

Raising the bar

'Neolithic' bar, by Studio Mackereth, Jack Badger and Royal Salute

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Making Of...

THIS PAGE, ARCHITECT SALLY MACKERETH AND BEN NAYLOR, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CARPENTRY FIRM JACK BADGER, WITH THEIR BAR OUTSIDE THE JACK BADGER WORKSHOP IN DERBYSHIRE

OPPOSITE, SOME OF THE 8,000-YEAR-OLD OAK USED FOR THE DESIGN

See sketches in the *Wallpaper* Handmade sketchbook*, page 077



Day 1: 8000-year-old petrified river oak in Zagreb, Croatia



Day 6: The first cut after five days of assessment in Derbyshire, UK



Day 9: Creation of the end grain blocks ready for tapering



Day 14: Wooden blocks stacked up and taking shape



Day 19: On to the fifth and final grade of hand sanding



Day 22: No room for error in cutting out the doors



Day 23: First full assembly outside the Jack Badger workshop



Day 26: The bar installed at Wallpaper* Handmade in Milan

Designing a bar is a fine way to explore new functions, forms and design interactions. It is also, some of us would argue, for altogether less noble reasons, one of the most important projects of our annual Handmade exhibition in Milan. And this year, our devotion to all things entertaining meant that the bar would be thrust centre stage like never before.

We entrusted the creation of this key component to London architects Studio Mackereth and Derbyshire carpenters Jack Badger, who, in partnership with Scotland's Royal Salute whisky, delivered a powerful centrepiece. Their 'Neolithic' bar is a circular design made using hundreds of chunks of 8,000-year-old oak, painstakingly hand-cut from an ancient tree trunk recovered from deep within a muddy riverbed in Croatia. Its grain is darkened and enhanced, thanks to its long exposure to various minerals and natural tannins.

As one might expect, eight millennia of immersion results in a pretty unique patina.

This wood is scarce, and usually sliced into smaller pieces to make novelty objects such as pipes, or turned into rather garish furniture. The opportunity here was therefore unique. For Sally Mackereth of Studio Mackereth, the material provided the perfect opportunity to explore issues around history, form and perception: 'The wood had never been used in a 21st-century way; it's usually rather folksy.'

Jack Badger is a team of highly skilled carpenters and masons with three decades of experience creating reproductions of unparalleled authenticity with their armoury of vintage and traditional tools. Based in Glossop, the workshop has branched out in

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recent years to include more contemporary designs, although everything that passes through the hands of its team, from doors and panelling to carvings, is finished to the same exacting standards. 'The challenge was achieving a sleek modern look while using ancient timber we had no experience of working with,' says managing director Ben Naylor, 'and the accuracy demanded by Sally's design also tested our slightly antiquated machinery and required some lateral thinking.'

When it came to working on the bar, the decision was taken to use the end grain, as it best displayed the wood's unique patination. Mackereth likens it to the wooden paving at the palaces of Versailles and Blenheim, 'as well as many early factories - it's very hard-wearing. It's precious yet it's also tough.' Working with this wood is not for the impatient. After its long, slow marinade in deep waters, each trunk is brought to the surface by divers and dried for up to five years. It then has to be sorted, shaped and

planned, using a combination of age-old techniques and laser-cutting technology. 'We turned our 1940s timber thicknesser into a state of the art machine capable of achieving 0.01 of a degree in terms of accuracy,' says Naylor, a carpenter by trade.

The bar, though, came together with remarkable speed. 'Our team worked literally day and night to hit the deadline,' says Naylor. The result is richly tactile, its surface a patchwork of shifting hues and shades, from golden brown through to a peaty black, with a toughness that comes from the wood's near-petrification. 'It has a wonderful texture and depth of colour to it - you just want to stroke the wood,' says Mackereth. The final form - two intersecting circles with a circular lighting ring above - is a nod to the age of the trees and the nascent technology of the Neolithic age. 'It's a very simple form, reminiscent of the invention of the wheel - a pure circle,' Mackereth says. 'Had it been put forward as a sculpture - which it could have been, given the age of the material -

people would have just stood and looked at it. But instead it was a bar, so it was leant on, danced on, and had countless glasses of whisky placed on it.'

Royal Salute is now set to fly the bar to LA for a polo event, where it will ensure the whisky maker's authentic brand of pomp and circumstance shines brightly in the California sun. Dedicated to whisky that's been aged for a minimum of 21 years, the brand launched its famous 21 Year Old on the day of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. 'Royal Salute whisky has a royal connection and its youngest whisky is 21 years old,' says global brand director Vadim Grigorian, 'so for this project we were interested in discussing the question of time and continuity - what it means in relation to heritage and how time can be hidden in materials and whisky.'

The project cemented a new working relationship between Studio Mackereth and Jack Badger. 'They're uncompromising in their approach,' Mackereth explains. 'We both initially thought, "How is this going to

work?" But ultimately we both want the same thing - to use traditional working methods to celebrate the wood. We're now collaborating on another project, using the same wood to create a dining table for a client.'

The 'Neolithic' bar will be a powerful presence wherever it finds itself, with bona fide Handmade credentials seeping out from every hand-crafted joint and junction. 'Our studio is very much about taking time, taking a step back to do things properly,' Mackereth says. Working closely with a traditional carpenter has given this emphatically modern practice another useful angle. 'We're doing quite a lot of high-end bespoke residential projects and we have to go and find experts in various fields,' she continues. 'My little black book contains people who take the time and trouble to do something special. There are clients out there who admire these one-off things. I'm very interested in the process of my job, rather than the product.' ★ studiomackereth.com; jackbadger.co.uk; royalsalute.com

Space

On shelves, from left, 'Mother Ship' tea caddy, by Jane Mayle and Designtex, see page 095; 'Hygge' serving board, by Koichi Futatsumata and Skagen, see page 084; 'Pleasure Dome' centrepiece, by Glenn Sestig

Architects and Van Den Weghe, see page 145; 'Honeycomb' shades/dividers, by Rich Brilliant Willing, see page 071. On plinth, water pitcher, by Jason Miller and Bosa, see page 076



'Neolithic' bar Studio Mackereth, Royal Salute and Jack Badger

Crafted from ancient, petrified oak, some of it 8,000 years old, the bar references the ageing processes of timber and whisky, see page 136



02

'High Eccentricity' stool/pedestal Studio Libertiny and Brdr Krüger

Off-axis woodturning created a dynamic form in coloured Dinesen Douglas pine

