

AHEC brings maple to Milan with the Class of '24

Giles Tetey Nartey and Parti create furniture inspired by food and fabric



Triennale Milan

Tuesday 16–Sunday 21 April 2024

- AHEC commissions two designers, each making their Milan Design Week debut, to create new works in American maple.
- Giles Tetey Nartey explores Ghanaian culture and everyday ritual with food-prep table Communion.
- Parti pushes the possibilities of CNC to create furniture inspired by the fold and flow of fabric.

For the American Hardwood Export Council, Milan Design Week is a crucial date on the calendar. The April event provides an unparalleled opportunity not only to showcase the design possibilities of sustainable hardwoods, but also to provide a platform for creative collaborations with extraordinary emerging and established talents.

At this year's Salone del Mobile, AHEC shines the spotlight on maple – a valuable yet underused hardwood with a delicate colour and a beautifully fine grain. Two UK studios participating in the Wallpaper* 'Class of '24' exhibition at the Triennale have been

commissioned to create new work in maple: the artist and architect Giles Tettey Nartey, and Parti, the interdisciplinary studio founded in 2015 by Eleanor Hill and Tom Leahy.

“We take immense joy in collaborating with creatives due to the unique opportunities it offers us as an organisation representing both an industry and a precious natural resource. Over the past two decades, we’ve cultivated fruitful collaborations with architects and designers to showcase the diverse possibilities of the sustainable timbers we represent.”

– **David Venables**, European director, American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC)

Supported by AHEC and Jan Hendzel Studio, each has used maple as a material springboard to explore and experiment, creating two very different bodies of work from a common starting point.

“For us, it’s about balancing traditional joinery methods with pushing the capabilities of digital machining. In these projects, we are celebrating the use of American maple, a beautiful creamy white, very hard, dense-grained timber, with an almost illustrative grain patterning. The challenge for us is in mastering how far we can push it.”

– **Jan Hendzel**, founder, Jan Hendzel Studio

‘Communion’ by Giles Tettey Nartey



Giles Tettey Nartey

Making his Milan debut, the British-Ghanaian designer Giles Tettey Nartey is using the commission as an opportunity to explore culture, culinary tradition, and the rituals of domestic life in Ghana.

Created from maple, which is dense and durable, Communion is a table designed for the making of fufu – a West African staple food, which is made by pounding cassava into a dough. Nartey’s table reimagines this practice as a communal performance, in which everyone comes together in the shared act of making food.

His design features an outer table equipped with dents, grooves, bowls, and bumps to enhance the preparation and cooking process, while a central

table is dedicated to serving and communal dining. Included within the design are mortars (woduro) and pestles (woma) for grinding cassava, along with seating inspired by both traditional Ashanti stools and typical kitchen stools found in Ghana.



Sketches for 'Communion'

Through its form, Communion aims to elevate the act of pounding cassava to the level of performance, one person pounding, another turning the mixture in an almost choreographed fusion of movement and sound that is akin to dance.

“Communion focuses on the rituals that bring to life the objects in our homes, presenting them not just as lifeless items filling our spaces but as artefacts rich with emotional and spiritual meaning, animated through our daily routines. For me it’s also a question of functionality, and whose functionality we admire and give space to. The piece celebrates a practice that is so local to West Africa presented in a new way which gives emphasis to the ‘communal’ by allowing multiple people to participate in the process of making fufu. The everyday local ritual is therefore transformed into performance, exposing the beauty I have always seen in everyday Ghanaian life.”

– Giles Tettey Nartey, creative

'Pirouette' by Parti

Inspired by the fluid movement of fabric and the childlike joy of spinning around, Parti's Pirouette collection is a range of timber furniture that explores complex geometric forms.



Eleanor Hill with sketches for 'Pirouette'

Translating the folds and creases of twisting and billowing fabric into the solid forms of seats and tables is a demanding and complicated process, usually associated with sculpture and the highest levels of craftsmanship. Collaborating with Jan Hendzel Studio, Parti has embarked on a journey of experimentation, pushing the boundaries of a three-axis CNC machine to sculpt the wood and develop the furniture.

“Hand-sculpting fabric out of heavy materials is something we’ve seen throughout history. At Parti, however, we are interested in utilising new technologies and processes, and pushing them to the limit. As a result, the making process is integral to the design, informing its boundaries. The final design is achieved through a process of negotiation between the expression of the piece and the process of making it. Although it would be easier to design a one-off, hand-crafted object, we wanted to push the limits of new technology to create a feasibly manufactured product.”

– Eleanor Hill, director, Parti



CNC experimentation for 'Pirouette'

Maple's density makes it especially suited to the creation of sculptural shapes through CNC cutting. Because the CNC machine cuts only one side of the wood, the forms are simplified, with each piece constructed from a series of complex shapes connected together, with top and bottom elements acting as 'keys' to lock everything together and sustain the furniture's structure.

