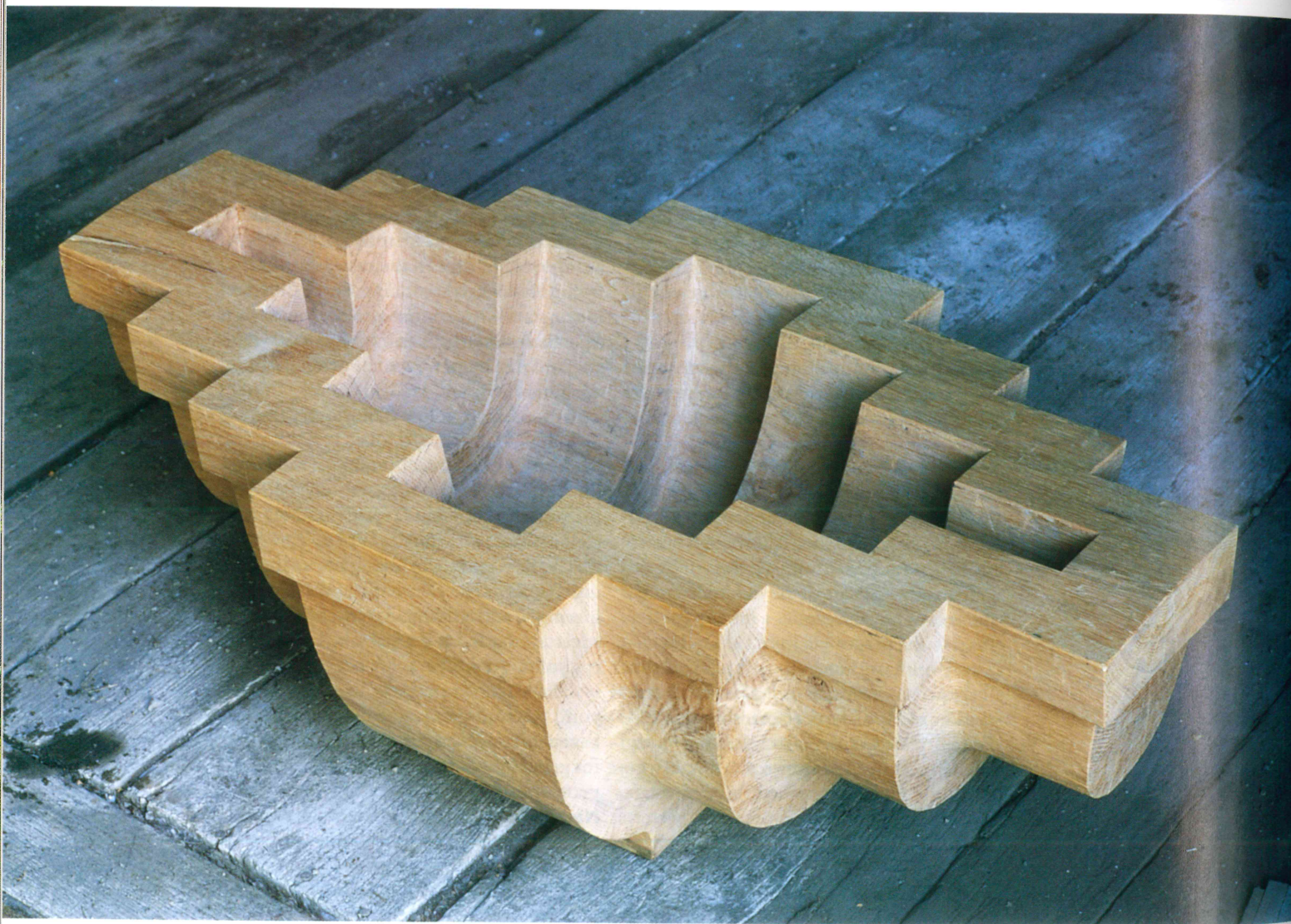
THE WORLD OF

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INTERIORS



Below and opposite: since 2003, Julian Schwarz has been working on a new series of his sculptural vessels, all hand-tooled in wood. This oak design, shown here in an old stable at the Etampes home that Julian shares with his wife, France, was made in 2004 and demonstrates his ability to combine the geometric with the organic





