

The New York Times

FUTURISTIC Vases designed by Michael Anastassiades look like time capsules holding clues to the past: an old-fashioned rose; \$145 to \$250, at Troy.



Tony Cenicola for The New York Times

DESIGN NOTEBOOK

Still Objects That Run Deep

By WILLIAM L. HAMILTON

LONDON

IT'S not as though Michael Anastassiades, 33, a Cypriot-born designer, hasn't designed tables and chairs. He has.

But then, they are not just tables and chairs. Mr. Anastassiades doesn't have a keen eye for the obvious. His oak dining table has a shallow concave mirror sunk in the center, like a reflecting pool, which provides seated guests a silent, slightly distorted version of themselves — like observers commenting on the party itself.

"I'm interested in the behavior of things," Mr. Anastassiades said, "the psychological relationship you establish with objects."

Though they are pieces of furniture, Mr. Anastassiades's table and chairs, first shown in 1998 at Colette, the Paris boutique, refuse, like the French, to admit social defeat — no matter how confounding the company. A mirrored lamp, designed to hang above the table, lights the eye of it like bright conversation. And the chairs have mirrors for backs, which keep the table occupied defiantly even as people depart.

"You have at least yourself to converse with," Mr. Anastassiades said in October, at home on Lower Marsh Street in southeast London. Mr. Anastassiades likes objects that do things, but these aren't servile domestics. In this designer's household, you conspire with your stuff, you engage it or ignore it — at your own risk. His Message Cup, a prototype, is a vessel for holding words, not water. A thin electronic card embedded in the bottom will record a brief message, storing it when the cup is inverted. When the cup is turned up, ready to pour, the

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A Park Offers Nature, Not Just Hoops

By PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

LOS ANGELES

TO sit quietly under a tree. To dance in the grass, play in a stream. Until the recent opening of the Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park — a park the neighborhood helped design to include bits of wildness — these were some things it was impossible to do in South Central Los Angeles. With irresistible symbols that include hills made from recycled Malibu mudslides, residents of one of the city's densest and poorest neighborhoods finally have a park, with an around-the-clock ranger in a Smokey Bear hat and an arroyo with rocks from the Los Angeles River.

"Something we couldn't have, we have now," said Jorge Lopez, who, with his wife, Silvia, was on the neighborhood committee that helped transform an eight-acre storage yard for water pipes into a natural

habitat anchored by a giant avocado tree. "We can say, 'This is mine,' like fine jewelry."

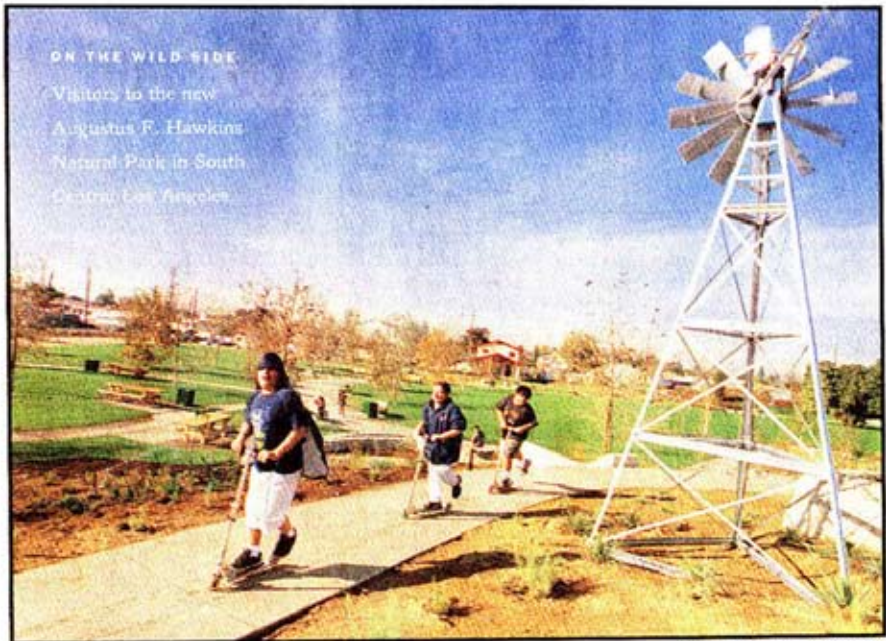
Any kind of park — let alone one with an Arts and Crafts-style ranger station — would be news in South Central. The neighborhood, which is mostly Latino, is perhaps best known to outsiders for the 1992 riots, a landscape dominated by industrial buildings, freeways, rail lines and houses ornamented with security grillwork. A majority of the city's parks are in movie-star habitat, the verdant Santa Monica Mountains. The city's west side, which includes Bel Air and Beverly Hills, has 13,310 acres of public open space, compared with 75 acres for the southeastern section.

