

Behind the design: strong yet sensual salt and pepper mills

For Wallpaper* Handmade X, interior architect Charles Zana and Atelier François Pouenat collaborate on simple tubular forms in copper and brass.



Designed to interlock and nestle snugly on a small tray, the salt and pepper set is highly polished, the copper's champagne pink tones dissolving into the brass' golden hues.
(Image credit: Bastien Gomez)

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François Pouenat's metal atelier in Nevers, central France, is abuzz with activity. An artisan is buffing metal as sparks fly through the air, a blacksmith adds coal to a raging fire, and elsewhere, a young man is ferociously pounding away at a brass rod.

Charles Zana watches in fascination. This is his first visit to the atelier, though the Parisian interior architect has worked with Pouenat before – the two met when they collaborated on hairdresser-to-the-stars David Mallett's New York salon. Today, Zana took the two-hour train ride from Paris to see the salt and pepper mills he and Pouenat co-created for Handmade. Zana runs his hands over the set, which he is also seeing for the first time. 'I'm just now realising how agreeable it is to the touch,' he says.

When Wallpaper* asked Zana to create an object around the theme of love, he decided to explore the idea of interlocking objects and the tactile quality of metal, and Pouenat was the obvious partner. A fifth-generation metalworker, Pouenat took over the family firm after his father passed away in 1987. The studio crafts its bespoke wares in iron, brass and copper. Over its 130-year history, projects have included commissions for the Shah of Iran and Paris' Plaza Athénée hotel, balcony railings for the Château of Versailles, and high-end works for the likes of Jouin Manku and Dominique Perrault.



The finished set, photographed at 'Wallpaper Handmade X: With Love' during Milan Design Week. (Image credit: Alberto Strada)

For us, Zana and Pouenat chose to work in copper and brass (two noble metals, not often combined), concentrating on shape rather than decorative treatment. 'Copper and brass are fantastic in their natural state – there's no reason to add to them,' says Pouenat.

Zana opted for simple tubular forms. The salt mill has a ring, the pepper mill an indent, and you must place them into their rectangular tray ('the foundation', says Zana, symbolising what unites a couple) at the same time in order for them to interlock. At 1.5kg apiece, the mills have substantial heft. 'The idea of weight is interesting; it gives the object force,' says Pouenat. Strong yet also sensual, the set reminds Zana of Brâncuși's *Le Baiser*, a series of geometric sculptures of a couple fused in a kiss. 'Ultimately,' he says, 'love shouldn't be complicated. You have to find the right person and a form that's complementary.'

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INFORMATION

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