

# LIVING

Ceramist  
Harvey Bouterse  
in his studio.



**The Belgians Are Coming** With a vibrant color palette and organic shapes, a trio of designers is shaking up the country's typically somber aesthetic.  
*by Melissa Feldman. Portraits by Frederik Vercruyse*



**A CULTURE THAT** has always valued the handmade, Belgium is evolving into a diverse creative landscape that's impacting everything from objects to interiors. "There's a strong sense of individuality," says ceramist Harvey Bouterse about his adopted land. Here, three talents who exemplify a flair for the unexpected.

#### HARVEY BOUTERSE CERAMICS

"Belgian style is about finding surrealism in things," says Bouterse. "It's always difficult to pinpoint." The fashion designer and son of Surinamese immigrants was raised in the Netherlands and moved to Antwerp in 1999.

Bouterse got his start in Antwerp's experimental fashion scene of the '90s, and eventually worked for Jean Paul Gaultier in Paris. In the past decade, the 37-year-old has pursued fashion with his own label while moving toward ceramics. "The garments I make are for others, but the ceramics I make for myself."

Bouterse started crafting his one-of-a-kind pieces at Perignem, a now-defunct factory near Bruges. The facility once produced a wide range of items, but Bouterse and his partner are the only ceramists operating there today. "My work is far from Belgian. I use a lot of inspiration from my heritage," he says about his

From left: Harvey Bouterse's Graphic 01 objet, 2017, \$1,250; and Primitive 1/3 objet, 2017, \$690. Below: Victoria-Maria Geyer sits in her Brussels home with her Venimeuses embroidered linen for Pierre Frey in Cuivre, left, and Nuit, pierrefrey.com.

vases and bowls, often made in bold colors or with pictorial symbols, which call to mind Suriname and its energetic mixture of African, Asian, and native South American cultures. "I don't look at books. It's my own vision; the symbols, forms, and shapes."

An exhibition this summer at interior designer Nathalie Deboel's office in the resort town of Knokke-Heist was a success with several private commissions including a tableware range. And in October, Bouterse exhibited a ceramic *Wunderkammer* filled with Brutalist shapes and primitive motifs as part of the Biennale Interieur, an international design fair in Kortrijk. "Everyone has a different approach," he says of Belgium's design scene. "You have to find your own aesthetic." [hrvi.tumblr.com](http://hrvi.tumblr.com)



#### VICTORIA-MARIA GEYER INTERIORS

Geyer is a German-born designer who moved to Brussels as an infant. The rising star's portfolio stands as a contrast to what you'd typically find in the Low Countries. "Here in Belgium, people are a little scared," says Geyer, 36. "It's gray, black, and white, not too risky." With clients throughout Europe, she sources things from all over the map: carpets from Iran, carved and lacquered wood furniture from Mumbai and Portugal, and antiques from auction houses in Paris and Stockholm. "I don't follow any rules or style," she says. "When I enter a space I'll quickly have an idea of what I need to do."

Geyer's own apartment includes a finely honed selection of '70s pieces like a geometric Swedish tapestry jux-

tailed with a pair of Joe Colombo brown leather Elda armchairs, next to a reissue of Gianfranco Frattini's 1970 Sesann sofa for Tacchini. She likes to contrast mod forms with decorative arts from the Napoleon III era, including a pair of gold wooden swans transformed into table lamps and a footstool upholstered in silk.

Her latest project is a capsule collection for Pierre Frey. It includes two designs: Venimeuses, an embroidered pattern of twisting serpents on linen, and Ouroboros, a fabric and wallpaper that depicts snakes biting their own tails.

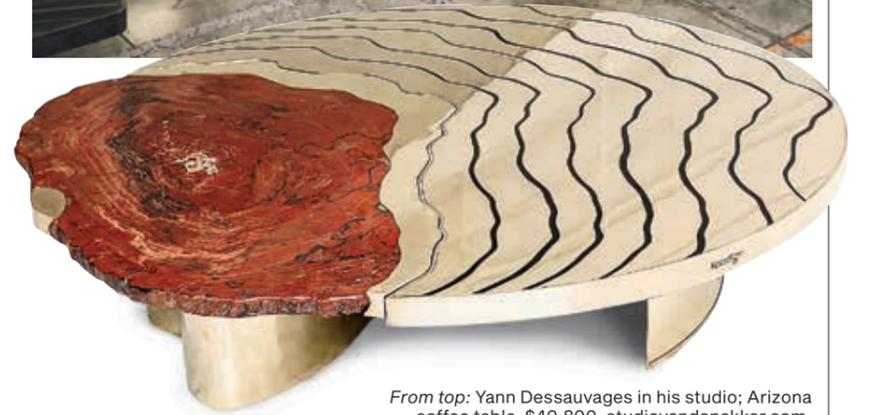
Geyer can't imagine leaving Brussels. "It's a small city, with a good quality of life and large spaces, so you have the opportunity to have fun, unlike in Paris or London," where space to be creative is at more of a premium. But, she admits, "the weather here can be terrible. It's always gray outside." It inspires her to push back with sunny and unexpected interiors. "I don't want to bring that inside." [victoria-maria.com](http://victoria-maria.com)

#### YANN DESSAUVAGES FURNITURE

During his childhood in Brussels as the son of a decorator and a blacksmith and the grandson of a bronze foundryman, Yann Dessauvages spent hours watching his relatives draft, cast, and weld. "My mother gave me the eye, and my father gave me the hand," he says.

Early on, the self-taught 29-year-old metalsmith became obsessed with the work of Ado Chale and Armand Jonckers, two Belgian craftsmen from the 1970s and '80s. "I love the way they manipulated metals and incorporated stones," he says. Goutte d'eau, a table with a circular pattern by Chale that influenced Dessauvages, recently sold at Christie's in Paris for \$41,000. "It's a simple but very powerful piece that carries a lot of emotions."

Dessaavages first began experimenting with lamps in 2012. His first were brass



From top: Yann Dessauvages in his studio; Arizona coffee table, \$40,800, [studiovandenakker.com](http://studiovandenakker.com).

structures holding precious stones. "Metal is often associated with raw objects, and I like that it can become elegant," he says. He casts his pieces in brass and then adds bronze and semiprecious stones such as lapis, agate, and malachite.

His more recent work echoes that organic spirit with a range of tables like the Arizona Eclipse, which incorporates petrified wood, brass, and resin that recalls

the finish of Chale's work. Today, it can take him up to a month and a half to complete each piece by hand, and Dessauvages is getting ready to move his studio out of the city and into an old farm he bought recently in order to work "more intelligently." People are taking notice: He's now represented at the Studio Van den Akker showrooms in New York and Los Angeles. [dessaavages.com](http://dessaavages.com)