



This page: One of Charlap Hyman's watercolors for VitraHaus, in Germany. Opposite: Charlap Hyman in his Brooklyn studio, in front of a painting by Kevin Zucker. The chair is by Green River Project, with fabric by Chiarastella Cattana. The plastic shell lamp was designed by Charlap Hyman & Herrero in collaboration with Green River Project. By his feet, a rabbit's ear chandelier and a study for a project in France. Charlap Hyman wears a Gabriela Hearst shirt; G.H. Bass & Co. loafers; his own sweater and pants.

Coloring Outside the Lines

Adam Charlap Hyman occupies a unique niche at the intersection of art, architecture, and design. Camille Okbio visits him in his firm's Brooklyn studio.

Photographed by Nicholas Calcott Styled by Allia Alliata di Montereale

"Why does a folly have to be in a garden? Why does a folly have to be outside?" A passing thought from the mind of Adam Charlap Hyman, one half of the genre-breaking architecture and interiors firm Charlap Hyman & Herrero. We are discussing architectural experiments of the 18th and early-19th centuries in his Dumbo, New York, studio, a loft space with unfinished wood floors, sunlight seeping in from thick glass panes, and canvas tarps covering the walls. On every surface, sources of inspiration, works in process, fragments of former projects, and pieces designed by Charlap Hyman and his friends and collaborators sit side by side or piled on top of one another. There are books on Malick Sidibé, Wagner, and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa arranged nearby, on a wooden table by the Brooklyn-based furniture designer Katie Stout, and miniature watercolor models next to trays of fabric. A black and white abaca rug in the shape of a snake—the fruit of a recent collaboration between Charlap Hyman & Herrero and the decor company Patterson Flynn Martin—slithers somewhere to our right; white plastic lamps shaped like giant shells, produced with the design studio Green River Project, dangle from the ceiling.

The topic of our discussion, the folly (from the French *folie*, which now means madness but once meant something closer to foolishness), is an architectural invention popularized in England in the 18th century that injected fantasy into the romantic landscapes surrounding aristocratic country homes. The landed gentry of Europe stuffed

their grounds with faux Roman ruins, crumbling monasteries and grottoes, and halved gargantuan columns in the hope that they would encourage contemplation and play. The nonfunctional structures offered a place for the eye to rest, for the mind to daydream, for the guest to frolic. As a concept, the folly represents a contained, constructed dream world—the perfect place to start when discussing the skyrocketing career of 30-year-old Charlap Hyman.

Foolishness usually doesn't find its way into a serious practice, but it's become a frequent reference point for Charlap Hyman and his partner, Andre Herrero, who founded their firm in 2015, when they were both 25. The dynamic pair, who split their practice between New York and Los Angeles (where Herrero holds down the fort and leads the architectural arm of the business), have been called upon to do everything from designing the retailer Moda Operandi's first Hong Kong showroom to constructing opera sets, draping palm trees in the Miami Design District in silver fringe, and transforming white-cube gallery spaces into textured rooms evocative of an Upper East Side funeral home and a house that had been packed up for the season. All along, the playfulness of youth has remained at the core of their projects.

Inspired by the design outliers who have come before him—he cites Renzo Mongiardino, Enzo Mari, and Luigi Caccia Dominioni—Charlap Hyman has managed to chart a nonlinear path for himself and his firm in the world of design. "Adam and Andre have created this very unique





This page, from top: A chair by Katie Stout for Bjarne Melgaard sits in front of an enlarged print of one of Charlap Hyman's watercolors (of a library filled with canonical queer literature) from the exhibition "Blow Up," at Friedman Benda, and foam molds for the shell lamps; Charlap Hyman holds a maquette for a project in New York. Opposite, from top: Photographs of snail-shaped topiaries and a watercolor for VitraHaus; a watercolor for a Los Angeles interior; concept models for Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai and a project in Texas.

model where the worlds of architecture, art, and design interact and overlap," said Alma Zevi, a gallerist with whom Charlap Hyman & Herrero worked on a site-specific installation during the Venice Art Biennale last year.

Collaboration is, in more ways than one, the cornerstone of Charlap Hyman & Herrero's practice. One long-term creative partner is Schumacher, with whom Charlap Hyman has designed whimsical textiles and wallpapers (red snakes, pencil-drawn stars). The partnership came about organically when a friend, the sales representative Leslie Lombino, showed Charlap Hyman's work to the company's creative director. Lombino was the only person to pay attention to him when he visited the D&D Building (the unofficial HQ of New York City's design community) for the first time, the summer after he graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design. "No one was taking me seriously because they thought I was a 13-year-old getting samples for a school project," says Charlap Hyman, who still cuts a particularly youthful figure.

