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WORDS:
Christopher
Turner

Below
Room divider
in discarded
Fendi leather

Right
Salmon-skin
stool, with coral
sponge seat



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Craftica by FormaFantasma

The Eindhoven-based Italian design duo has collaborated with Fendi on a range of primitive-looking tools and furniture that seeks to explore the tactile qualities of leather



“People are very sensitive when it come to leather,” explains Simone Farresin of design duo Studio FormaFantasma: “They know where it comes from but they don’t want that to be apparent.” Farresin and his partner Andrea Trimachi both studied in Florence where “it is hard to avoid the leather industry”, and in their Craftica collection, which he describes as their “homage to leather”, they wanted to question the stereotype that the material “just comes from a cow or pig”. In their material investigation into leather, they intended to make the origins of the unusual skins they used very clear. Fendi, the Florence-based fashion house that sponsored the project, which was on display at Design Miami/Basel, was apparently a little concerned by FormaFantasma’s wilful primitivism.

The studio worked not only with the discarded off-cuts from Fendi’s range of products but also with a multiplicity of other leathers – including vegetal dried salmon and perch skins, and the fierce-looking Atlantic wolffish. These were “discarded skins from the food industry” rather than prized exotic leathers, the majority sourced from a factory in Iceland. They give a tactile, pre-industrial glamour to a range of bespoke products: a stool, with a generous coral sponge as its seat, is held up by legs



Left
Scallop
spoons, with
trout and
salmon-skin
handles

Below
The leather
table is
stretched
by marble
weights

covered in tanned salmon skins; an elegant spoon, whose bowl is a scallop shell, has a handle covered in trout; side tables are covered in perch or wolfish.

The duo wanted to present “a holistic view of leather” and also used boar bristles, goatskins and cow bladders, the latter bought from local farmers to create tabletop vessels. As if to acknowledge the curing and tanning process that Farresin admits was “stinky”, they constructed two protective masks out of discarded Fendi leather and scallop shells, through which air holes have been drilled.

Other items include a room divider that resembles a blacksmith’s apron, its pocket weighted with a marble millstone, and a long leather table over which a skin is stretched by columns of marble weights (they will be on sale through Gallery Libby Sellers). “It was a challenge,” Farresin admits, “to combine so many different kinds of material – leather, marble, glass, brass – into a visually cohesive assembly.”

They also wanted their exhibition to tell a story of the use of leather through the ages, and the pieces were accompanied by a series of comic illustrations on parchment by Francesco Zorzi, who now works in their studio, that show a picaresque history, from the leather used in medieval armour through to contemporary fetishism.

Right
Protective
masks made
from shells and
discarded
Fendi leather



Hooke Park

The AA's postgraduates have crafted a workshop out of timber in Dorset where future students will be able to develop their practical skills

Big Shed is the first project to be built at the 350-acre woodland in Hooke Park, west Dorset as part of the Architectural Association's Design and Make course. Completed in April this year, the 500sq m workshop was conceived and constructed by a team of resident postgraduates, led by programme director Martin Self and course tutor Piers Taylor.

Described by Self as "the mothership" of the site's overall masterplan, Big Shed's hulking timber structure houses the course's core research activities in fabrication, assembly and prototyping. "The academic agenda at Hooke Park is one of providing [students with] real experience of construction and the testing of ambitions by physically mocking things up," Self says. Future cohorts will add to the masterplan, with a project for a student accommodation lodge currently underway.

The AA took ownership of Hooke Park in 2002, inheriting the site's three existing buildings: ABK and Frei Otto's long-span gridshell, Ted Cullinan's elevated dormitory and Buro Happold's prototype house with a tensile timber roof. These experimental campus buildings pioneered the use of forestry leftovers or "thinnings" – waste wood that has no commercial value but still has structural use. "The buildings are from the 1980s when

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furniture designer John Makepeace established a branch of his school here," Self explains. "Design and Make's buildings are intended to be sensitive to that legacy."

Big Shed and subsequent structures at Hooke Park are also about using timber sustainably and "minimising processes". The structural frame is a system of un-milled timber columns and trusses. The unconventional faceted form is clad with larch strips from the surrounding forest.

The hands-on approach of the building programme at Hooke Park seems a far cry from some of the avant-garde goings on at Bedford Square shown in this year's graduate show. But Self says the off-site course is not so different from its central London counterparts. "It's about marrying craft knowledge with techniques like digital modelling," he says. "At Hooke Park we're able to feed our knowledge back and use research in a pragmatic way."

WORDS:
Riya Patel

Below
The 500sq m
Big Shed
workshop in
west Dorset

