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Barrie Benson and Stefan Steil with a chair by Oly and an étagère by Todd Alexander Romano. See Resources.



THE TOP 10 PLASTER PIECES

Designers Stefan Steil and Barrie Benson cast an appraising eye on an array of chalk-white pieces that add a clean, crisp note to any room

From ancient Egypt to colonial America, artists have used plaster, one of the world's most versatile materials, to make intricate sculptures and architectural ornaments. In the 20th century, designers such as Frances Elkins and John Dickinson became renowned for producing whimsical white plaster furnishings and light fixtures.

The material isn't without drawbacks, most notably its fragility. Today, manufacturers use plaster as well as similar looking but more durable materials

to create objects and furniture with the signature chalk-white look. Such pieces are popular for good reason, says designer Barrie Benson: "They can make a stiff room feel a lot more casual."

Plaster-like pieces usually have a strong handmade quality and a heavily textured finish—appealing elements for almost any interior, traditional or modern, says designer Stefan Steil. "They can bring a touch of nature into a room," he adds, "without hitting you over the head." ▸

THE EXPERTS

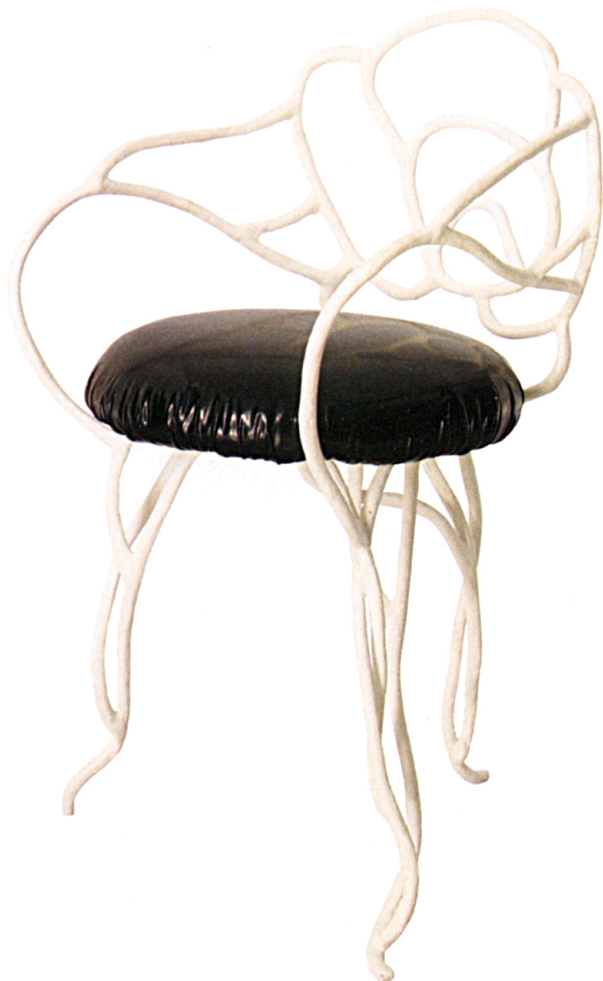
BARRIE BENSON

Known for mixing periods and styles while adding splashes of color and pattern, Benson designs residential and commercial spaces in her native North Carolina as well as in New York and Los Angeles. barriebenson.com

STEFAN STEIL

Since establishing his smartly named design firm, Steilish, last year, the German-born, New York-based designer has crafted modern interiors peppered with surprising natural elements. steilish.com

TEXT BY TIM MCKEOUGH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAX KIM-BEE / PRODUCED BY ORLI BEN-DOR



1 / PETAL CHAIR BY ATELIER DÉMIURGE

Made of stucco over iron, this chair earns Barrie Benson's praise. "It's a little work of art," she says. "The petite scale would make it perfect for a vanity." Stefan Steil appreciates the item's nod to nature. "It looks like twigs growing out of the ground," he says, and suggests setting it off as a focal point. "It would be unexpected in a stark living room." 32" h. x 17" w. x 16" d.; \$3,400; demiurgenewyork.com



2 / VOLUTE CANDLESTICKS BY STEPHEN ANTONSON FOR DESSIN FOURNIR

While Brooklyn artisan Antonson is known for his work in plaster, these candlesticks (available to the trade) achieve a similar effect with painted resin. "They remind me of coral," says Steil. Benson envisions using them in clusters with colored candles. "They're purposely imperfect," she says. "They would offer a nice contrast on a highly polished table." 4" h., \$600; 6" h., \$750; 9" h., \$900; dessinfournir.com



3 / KASPER SIDE TABLE BY MR. BROWN

This wood table has a heavily textured gesso finish that appeals to Benson. "The plaster keeps it from being too seriously contemporary and gives it an instant vintage look," she says. "It would be great as a drinks table, especially in a small room." Steil admires its proportions, and its combination of rough texture and sleek lines. "It creates a nice mix," he says. "I'd use it alongside a reading chair with a floor lamp, or as a nightstand." 24" h. x 18" dia.; \$1,811; mrbrownhome.com



