

Finding Clarity

story by Peter J. Wolf

Ask Charles Hollis Jones what the happiest day of his life was, and he'll tell you — without a moment's hesitation — it was the day his father sold the family's dairy cows. As a child growing up in Bloomington, Indiana, Jones hated the early-morning milking routine. He says he actually chased the hated cows down the road that day, thrilled to see them go. It was, as he says, "goodbye discipline, hello freedom."

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Photograph by
Jerry Sarapicello



So what did Jones, the youngest of eight children (who admits, with downright *glee*, to having been spoiled as a youngster) do with all his newfound freedom? When he wasn't at the local welding shop, learning how farm implements are put back together, he was at the racetrack with his brothers, learning about how cars come apart. And all the while he was watching his father juggle the farm and several other businesses. What Jones was doing, in other words, was figuring out how *stuff* works at the same time he was figuring out how *people* work. These seemingly ordinary experiences actually formed the foundation of his training as a designer.

Eventually, Jones would celebrate his freedom by spending the summer of 1961 in Los Angeles, where, at the tender age of 15, he began designing furniture and accessories. His work was an instant hit with the Hollywood decorators shopping at Bullock's Wilshire, the landmark department store dubbed the "cathedral of commerce." Come autumn, Jones was back in Bloomington, a junior in high school. When word got out that he was collecting royalties from his "summer job," his friends were beside themselves. "They were saying," Jones recalls, "Charles is gonna have a better horse than we are!"

Jones spent the summer of 1962 in Los Angeles, too, and settled there as soon as he graduated in 1963. Working as the head designer for the Hudson Rissman showroom, Jones was able to explore more seriously his chosen medium: acrylic (often referred to as "Lucite," a trademark of DuPont). "I really fell in love with glass," he says, "but it couldn't do what I wanted it to do." Glass is heavy, and easily broken. Not only that, it reflects light. Acrylic, on the other hand — in addition to being lightweight and more forgiving of impacts — also "carries the light," as Jones likes to say. The ethereal qualities of acrylic have captivated Jones for more than 45 years now. And Jones — with his child-like curiosity and craftsman's attention to





left Staircase
Photo by Mary E. Nichols

right Sling Chair
Photo by Cole Gerard



detail — has, in turn, been captivating clients with his spectacular acrylic creations: furniture, accessories, sculptures and custom installations.

And Jones has compiled an impressive list of clients over the years, including Lucille Ball, Johnny Carson, Bob Hope, Dean Martin, Diana Ross, Frank Sinatra, Sylvester Stallone and Loretta Young, to name just a few. And then there are the architects, designers, and decorators he's worked with: Paul László, John Lautner, Arthur Elrod, Hal Broderick, and John Woolf, among others. Not bad for a kid from the heartland, who as a boy, Jones confesses, "didn't even know what an architect was. My mother kept talking about Frank Lloyd Wright, but her idea was, she hoped I'd become a manager of Howard Johnson's."

Acrylic furniture has been around since the 1930s, but most of the early examples were uninspired attempts, crafted simply of bent rod and bent sheet, novel versions of the bentwood furniture of the 1850s. For years, acrylic was treated as if it were nothing more than a wondrously transparent

version of good old wood or metal. But Jones saw a far greater potential in acrylic. Its transparency offers so many possibilities, after all — but it also requires a certain obligation on the part of the designer. The magic is so easily spoiled by clunky nuts and bolts, or sloppy glue joints. Few other designers have adopted a truly sensitive approach to acrylic, and "the uneducated use of acrylic," says Jones, "is a disaster."

One of Jones' trademarks is an absence of visible fasteners. Because acrylic simply can't hide the screws and other fasteners commonly used to assemble a piece of furniture, Jones either finds a clever way to hide them, or — better yet — eliminates them entirely. For his *Metric Line*, he developed a proprietary process to join acrylic and metal directly. First, the acrylic is cooled — forcing it to contract. It then expands into the metal joint as it returns to room temperature. The result is a clean, rock-solid joint, free from the visual clutter of nuts and bolts. He approaches his glue joints with similar finesse. He uses a special non-acidic product, applied laboriously with a craftsman's skill. Thus, his joints are practically

right **Blade Line Desk**
Photograph by Cole
Gerard

left **Blade Line Table**
Photograph by
Jerry Sarapicello

invisible — no bubbles or discoloration, only the smooth edges of two transparent planes of acrylic. The joints are further improved through “curing”, a slow, carefully controlled heating and cooling process that reduces the internal stresses on the acrylic. The result is, Jones says, a piece that is “molecularly happy.”

