


MY COMPASS BE MY GUIDE

Antoine Proulx chooses Phoenix to launch its first stand-alone showroom  By Echo Surina

The dream woke him. Not a dream, mind you, *the* dream that changed his life. A jolting voice said, "You're only held by freedom." Sitting up in bed in a hotel room in Tokyo, Marc Desplaines, who at the time was U.S. director for world famous fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto, thought about the truth of what he'd just heard: He really was only limited by the freedom he recognized and embraced. A few days later, he quit his job and moved from New York City to San Francisco, leaving the fashion industry thousands of miles behind.

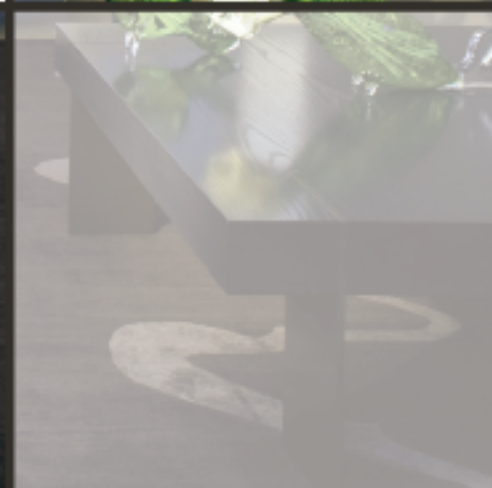
Twelve years later, he sits in his showroom in Phoenix holding out a tattooed hand for me to see; inside its



compass design are the words, "Held by freedom." The dream prompted him in a new life direction, inspiring the tattoo that would later become his company logo.

Despite the triple digit temperature outdoors, Marc Desplaines, founder and owner of Antoine Proulx, looks cool. Even swish. Clean shaven with an eyebrow ring, he strikes me as the personification of "custom," a term often misused.

Desplaines' appearance—like his company's furniture—is a refraction of him. The furniture does more than simply reflect his vision and inspiration—it has its own heartbeat; it is a medium by which Desplaines' creativity is translated and twisted into an independent being.



Antoine Proulx has been designing and selling custom, made-to-order furniture exclusively to the trade since 1993. The newest location in Phoenix is its only freestanding showroom. The company's handmade products are available through 11 showrooms across the United States.

Having left an industry that buys six months in advance and sells in half that time, Desplaines admits to missing the fast pace of the fashion industry. "This long drawn out affair with furniture can be tiring," he says. "The gestation period for one sale could be two years."

Situational irony: Thousands of furniture companies employ cutting-edge industry techniques to produce common products—that which are easily available through a sea of like businesses. However, Antoine Proulx uses old-fashioned ways to create design, found nowhere else.

The company uses solid wood frames; eight-way, hand-tied springs; and foam with down wrap or pure feather. "The fit is comfortable because we're still making things the old way," says Desplaines.



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Outdoor Furniture Collection to Launch Spring 2007

Antoine Proulx will launch its first outdoor furniture line spring 2007 in Phoenix. The collection will offer year-round products, due to the state's climate. Made of aluminum, steel and perhaps corian, the line will include a daybed, dining tables, coffee tables, end tables and console tables. The pieces will have a baked-on epoxy finish and will come in an array of colors: black, bronze, titanium, white, graphite and maybe blue or green.

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Named after Desplaines' grandmother, Antoinette (and modified to a masculine version because he felt it less intimidating for men), Antoine Proulx is born of an interesting history. Pronunciation of the name is unclear to many people, says Desplaines, which is another reason he felt it ideal.

Referring to his days in fashion, he says, "If you knew how to say Yohji's name, you were in the know. There was a certain caché, an insiders' club—that's how I always saw Yohji, and I wanted to model my company after his."

Unlike the showroom with its dark stained furniture, Desplaines' private residence, a downtown Phoenix condo, mixes generous portions of light gray and bleached ash wood—two materials he admits are not in vogue. "I'm not too fashionable when it comes to my furniture pieces," says Desplaines. "I'm not trying to make a statement with it. I want to live with it for a long time."

But those who want to say something current and crisp with their furniture, find Antoine Proulx flexible in usability and design style; it is created to weather years of wear and generations of trends. Classic to the core and powerfully progressive, the company offers innovative forms.

A bench sits outside in the baking sun, all 200 pounds of its mahogany and steel body. It's a testament to Antoine Proulx's anti-prototype philosophy. The company never generates mock-ups of furniture because they can't be appreciated and understood unless seen in full-scale, in the right materials, says Desplaines.

But for now, this full-size Antoine Proulx piece is used to test the finish against the elements for future furniture designs. The results only time will tell—or perhaps, another dream. After all, Desplaines' compass tattoo is permanent—its direction immutable—an unwavering prediction change and innovation are friendly companions likely to reappear. ☒

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