Lombino remembers that first meeting fondly: "I was showing him around the showroom, and he spotted Madeleine Castaing's collection of narrow-loom Wiltons amongst thousands of samples. It was unusual for a young designer to know so much about the collection and Castaing herself—her friendships with Cocteau, Chagall, Picasso, etc.," she said. "He has an encyclopedic knowledge of art history, influences, architecture, architectural history, and pop culture."

In conversation, Charlap Hyman shares an infectious joy about objects as diverse as Balthus's painted light switches in Rome's Villa Medici, ecclesiastical clothing, shell-shaped china, spray-painted flowers, and floor-length veils. He's kept a file on miniatures (and created them) since he was 8 years old. His manifold passions and collected references from film, music, art, and literature get poured into his projects as much as they inform the way he lives his life: For one birthday, he transformed his studio's storage room into a dance floor, complete with a disco ball, and adorned the ceiling with eyeball-shaped balloons. For another party, he hired West African musicians to fill the space with drumbeats and enchanting melodies.

There is rarely a line drawn between his tight-knit community of creatives and professional collaborators, and Charlap Hyman often turns to his artistically minded family for their unique points of view. For the set of *La Calisto*, an opera performed at Juilliard's Willson Theater, Charlap Hyman enlisted his mother, the artist Pilar Almon, to paint a giant repeating forest landscape that engulfed the set and costumes. And for *Click Clock Tick Tock*, a recent video project with the Guggenheim Museum, director Zack Winokur, and countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo, he created an intricate, minuscule paper cutout of a stage set complete with trees, forest creatures, urns, and reclining figures. (He apprenticed with a master paper cutter in China while in college.) Charlap Hyman's toymaker father brought to life the fanciful cutouts using stop-motion animation, while his 93-year-old grandfather, the storied composer and jazz musician Dick Hyman, composed an original tune for the piece. "My parents have such extraordinary skill and clarity of vision. It's very humbling to me," Charlap Hyman says. "My dad was giving me drawing lessons about negative space and shadows when I was very little." ♦



PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: JANELLE JONES

These lessons come in handy when he's planning the more straightforward residential and commercial projects that are also customary for the firm. For each interior he conceives, Charlap Hyman makes at least two sets of watercolors to present to the client—a rarity in today's AutoCAD world. "That's how my mind works best," he says. In Charlap Hyman & Herrero's domestic spaces, boundary-pushing experiments abound. For a private project in New York, the pair enveloped an entire bedroom in a shade of robin's egg blue. Just the right amount of tinkering was necessary to match velvets, silks, glass, and paint; the only visual interjections were a playful pink blob of a mirror by Misha Kahn and a moody portrait of a perceptive-looking woman clad in a darker blue. Working with a Los Angeles client, the duo constructed a room within a room from wood and highly polished aluminum in the corner of a concrete loft. The 350-square-foot box incorporates built-in furniture, including a Murphy bed, nightstands, seating, and closets, with doors and windows that open into the rest of the space.

Underneath their conceptual approach is a perspective on design history that alternates between reverence and high-minded criticality. "The passage of time, ruin, and decay are really a cornerstone of our practice. It's built into the way we look at things and is a big reason why we love the aesthetics of modernism—it's a sort of doomed project," says Charlap Hyman, who is not afraid of combining the ultra-contemporary with the ultra-twee. Last year's "Blow Up," an exhibition at the New York design gallery Friedman Benda, featured pieces by cutting-edge designers and artists such as Soft Baroque, Sam Stewart, and Kristen Wentrcek and Andrew Zebulon that were placed inside what was essentially a life-size, pastel-hued dollhouse created by Charlap Hyman & Herrero by printing Charlap Hyman's watercolors onto massive sheets of vinyl mounted on cardboard.

The pair created a similarly cinematic space for a recent installation at Schloss Holleneegg for Design, a cultural foundation and residency in a 12th-century Austrian castle. Hand-painted wallpaper mimicked the luxuriant vines creeping up the sides of the castle's exterior, except that Charlap Hyman & Herrero's climbers hosted a variety of insect species, visible only upon close inspection. "The mural teeters between a romantic suggestion of man's poetic relationship with nature and an ominous reminder that all buildings will become ruins eventually, overtaken by the untameable," reads the official statement for the project. Earlier this fall, Charlap Hyman & Herrero partnered with Vitra to outfit the VitraHaus loft with colors, materials, and objects inspired by favorite cinematic moments (Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*, for instance).

Like all great design minds, Charlap Hyman aims to translate what inspires him into fully functional, all-encompassing fantasies for his clients. "Mongiardino and a lot of his contemporaries were world builders," Charlap Hyman says. "I love a tented room. I love a potted palm. I love faux painting." Like his design heroes, Charlap Hyman approaches all his projects as one-of-a-kind, self-contained worlds. Everything is treated—from the baseboards to the door handles to the ceiling—with precision and play in mind. Nothing is cumbersome. Nothing is too precious. And, above all, nothing is boring. ♦

