



Sketch Troop

Swedish designers Front devise a hybrid, hi-tech method to make fast furniture out of thin air

Story JOHANNA LENANDER Portrait BJÖRN GREEN

"We're constantly searching for knowledge," says Sofia Lagerkvist, one quarter of the ascending Swedish design firm known as Front. "We begin most of our projects by asking: 'Why is a particular object made in a particular way? Can we do it differently?'" It's an appropriately academic approach for a quartet of designers who met at Stockholm's Konstfack University, and their investigations have led to some pretty radical experiments. In the two years since Lagerkvist, Katja Sävström, Charlotte von der Lancken and Anna Lindgren founded Front, they've worked with rats to create wallpaper, installed speakers in glass vessels, and produced an ever-changing museum interior. Their combination of childlike curiosity and vigorous research has made them Sweden's most talked-about young designers, with accolades from sources as varied as *Women's Wear Daily* and the esteemed Dutch firm Droog Design, with whom the foursome began collaborating last September.

Given Front's affinity for design alchemy, it was only a matter of time before they dreamt up another unconventional project – this time, creating cartoonish furniture with high-tech animation tools and manufacturing processes, all in an effort to explore the relationship between initial sketch and final product. "We wanted to merge two completely different techniques that have never been combined before," says Lindgren. "It's like a meeting of two separate worlds." By hooking up motion-capture sensors – the equipment used to register actors' movements in the development of animated film characters – to their index fingers, Front members were able to literally draw their designs in the air. "Normally, you make a two-dimensional sketch, but >

these were three-dimensional, like you were creating an invisible object," says Lindgren. The difficulty, and perhaps the added beauty, of this technique was that they couldn't see what they were drawing. "You have to sketch very quickly so you can remember what you did," adds Lagerkvist.

Front saved several of their sketches as computer files and brought them to a Finnish factory that specializes in Selective Laser Sintering, a type of rapid prototyping normally used for car manufacturing. Each motion-capture file was interpreted by a high-power laser beam, which slowly built a three-dimensional prototype by fusing small particles from a pool of liquid plastic, with the material applied in successive thin layers. Over the course

of about four days, the final product rose out of the liquid like a sea monster emerging from the depths. "It was really strange to see the furniture just appear like that," says Lindgren. "There was definitely a sense of giving birth."

The limited edition furniture collection, which consists of a table, chair, lamp and sofa, debuted at design.05 in December, during Art Basel Miami; it's now available at the Barry Friedman Gallery in New York. Depending on its success, the project may be expanded in the future, but for now Front's designers still seem to be slightly in awe of their own invention. "It's so fascinating to bypass the whole manufacturing process," says Lagerkvist. "In a sense, the pieces are made by hand, but no one has ever touched them." JL



LIVE AND DIRECT: These four pieces grew out of a desire to create an object from an initial sketch. Performing this experiment, Front were also exploring the idea of designing "directly in a space"

Photography ANNA LÖNNERSTRAM