One of Jones’ trademarks is an absence of visible fasteners.

Something else that sets Jones’ work apart from others’ is his bold use of acrylic slabs three and four inches thick. These designs take on a truly sculptural presence, and their great volume of light-carrying acrylic gives them the appearance of being lit from within.

Jones hasn’t milked a cow in nearly 50 years — the cows are really, truly gone. But that discipline he said the cows took with them

—well, that’s really been with him all along. How else to explain that fact that Jones has created more than 5,000 designs, including 16 complete lines of furniture and accessories? In 2004, the Pacific Design Center (once home to two of Jones’ showrooms) honored him with the Product Designer of the Year Award for lifetime achievement. And at the rate he’s going, they may want to consider a *second* lifetime achievement award for Jones. Today, he’s working as hard as ever. Eighteen-hour days are common; vacations are rare. And he’s just announced a new line of furniture, *Nouveau Vue*, with which he pushes acrylic in yet another direction (see story in this issue). So, maybe it does take a certain amount of freedom to be creative, but as designer Charles Hollis Jones has demonstrated so clearly, it takes a particular kind of discipline to actually create *so much*. •

Where to Buy Charles Hollis Jones:

Modern Homes
2500 North Palm
Canyon Drive
Palm Springs, CA
92262
(760) 320-8422

Art + Industry
Gallery of Modern
Art + Design
115 South Palm
Canyon Drive
Palm Springs, CA
92262
(760) 864-1103