The Adze Man Cometh

Introducing Julian Schwarz, a sculptor in wood with little time for power tools. Antique saws, shears, gouges, axes and adzes – or implements he has made himself – are his weapons of choice, all employed in the struggle to fashion one of his remarkable abstract vessels from a single stump of freshly fallen timber. Marie-France Boyer travels to his home in Etampes, east of Chartres, to see his latest trunk lines. Photography: Eric Morin





Opposite, top left: a shallow capital-like vessel in oak is displayed in front of rusted ironmongery, and flints and stones gathered from local fields. Top right: the 64cm-long 'Big Cherry I' (2003) looks like a giant seed or bulb. Bottom left: a walnut 'teacup' from 2003. Bottom right: this 2006 piece in walnut has a Medieval-style form. This page, above left: ferns and rocks form a backdrop to an ash stool/low table. Above right: the inside of 'Big Cherry I'

Julian Schwarz sculpts intriguing large objects out of wood. Powerful, pneumatic and raw, they speak to the senses of sight and touch, and they are an expression of the geometric as much as the organic. Julian respects every irregularity of the wood, on which the eye lingers in amazement, before gliding with the same pleasure as the hand over the round, smooth and bulging surfaces that always have a hollow in their centre. He calls these wooden bowls, basins, urns, containers or receptacles 'vessels'. They are forms that he considers 'elementary, symbolic, utilitarian' and today they are to be found in the collections of the Henry Moore Foundation, the Tate and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Julian Schwarz has always liked these forms. His father was a painter of Viennese origin, but his grandfather was a carpenter from near Birmingham who also made coffins. Julian spent part of his early childhood in his company. 'As a child I carved boats from wood offcuts,' he says. 'I still have the scars on my hands.' At the age of 11, living in London, Julian developed an obsession with Eskimos and enjoyed spending his time in his school workshop enthusiastically filing iron, striking the anvil and turning wood.

At the Slade, from 1968 to 1972, he painted and constructed metal and wooden objects based on complex drawings, but, as time passed, it was wood that prevailed and Julian entered a frenzied decade in which he produced sophisticated assemblages, from spheres to precious cabinets. He then contrived to create cut-outs and extremely accurate interlocking constructions, or carved designs straight from single blocks of wood, like Chinese puzzles. These pieces, which sometimes took two years to make, brought him a degree of fame in Cork Street and took his work into major collections such as that of Stanley Picker. But in the 1980s he ceased this activity, which had become very obsessive, and turned to engraving on wood and painting, and he moved to Cardiff as artist in residence.

In the meantime, he had married France, the French girl who refused to dance with him one night at the Royal College of Art, and, in 1990, they decided to emigrate. After living in cramped conditions near Paris, they soon moved to Etampes, a small town in Beauce, east of Chartres and north of Orléans. Was it the presence of the forest, its tree trunks, its tree stumps that drew him? Or was it the ease with which he could get to the capital from there. 'I need museums,' Julian declares.

In 2003, Julian, who likes to work where he lives, went back to his wooden vessels, his perennial interest and obsession. Striving for perfection is ingrained in this hat-wearing singular man who is always on edge in spite of the sweet and cheerful presence of his wife, assistant and secretary, who is as ready to smile as he is to fret over his work. He is a serious man. When he portrays himself, it is with big tragic black lines and

