



# SHOW STEELER

*Sculptor Andrea Wendel transforms unexpected objects into art with a purpose.*

STORY BY ALI MARGO

Andrea Wendel’s industrial space in the Basalt Design Center looks more hardware store or a mad scientist’s lab than artist studio. Walk in unannounced any day of the week, and you’ll likely experience the spectacle of Wendel, with her fine features and birdlike frame, fiercely wielding a blowtorch—the inferno of fire-on-metal reflecting in the glass of her protective face shield.

“I love to create sculptural objects with a purpose, to build art in unexpected forms that can be used in everyday life,” she says. For over 30 years, Wendel has been a multidisciplinary artist who focuses on the integration of art and furniture. She works in a variety of media, using wood, metal, and paint to transform otherwise mundane objects into works of art, like “Mountain Chaise,” (above left) a chaise longue of fenceposts mounted on an undulating steel frame and “Erosion,” (above right) a coffee table of carved wood that’s been burned and ebonized, inspired by geological rock formations Wendel observed during one of her many forays cross country and abroad.

Originally from rural Pennsylvania, Wendel studied illustration at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia. Immediately drawn to large-scale installations, she launched her career in the 1980s by creating commercial

and residential murals across the country. From the start, Wendel would find inspiration in a specific aesthetic that struck her during her travels and let that inform her process, which lead to exploring other materials, mediums, and techniques. When she became interested in metal and steel, she enrolled at the Del Ray Technical School in South Florida to learn how to weld. Still in her twenties, she was the only artist and most certainly the only woman bending metal—and likely the minds—of her classmates.

“I love steel,” she says. “I love the physicality of working with it and giving it a more feminine edge, bending it, and adding texture or shape so it looks more like jewelry. It’s no longer just a big chunk of steel but something that represents me.”

Traveling through the desert Southwest throughout the ‘90s, Wendel developed what



she describes as “large totemic sculptures in bent steel representative of petroglyphs.” Later, time spent in Africa on multiple trips between the 1990s and 2008 led to an interest in wood carving. When Wendel settled in the Roaring Fork Valley in 1990, she enrolled in as many woodworking and sculpture classes as she could at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, adding a quiver of saws and carving tools to a workshop that would make any ironworker swoon.

Wendel says she also draws inspiration from Native American art and striking landscapes: the pattern in a Navajo rug, the hues of a desert terrain, or the texture of an African wood carving.

“I was always fascinated by Indigenous cultures,” she explains. “I’m inspired to take those influences and transform them into something with a more contemporary, global spin.”

Today, she creates custom pieces for showcase homes, locally and nationwide. In addition to creating interior pieces that are very much in demand in Aspen’s high-end luxury home market, Wendel is planning a February launch of Blossoms, a line of botanic-shaped high-top tables with verdant green bases and an attached leaf that Wendel describes as being “perfect for parties and events, a space to put a drink when eating or greeting and hugging friends.”

Find her work throughout the winter season at Forre Fine Art in Aspen ([forrefineart.com](http://forrefineart.com)). ●

