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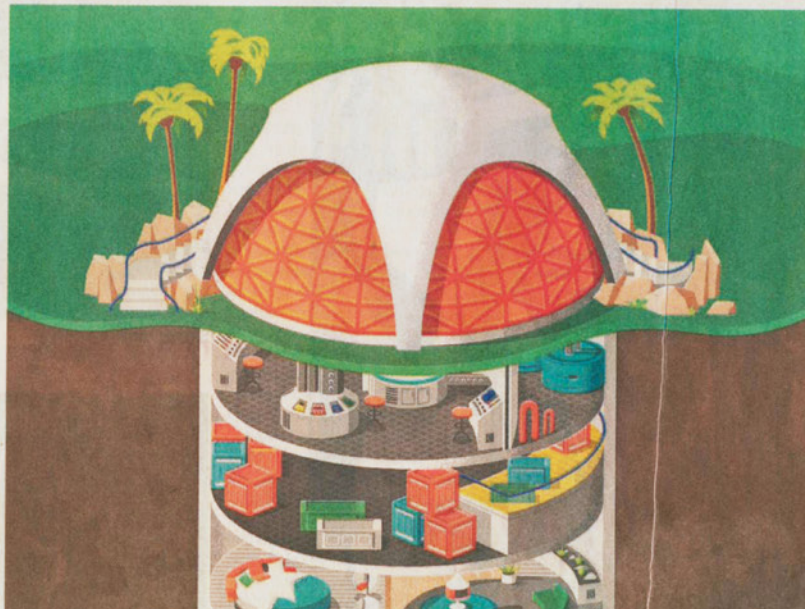
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Apocalypse wow!

Fears of catastrophic climate
change or cyber warfare have
driven some billionaires to
invest in 'penthouse'
bunkers. By *Edwin Heathcote*

The latest real estate trend among internet billionaires and hedge fund tycoons is, apparently, buying bunkers. These individuals, who have made fortunes by disrupting the present, predicting the future and then making that future happen through trades, algorithms and tech innovations, are preparing for the end of civilisation.

That probably isn't the most comforting thought. Bunkers had rather gone



Test launch of an Atlas F missile in 1959. The Survival Condo Project is located on a former missile launch site in Kansas

Sculptures that resin-ate

Artisans | Hélène de Saint Lager has suffered for her art – which involves poisonous liquids – but the results are profound. By Jonathan Foyle

Polyester resin may not spring to mind as a likely material for an artisan to choose for shaping and adornment. But then the Parisian artist Hélène de Saint Lager, who moulds glitzy furniture from the stuff, is a maker of many talents and myriad materials.

As a child, Saint Lager spent summers in the Pyrenees at Château de Bielle, a forlorn-looking pile built in 1768 with a tall roof to protect it from Atlantic storms. In the darkness of that roof she found some dusty trunks, filled with old textiles. Young Hélène unfolded them and cut them into shapes for collages.

"I used to make things with my hands – anything," she says. "My

grandmother used to say 'if you want to keep Hélène busy, give her some fabric and glue'." Her small hands would make large pictures on boards to while away the hot days in the shade of the old house. She regards her formative creative period as 1962-73, between the ages of five and 16. At 12, she lived for a year in Algeria and under the spell of Islamic art: its colour, metals, pattern, fabric. "It remains important for how I work today," she says.

Her greatest immersion came while studying for a degree in the history of art at the Ecole du Louvre, in the days before the glass Pyramid when it was "an old place, with real spirit. It still gave the impression of being a palace". Though she confesses she "was not



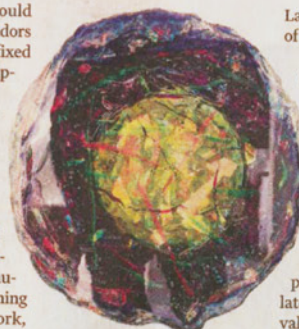
Hélène de Saint Lager at her workspace in Paris, where she handles restoration, millinery, sculpture, casting and metalwork — Photographs Pierre Faure for the FT



Saint Lager preparing three barrels of liquid resins

disciplined to work hard", she would lose herself in the labyrinthine corridors studded with art and become transfixed on some detail of a painting or sculpture, gathering influences.

After forays in restoration and millinery, Saint Lager realised she was, in the end, a sculptor. Starting about a decade ago, her skill in making both lustrous and profound sculptures in resin caught the eye of an interior designer called Jacques Garcia, known for his transformations of Paris hotels and restaurants. Through Garcia's commissioning came Saint Lager's best-known work, the Fleur table for the fashion house Schiaparelli. Its surface has gold circles over glazed deep red resin, and it is set on three gilded legs with staggered leafy shelves. Its dazzling surface and profound depth were the result of Saint



A sculpture titled 'Quark'

Lager's experiments with the properties of polyester in her studio and at home.