Running diagonal across the twisting timber 'skirt', the wood's silky grain contributes to a sense of fluidity and motion within the pieces, which are tactile and dynamic, reminiscent of dancers frozen in the moment. Despite Pirouette's intricate appearance, meticulous attention to detail ensures that the manufacturing process remains streamlined and efficient, allowing for a seamless blend of complexity and simplicity in each piece.

A call for material diversity

For AHEC, the principal goal of these collaborations is to bridge the gap between the design industry and the naturally regenerating forests that supply American hardwoods, and to call for a sustainable material-first design approach that is led by resource availability rather than trends.

"The relentless pursuit of ever-changing trends has led to overexploitation of certain wood species, disregarding the rich diversity of natural resources available. Moreover, trends that prioritise flawless, uniform appearances incentivise practices that may compromise the integrity and resilience of forests and ecosystems."

– **Rocio Perez-Inigo**, director of communications, AHEC

To truly embrace sustainability, AHEC believes the industry must shift its paradigm towards a more holistic understanding of materials. This begins with integrating material choice into the initial stages of the design process, prioritising responsibly sourced, renewable natural materials and investing time and effort in learning and understanding their unique characteristics and potential. Rather than treating natural materials as like-for-like substitutes for man-made equivalents, design must recognise and celebrate their inherent qualities and imperfections as part of their charm and authenticity. By adopting this mindset and approach – as Parti and Giles Tettey Nartey have in this project – we can foster a more sustainable design ethos that respects and preserves the natural world while meeting the needs of contemporary design aesthetics.



Communion and Pirouette will be displayed as part of Class of '24 by Wallpaper at Triennale Milano, Viale Emilio Alemagna, 6, 20121 Milan, from 16 to 21 April.*

Notes for editors

American maple (*Acer rubrum* and *Acer saccharum*)

A close cousin of European maple and sycamore, American maple is a cold-climate species favouring the northern states and can reach heights of 23–27 metres, with a trunk diameter of 75cm. Maple is a predominantly creamy white, hard-wearing timber that can be machined and polished to a very smooth finish, making it a favourite for sports floors across the world. It is also the primary source of maple syrup.

Find out more about American maple [here](#)

American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC)

For more than three decades, the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been the global face of the U.S. timber industry, championing the performance, sustainability and aesthetic potential of American hardwoods worldwide. As the leading international hardwood trade association for North America, AHEC operates a non-profit programme representing thousands of businesses engaged in the production and export of timber – ranging from small family-run sawmills to major flooring manufacturers. Established to unite this wide-ranging spectrum of companies with a single global voice, AHEC has successfully built an internationally recognised brand,



Wallpaper*

marketing more than 20 commercially available hardwood species and increasing demand around the world.

americanhardwood.org

[@ahec_europe](https://twitter.com/ahec_europe)

Parti

Parti is a design studio based in London, founded by Eleanor Hill and Tom Leahy in 2015. The studio bridges architecture, furniture and landscape, creating atmospheric and characterful objects and places. The practice is defined by an explorative, research-based approach that responds to the specifics of each project, resulting in innovative, well-crafted and beautiful designs that bring joy, intrigue and character into people's lives. Recent and current work includes: 15 houses in a disused limestone quarry; a new educational building for a North London Academy; a restaurant on the Thames; an art gallery in London; furniture; and a number of private homes. Parti also works closely with Arc to create a new form of hospitality that reimagines the country house for designed experiences.

parti.global

[@parti.studio](https://twitter.com/parti.studio)

Giles Tettey Nartey

Blending research with a thoughtful design-as-poetry approach, often with a sharp political edge, Giles Tettey Nartey is a trained architect, artist, designer, filmmaker, researcher and educator. Named by RIBA as a 'Black architect of tomorrow' in 2018, Giles has exhibited at numerous galleries and biennales, including Seoul Biennale and London Design Festival. Alongside pursuing his PhD at the Bartlett School of Architecture, Giles teaches at the university, and also leads a diploma unit at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

Tettey Nartey's research-based practice spans curation, filmmaking, installation, performance and furniture design, and is rooted in traditional West African cultures, fostering a dialogue between craft and ritual, the intangible and tangible.

gilestetteynartey.com

[@gilestetteynartey](https://twitter.com/gilestetteynartey)

Jan Hendzel Studio

Jan Hendzel Studio designs and makes expressive timber furniture and objects from its workshop in London. Translating complex ideas into sculptural forms, the studio explores and refines the relationship between artistry and craft to make things the right way. The studio's approach follows the sinuous, flowing path from concept to object, combining precision and experimentation to make objects the best they can be.

janhendzel.com

[@janhendzelstudio](https://twitter.com/janhendzelstudio)