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The Contagious Charm and Kicked-Back Cool of Hollywood's Golden Girl





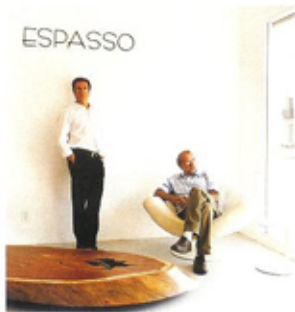
Left: Hugo França's Ouró chair.
Below: The \$9,000 chaise.
Bottom: A table.



The Woodsman

Hugo França creates sculptural furniture from rainforest scraps.

Photographs by JOAO CANZIANI



Carlos Junqueira, left, and Hugo França at Espasso in L.A.

When Hugo França looks for a place to sit during an interview at an L.A. furniture showroom, he avoids the most striking chair in the room, a \$9,000 chaise of his own design. The piece is rather uncomfortable, he admits: "It's not like you're going to sit in it and watch TV."

França's designs are indeed more sculptural than functional, and amid the growing frenzy for contemporary Brazilian furniture, they stand out as works of art. They also offer collectors a rare chance to own an ecologically correct piece of the rainforest. França, a bearded 50-year-old, carves each bench, chair and table from wood that he rescues from abandoned logs and burned stumps near his home on the Bahian coast of Brazil. Most scraps come from the mighty *Poqui* tree, known for its uncommonly hard, knotty trunk that is impervious to fire, rain and ordinary *chairsaws*. Like the local fishermen who shape their canoes from single *Poqui* trunks, França tailors each piece to the wood's natural contours, and he sees his work as a tribute to the sturdy magnificence of tropical hardwood—a resource that the Brazilian government has only recently begun to protect.

Already popular with wealthy collectors in Brazil, França's work will get a boost in the U.S. in September with a show at the Long Island City headquarters of his dealer, Espasso (espasso.com), one of the leading sources here for contemporary and vintage Brazilian design. Owner Carlos Junqueira foresees a particularly strong market for França's one-of-a-kind pieces, not least because his source material is now becoming even rarer than the protected live trees it comes from. "Five years from now," França predicts, "all the usable *Poqui* wood will be gone." —CHRISTOPHER BAGLEY