The natural park, which local teenagers call "o.g." — original — is designed to confound this social geography, to bring "the messiness and utter joys of natural places" to the community, in the words of Randy Hester, a Berkeley landscape architect who

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ON THE WILD SIDE

Visitors to the new Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park in South Central Los Angeles



Marissa Roth for The New York Times

Still Objects That Run Deep

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message plays back. It could be instructions for a child home from school; it could be a lover's greeting. The cup, a familiar item, is being used to question the nature of content. How special it becomes depends on who fills it, why and with what.

Mr. Anastassiades has also designed a restless bedside table with a built-in alarm clock that vibrates to wake sleepers. (Like many of the designer's products, it is available by commission; for information: www.michaelanastassiades.com.)

He is at work on interactive lighting: an "antisocial" light turns on and will stay lit only in the absence of conversation, thanks to the vigilance of its concealed microphone. "It's more of a reading lamp," the designer said. "It glows only during silence."

In turn, a "social" light beams when spoken to, as though flattered by attention. "It needs to be talked to to glow," Mr. Anastassiades said. "It's almost therapeutic."

If it sounds exhausting to be living with things that treat you like part of the furniture, Mr. Anastassiades has also produced bottle openers and tablewares that pretty much do as they're told — no questions asked and no smart-aleck answers.

Mr. Anastassiades has designed an acrylic box light with an exposed silvered bulb, available at Babylon, a chic store here in Chelsea, which also sells his silvered lamps, drinking glasses and vases. (For information: info@babylondesign.demon.co.uk.) The vases are available in New York at Troy on Greene Street.

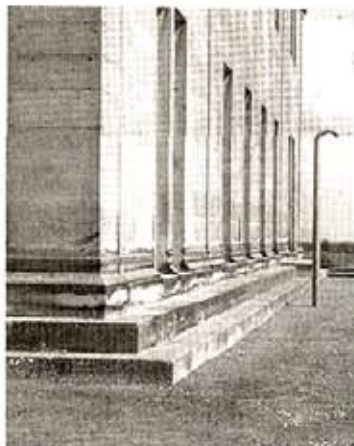
IN his renovated 19th-century house in an as yet ungentrified section of the city, Mr. Anastassiades lives at close quarters with design: Guys and Dolls Unisex Hair-styling across the street and a view of the London Eye millennium Ferris wheel out the back.

The narrow building, once a shopkeeper's residence, is now a stack of loftlike interiors, executed basically in mahogany and marble.

"All the marble — maybe that's the Greek side of me," Mr. Anastassiades said.

Mr. Anastassiades studied civil engineering at Imperial College in London.

"But I always liked making things," he said, explaining his graduate degree in industrial design at the Royal College of Art.