tie I



tie II



daily



robo



flectur



hamilton



lancaster



glasin



franklin



bushop



wrights I



ed



jante



water melon



gough



sterry hackett



dandy



veronica II



beas IV



beas III



zabo



mager



pear's park



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anderson



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strand ring II



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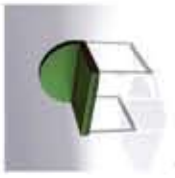
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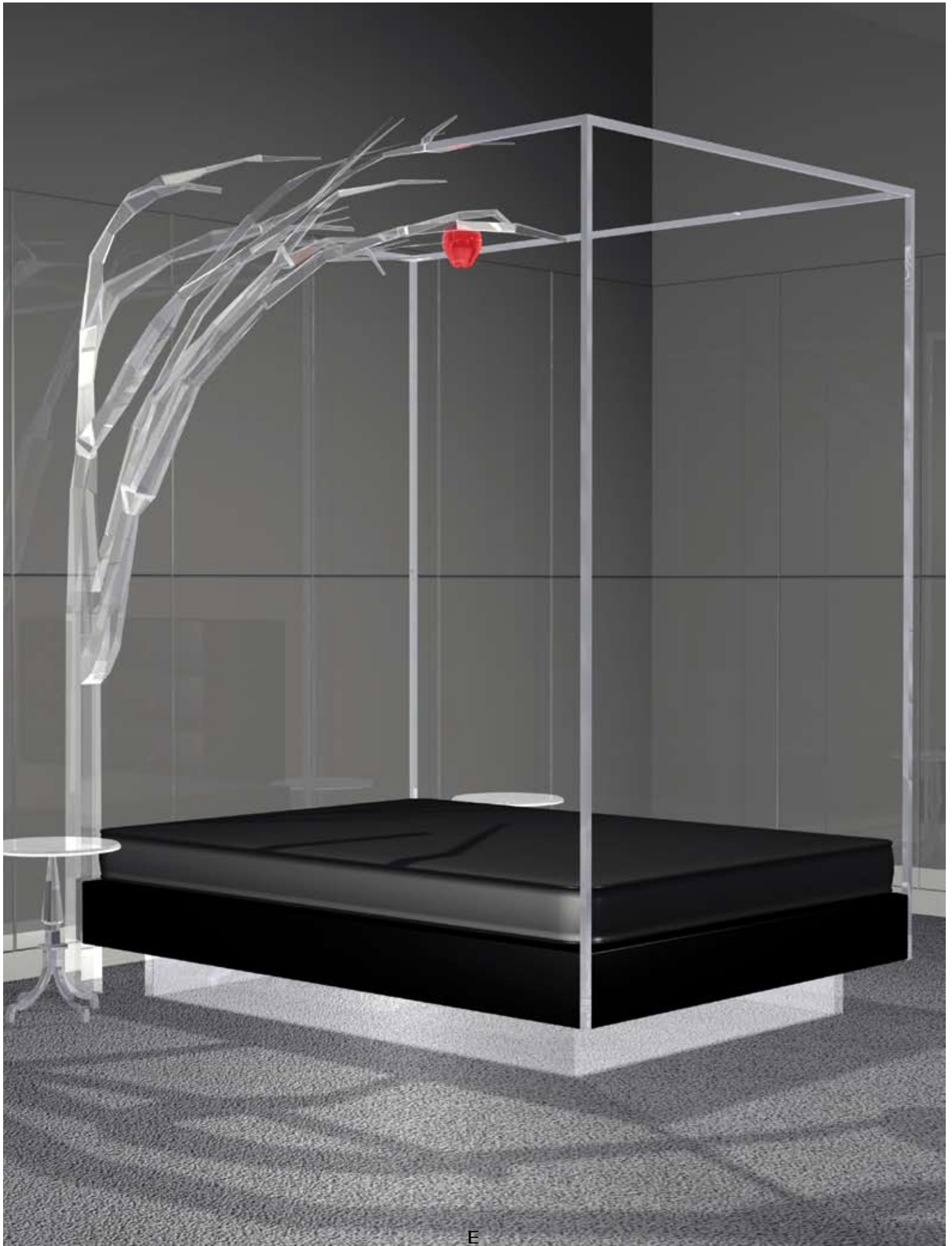
trophich



forest



grove



left **Nouveau Vue**
Bed Rendering by
Sky Burchard

Sky Burchard
earned his
BFA at UCLA
and his MFA at
USC. He has
been working
with 3D
software for
five years

A Room with Some **VUE**

By Peter J. Wolf

Think you know all about Charles Hollis Jones' design work? Better think again. His latest creation, the *Nouveau Vue* line, is a radical departure from his largely geometric, Art Deco- and Bauhaus-inspired oeuvre. "I studied Art Nouveau for years," says Jones, "and I always wanted to make furniture as good as Art Nouveau." Jones' take on Art Nouveau - rendered in ghostly acrylic - naturally is, as he says, a completely "new view" of some of the things we've seen before. "Let's take *another* look at the Edison light bulb," he says, referring to the lamps in the new line.

Jones calls *Nouveau Vue* "a whole new way of working with acrylic." Hot air is blown into acrylic tubes, which are then manipulated by (highly skilled and white-gloved) artisans and formed into gentle, organic shapes. "It's taken me over two years to develop the machinery to do it," says Jones. "I didn't even know how to make it when I first designed it." Inspiration came to him while he was in a friend's Palm Springs garden, admiring the trees loaded with ripe fruit. (Jones has always loved gardens, and spends as much time as his busy schedule allows in his own.) "I thought, *you know, I have to start drawing more things from where I come from.*"

Among the first pieces in the new line is an extraordinary bed, part of the "Adam and Eve"

collection. Glorious four-poster beds are nothing new to Jones — he's been designing them for years now. But this one — as the name suggests — represents a new beginning, as it were. Incorporated into the bed's design is a bright red acrylic apple. "For instance, guests of a hotel", suggests Jones, "if they enjoyed it a lot — sleeping in the bed — they could ask to buy the red apple off of the bed as a remembrance of being in that room, of sleeping in the *Nouveau Vue bed.*"

Sound tempting? Jones says the first pieces of *Nouveau Vue* will be available in November, and installed at the newly-renovated Horizon Hotel in Palm Springs before winter. •