Polyester resin is a material familiar to restorers: it is a tough, clear, mouldable alternative to glass. Combining polyester and styrene liquids, the polyester molecules are cross-linked by styrene during a slow setting and curing process, taking about a day to complete without accelerants. It was pioneered in 1894 as a glycol maleate, developed in the 1930s and patented in Britain in 1932. A little later, American engineers realised its value in laminating glass fibre for light and strong radar equipment, all of which prepared it for postwar consumer demand in the age of coloured plastics.

Resin's clarity and colour have a dark side. In its hard-set state, it is inert but the uncured liquids have long

been known to be poisonous, as described in a 1963 article, "Polyester Resin Hazards" by Bourne and Milner, which explained that "the handling of polyester resin system materials may give rise to skin irritations, allergic reactions and burns . . . probably due to styrene and organic peroxides. Atmospheric pollution from styrene and explosion and fire risks from organic peroxides must be prevented".

Saint Lager's lungs have yielded to those effects. Animated and passionate as she is, during our interview her son Guillaume speaks with concern about his mother's respiratory health. But this is her lifetime's work and her chosen medium.

A Saint Lager table is typically made over the course of a week, using a hollowed-out bed of sand. She forms that hollow to represent the mass of the



Some of the constituents of her creations



A mold and various flower resins



A small tripod table in orange resin



Saint Lager applying the finishing touches using abrasion

table when it is filled. A canvas sheet lines the void before Saint Lager pours a layer of resin a couple of inches deep on to it. Her task now is to decide how industrial dyes lend effects of opacity or transparency, depth or brilliance. Metallic strips or iridescent drops or streaks might be added as the material is built up in each stage, with 24 hours needed for each layer to cure.

Sometimes mother-of-pearl or broken ceramics are added. One table made for Garcia entombed a much-loved antique teapot his client had dropped and smashed. Its fragmentation is suspended for eternity, a disaster turned to virtue. And Saint Lager encourages personal effects to be entombed in her work: wine labels and vine leaves have become an unreachable and incorruptible tableau in the anaerobic depths of her resin.

The results combine depth and mystery with warmth and luminosity. The prismatic, glowing effect is gained by the peeled-off canvas sheet having left the impression of folds and bulges that animate the edge and underside, which will probably be finished in silver or gold leaf so that each crease reflects the light penetrating the glacial mass. The Améthyste table is uncoated so that the violet resin and shimmering strips suggest layers of ancient quartz. You could be looking at a piece a million years in the making.

Even when it comes to table legs, Saint Lager takes a contrarian approach. They are typically made from common materials such as concrete reinforcement bars and then gilded or silvered, if not coated in glass fibre and resin. The often diagonally set legs seem spindly, like the landing gear



Geode table lamp in resin and silver foil

of a flying saucer. That adds some levity but the effect is to make the heavy resin seem to float.

Colours and themes are not always of Saint Lager's choosing; 80 per cent of her orders come through designers for specific projects, or from clients with specific ideas. When she works with Garcia or Peter Marino, New York's architect of choice for fashion houses, colour schemes are stipulated. One Russian client wanted a vivid pink interior. The remaining 20 per cent of her work, however, draws on her own ideas. It may include a pool of eyes inspired by the Egyptian ceramics she wondered at long ago as a student in Paris, or forms created by splashing molten aluminium into pools of water.

Constantly adding more methods and materials to her repertoire, Saint Lager is far from set in her ways.

Design classic Nokia 3310 mobile phone

Smartphone screens may tremble at the sight of a marble floor but the Nokia 3310 relishes the challenge. Launched in September 2000, the name of the game with this brick-like device is durability. The 3310 harks back to a time when phone batteries would see you through a ski trip and not just a chairlift, and worries about WiFi were just three curved bars on a distant technological horizon.

Before Apple's worldwide domination, there was Nokia, and the 3310 is probably the model that defines the Finnish company's brand. It has a near-legendary status for its hardness, which is ensured by a plastic faceplate that can be easily snapped off and (if desired) switched for something jazzier. The shell protects the T9 ("text on nine buttons") keypad and encases the thick rubber on/off button at the top. Developed in the age before colour blasted on to phone screens, the original handset, which weighs 133g, featured an 84 x 48-pixel monochrome display. A much-loved and time-consuming element of the 3310 was Snake II, in which a long, striped snake, controlled via the keypad, navigates the screen in search of food.

Recently Nokia has been living in the sleek rectangular shadow of the smartphone but this year will see it re-release the 3310 almost 17 years after it hit the market.

The new model borrows many classic elements from its ancestor but is considerably less tubby at just 79.6g. The revamp boasts a colour display and a battery life of up to a month on standby. It will be available in matt or gloss colours at €49.

More than 100m of the original devices were sold worldwide and Nokia will be hoping that hipsters, who have shunned computers for typewriters

and prefer Mason jars to water glasses, will today be looking for a more nostalgic approach to telecommunications.

Katy Fallon