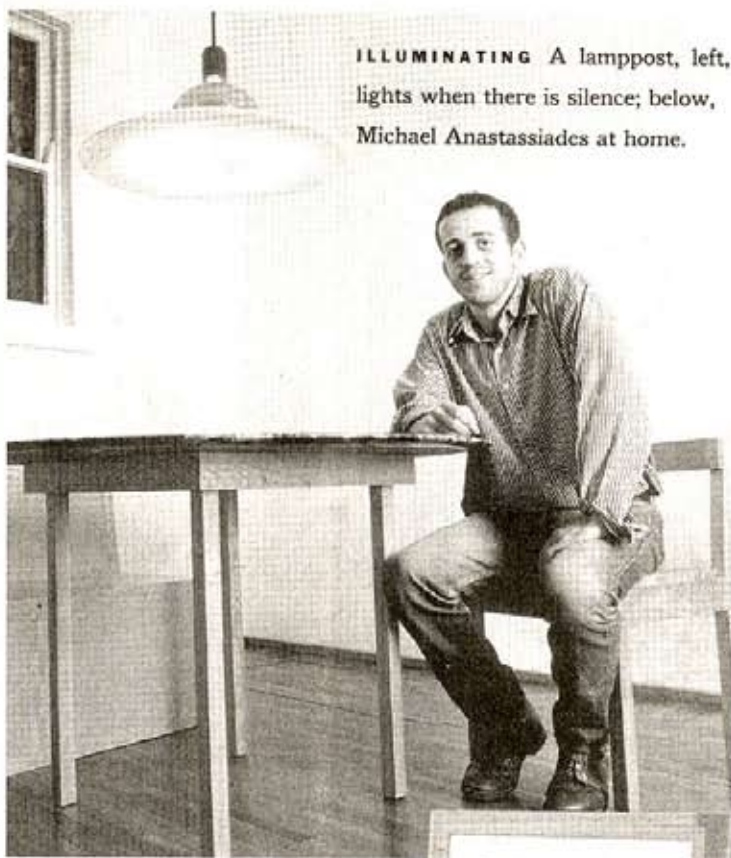


Right, Michele Currel for The New York Times

Mr. Anastassiades set up his own studio in 1994. Inclusion in several exhibitions, including "Stealing Beauty: British Design Now" at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 1999, brought his conceptual work to the attention of Hussein Chalayan, a fashion designer. Mr. Anastassiades designed runway shows for five of Mr. Chalayan's collections, staging them minimally, like art gallery installations — and without runways.

Having put the house on notice that life might never be the same if his more provocative designs proved popular, Mr. Anastassiades has been busy in the garden. He participated this year in an exhibition of outdoor follies, or sitooteries — a Scottish word for places to perch in a park — at Belsay Hall in Northumberland. Mr. Anastassiades's contributions included an oak lamppost that, like his antisocial light, would illuminate only silence, and a white column with a concave bowl at the top that upon inspection brimmed over with a sheer veil of water; a shorter column, which served as a stool, sat to its side: a contemplative cascade presented as a classical take on watching television.

In collaboration with Anthony Dunne, a designer, and Fiona Raby, an architect, both colleagues at the Royal College of Art, Mr. Anastassiades has also been at work on "Weeds, Aliens and Other Stories," a long-running project of designs, including a bookshelf with a leafy branch that rustles mechanically, for bringing the wind in the trees and other elements of the garden inside the home. Doris Saatchi, the collector, purchased the bookshelf and



ILLUMINATING A lamppost, left, lights when there is silence; below, Michael Anastassiades at home.

branch, having seen it at "Stealing Beauty." The designs are what the team calls an "alternative domestic environment," which literally introduces a wilderness of associations indoors.

The Cricket Box — a portable wooden drawer with a digital recorder and player — collects the sounds of the garden, like an entomologist's specimen box or a traditional Chinese cricket cage, reintroducing them as a lullaby for a sleepy baby, for instance, or chamber music for a midnight meal.

"I think nothing is new," Mr. Anastassiades said of the designs. "I like using technology, but my approach is not to make things more complicated, or novel, or loud. Interesting objects can exist subtly too."



DINNER GUEST

Even vacant, a mirrored chair reflects life.