4 / CROSS HATCH STOOL BY IRONIES

"This piece looks delicate," says Steil of the resin-coated stool (available to the trade), "but because of its steel armature it's actually durable. On a colorful silk rug, it would be a beautiful statement piece." Benson deems it pure sculpture. "It's almost Brutalist," she says, "but the plaster wash softens it." She imagines it in a contemporary, gallery-like loft space or a clean-lined room, where it can "stand alone, for ultimate impact." 16" h. x 22" w. x 16" d.; \$3,920; ironies.com



5 / FOOTED LAMP BY JOHN DICKINSON FROM SUTHERLAND

San Francisco designer John Dickinson's plaster furnishings from the 1970s and '80s are now pricey collector's items. This lamp (available to the trade) is an authorized reproduction in more practical resin. "If a room feels stuffy, this whimsical piece would be a great addition," says Benson. Steil admires the tribal-inspired animal feet and would pair the lamp with a darker shade to "really make the white pop." 30" h. x 18" d.; \$1,440; sutherlandfurniture.com

The opinions featured are those of ELLE DECOR's guest experts and do not necessarily represent those of the editors. All measurements and prices are approximate.



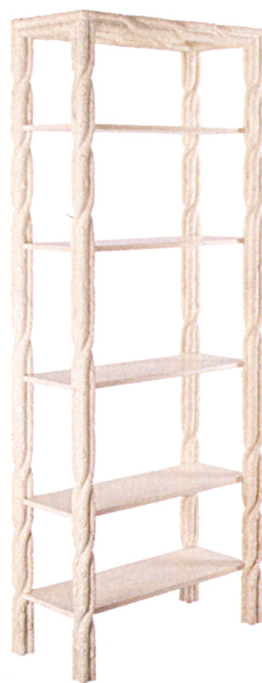
6 / DEAN CHANDELIER BY MADE GOODS

For Steil, this faux-bois-and-iron light fixture is all about contrasts. "The gold metal versus the plaster, the reflective sheen versus the distressed matte finish," he says. "It's surprising." It would make an ideal addition to a house in the mountains, says Benson. "In a place that's very woodsy, with antlers and dark colors, this would freshen things up," she notes. 34" h. x 34" dia.; \$2,850; mecoxgardens.com



9 / QUEEN ANNE SIDE TABLE BY MICHAEL S. SMITH FOR JASPER

This hand-sculpted plaster table is a fresh way to introduce a traditional element into a modern room, says Steil: "It's a classic form that takes on new life in such an unexpected material." Benson imagines it as a casual twist in an antiques-filled library or a traditional living room. "It would loosen up all that refinement," she says. "I love it." 23" h. x 29" w. x 19" d.; \$7,700; michaelsmithinc.com



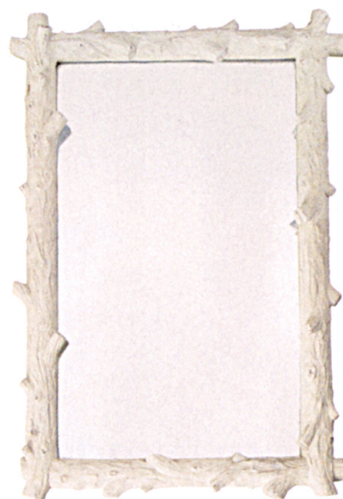
7 / TWIG ÉTAGÈRE BY TODD ALEXANDER ROMANO

This hand-carved wood piece with a plaster-like painted finish strikes Benson as versatile. "It's pretty but also fairly simple and not too heavy," she says. "I'd use a pair to flank a doorway or mantel, for balance and symmetry." Steil recommends stocking it with "sleek surfaces," like art books or photo albums, instead of decorative objects. "That would allow the piece itself to stand out," he says. 80" h. x 32" w. x 15" d.; \$6,800; toddalexanderromano.com



8 / FOSSIL CHAIR BY OLY

Steil admires the texture of this metal-and-resin chair. "When people hear 'plaster,'" he says, "they think of something cold. But this is soft and smooth, with a beautiful sheen." Benson considers it a lounge chair with a sense of levity, useful in many settings. "I could see it in a Florida beach house," she says. "If you had a big, upholstered sofa in the room, this piece would add lightness while still offering a lot of comfort." 31" h. x 29" w. x 32" d.; \$2,625; olystudio.com



10 / FAUX-BOIS MIRROR FROM WISTERIA

Benson considers this resin-framed mirror the perfect counterpoint for a space filled with gleaming wood furniture. "Dining rooms tend to have a lot of brown pieces, so it would be nice to have this thrown in," she says. "And it's an incredible price point." For Steil, the piece looks "very Adirondacks—but through a contemporary lens, because of the finish. It would be eye-catching in an entry with black-lacquered walls." 46" h. x 32" w.; \$349; wisteria.com

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