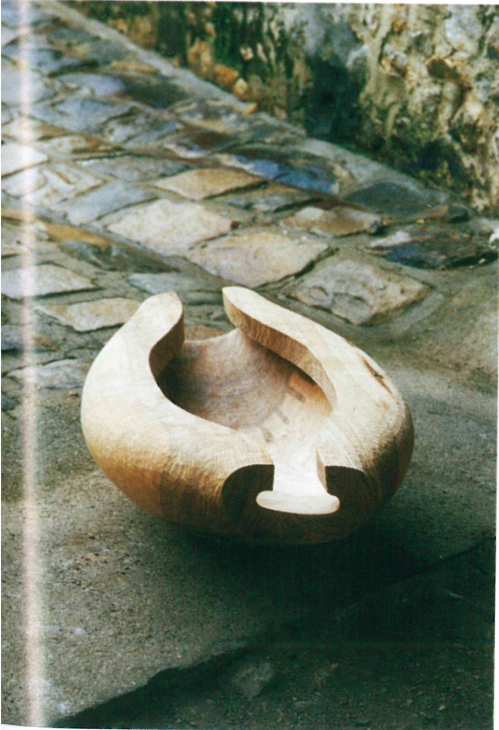
a chalk-white face. Indeed, he is pale and thin and everything about him expresses a kind of tension.

Everyone in the neighbourhood knows that Julian is always on the lookout for tree trunks. As soon as there is a high wind or a tree falls, he knows about it. Storms are his ally. He also manages by getting supplies of pieces of oak quite easily from the nearby sawmill because the forest of Orléans is not far away. He doesn't stockpile them because he needs wood full of sap and he cuts it just above the roots, near the part of the stump where the diameter is widest. Getting the fallen tree to the studio can be quite an adventure. He sometimes needs a lorry with a crane and then has to get this down the quiet little lane where the houses and small gardens generally see only the odd passing moped – an exquisite torture for this artist who, as soon as anyone mentions a tree trunk that he might get hold of, begins to fantasise. He makes a thousand and one sketches, but once the wood is there in the yard, he lets its dimensions inspire him. He can be more precise. But as soon as he makes a start on the piece with his characteristic meticulousness, it is the wood that 'decides'. He may change the original project and go in a completely different direction. It is then a passionate adventure, a battle that is played out.

Julian never uses electrical or mechanical tools – apart from his neighbour's chainsaw for cutting off the piece of walnut, oak, ash or maple that he is going to sculpt. The rough shape is made in the yard in front of the studio with various woodcutter's saws. When the piece is reduced to its final volume (the object can weight from 20 to 50kg), he takes it into his studio where he continues to work by hand using traditional tools – shears, gouge, axe, cooper's adze – many of them old, which he prefers, or ones that he has made himself, in his own way, since he is also proficient at metalwork.

Although Julian began his artistic life by taking an interest in the wooden architecture of Japan, he finally went back to his own 'roots', he explains, returning to wood as though unintentionally, by exploring the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the West as well as the Old Masters in the National Gallery in London or the Louvre, and even the Musée Cluny. His work is sometimes redolent of liturgical objects such as baptismal fonts, but it is intended to be abstract: 'I don't like a piece to make people think of something,' he says. 'Through my bulky forms I am looking for solidity, energy, architectural presence. My work may have a brutal aspect but I hope it exudes a vital humanity.' And, on his long bicycle rides with France on the plain of Beauce, 'the windswept sky above Chartres or a Romanesque capital' might equally inspire him ■

Julian Schwarz is showing at Galerie Fusion, 6 Rue Bouquières, 31000 Toulouse, France (00 33 5 62 26 78 61), 30 Aug-29 Sept. He can be contacted on 00 33 1 69 92 93 05. Vessel prices start from £350 approx



Top left: Julian and France pose by a utilitarian shed in the courtyard where tree trunks are stored when first brought to the house. Top right: a shopping-bag-like vessel is made from walnut. Above left: this 2005 ash piece evokes a shell or curling leaf. Above middle: 'Big Cherry II' has a bulging, almost inflated appearance. Above right: sycamore was the wood Julian used for this architectural design of 2005