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R O B E R T K U O

M c G U I R E

I

FORWARD

Robert Kuo is inspired and inspirational, both as an international designer and as a collector of antiques. With verve and grace, he travels widely looking for the best in each culture, especially in the visual arts. At home in his studio in Los Angeles, he takes what he has seen, in particular borrowing from Chinese art, to create a personal aesthetic vision. Robert designs things—all kinds of things—that are contemporary and yet traditional, elegant and yet approachable, and which in the end all prove irresistible. If you are lucky enough to know Robert personally, you will find that the warmth and sensitivity of his work reflect his personality.

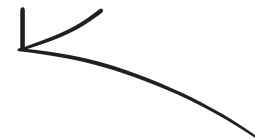
I met Robert almost fifteen years ago because of mutual interest in Chinese cloisonné. In fact, I knew of his work first, and when we did meet, we were astonished to discover that by strange coincidence I had lived with his married sister of a different surname in Taiwan ten years earlier when I was a language student. At the time I did not know she had a brother in the United States who was an artist and designer. Fate had surely arranged to bring us together.

Robert's reputation had preceded our initial meeting in Washington, DC because I had seen his innovative, matte-finish cloisonné box with cloud design in a Chinese art magazine. As a curator of Chinese art I was excited by Robert's bold, new concept and technique. He abandoned the sometimes overly glossy finish and fussiness of traditional Chinese enamels for a fluid pattern rendered in pastel colors buffed to velvety softness. The box was a dramatic design statement that like most of Robert's work deconstructs the hackneyed belief that the more than 5,000 years of Chinese civilization has frozen artistic development. For Robert, it is just the opposite. Five thousand years of past creativity is a nourishing tonic that enriches his own artistic output. He is truly passionate and knowledgeable about Chinese antiques and knows how to mine them as sources for innovations within, and beyond, tradition.

Robert is happiest surrounded by art, which you can say is almost in his blood. His father is a Chinese painter and designer of cloisonné, and he is married to an internationally known jewelry designer. Art provides daily solace for him and drives him to keep creating anew. If you catch Robert at home between one of his many trips to China, where he supervises the handwork of executing his designs into concrete form and hunts for antiques, your timing will have been fortuitous. He is almost always on the go, but that is all right because the continual stream of exciting, new work he creates pleases him and his family. And, of course, his efforts reward all of us whose lives have been made more enjoyable by his artistic gift.

JAN STUART

WASHINGTON D.C.





II

FORWARD

Robert Kuo is a visionary, a preservationist, and above all an artist of unsurpassed integrity. His exclusive edition for McGuire reveals with pleasure the master's touch for creating furniture and lighting which marries the world's finest craft traditions with a sensibility that is truly of our time.

Kuo's forms are at once antique and modern, friendly and formidable. Each piece is rendered with such precision as to be quietly imperial in ancestry. It is this devotion to craft that distinguishes this collection and commemorates its unique heritage. By celebrating with such vigor these great traditions, Kuo assures their survival.

WILLIAM SOFIELD

NEW YORK CITY

INTRODUCTION

Robert Kuo is perhaps best known as an artist and creator of exquisite ‘objets’, impeccably executed using methods and techniques that date back many centuries. His respect for and knowledge of traditional craft methods, techniques, and materials enable him to bring both aesthetic and technical innovation to his work.

In the spring of 2001, McGuire commissioned Robert Kuo to design and create a special edition of furniture and lighting. In keeping with McGuire’s mission “to create functional art of lasting value”, the artist has created a collection of pieces that incorporates the same exquisite aesthetic, craftsmanship and materials for which he has become so well recognized.

The woods used in making the furniture pieces in the collection are indigenous to China. In many cases, components are cut from reclaimed timbers that are hundreds of years old. The use of aged wood imparts a special character to the furniture. Northern elm (yumu), ebony (zitan), and rosewood (hualimu) are types of wood that have been used in furniture making in China for hundreds of years. The construction and joinery methods used are the same ones employed by furniture craftsmen of the Ming Dynasty. No nails or screws are used. The traditional joinery methods, such as mortise and tenon, enhance the beauty, quality, and structural integrity of each piece.

Repoussé, the traditional art of hand-hammering decorative relief into sheet metal, dates back to 800BC, and in Chinese historical context, can be found as early as the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.). This laborious technique involves using a hammer and various shaping tools. Form and design are achieved by working on both sides of the sheet metal. Sections in relief are worked from the interior while depressed or concave sections are worked from the exterior. Pitch, a material similar to putty, is used as a filler for hollow forms, or to hold sheet metal in place while the artist works on the design. The pitch absorbs the blows from the hammer and provides proper resistance for the artist to execute the design. Robert Kuo has incorporated copper repoussé into a number of the pieces in the collection. The unique designs are all created by hand using traditional repoussé techniques.

Lacquer is a highly regarded art form and has been used in China since the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C. – 1100 B.C.). The term ‘lacquer’ refers to the name of the substance as well as the technique. True organic lacquer, which is the type used in this collection, is made of translucent sap collected from trees (thus verniciflua) that are indigenous to East Asia. After it is tapped from the trees, the sap is boiled and strained to remove impurities and to prepare it for use as a coating. Various substances, often closely guarded ‘recipes’, are added to the lacquer as colorants. Once prepared, the lacquer is applied in thin layers multiple times, waiting for each layer to dry or cure for at least 24 hours before the next layer is applied. The lacquer must cure in a high humidity environment, and it is crucial that only a thin coating be applied each time. If applied too thickly, the lacquer underneath does not cure properly and remains in a semi-liquid state. The lacquer pieces in this collection are made using 60 coats of lacquer, applied over a wood or copper base. The unusually high number of coats of lacquer are what gives the lacquer surface its visual depth and richness. The artist has used the rich surface and color of lacquers as harmonious counterpoints to the deep warmth of wood and copper.

The cloisonné technique dates back to the Byzantine Empire. This technique of enameling on metal reached China during the 12th century. It is a multi-step, challenging process requiring skill, dexterity, and technical know-how. The process begins when copper wires are formed by hand to outline a design or pattern. Once formed, the wires are then soldered in place onto a copper base forming ‘cloisons’ or cells. The cells are then carefully filled with enamel powders consisting of silica and various combinations of metal oxides that are used to create different colors. The piece is then fired in a kiln, with special attention paid to specific temperatures required for various colors. The enamel shrinks during firing, and the process of refilling the cloisons with more enamel powder and firing must be repeated several times. The enamel surface is then ground to an even level with the top of the wires. Finally, the surface is polished and the exposed wires are plated with gold. Robert Kuo’s earliest exposure to traditional craft techniques was through his apprenticeship in his father’s cloisonné atelier. Kuo’s innovative cloisonné work is represented in this collection, exemplified by flowing organic patterns and the use of unique colorations that are technically challenging to achieve.

Owing to the exacting craftsmanship and time-consuming methods used to create each piece in the collection, production is, by its very nature, limited. As a testament to the artistic methods involved in the production of the collection, each piece is numbered, dated, and signed by the artist as it is completed.

No. **RK-771**

SMALL CABINET

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

32 x 22 x 27 inches OH

81 x 56 x 69 cm OH



No. RK-751

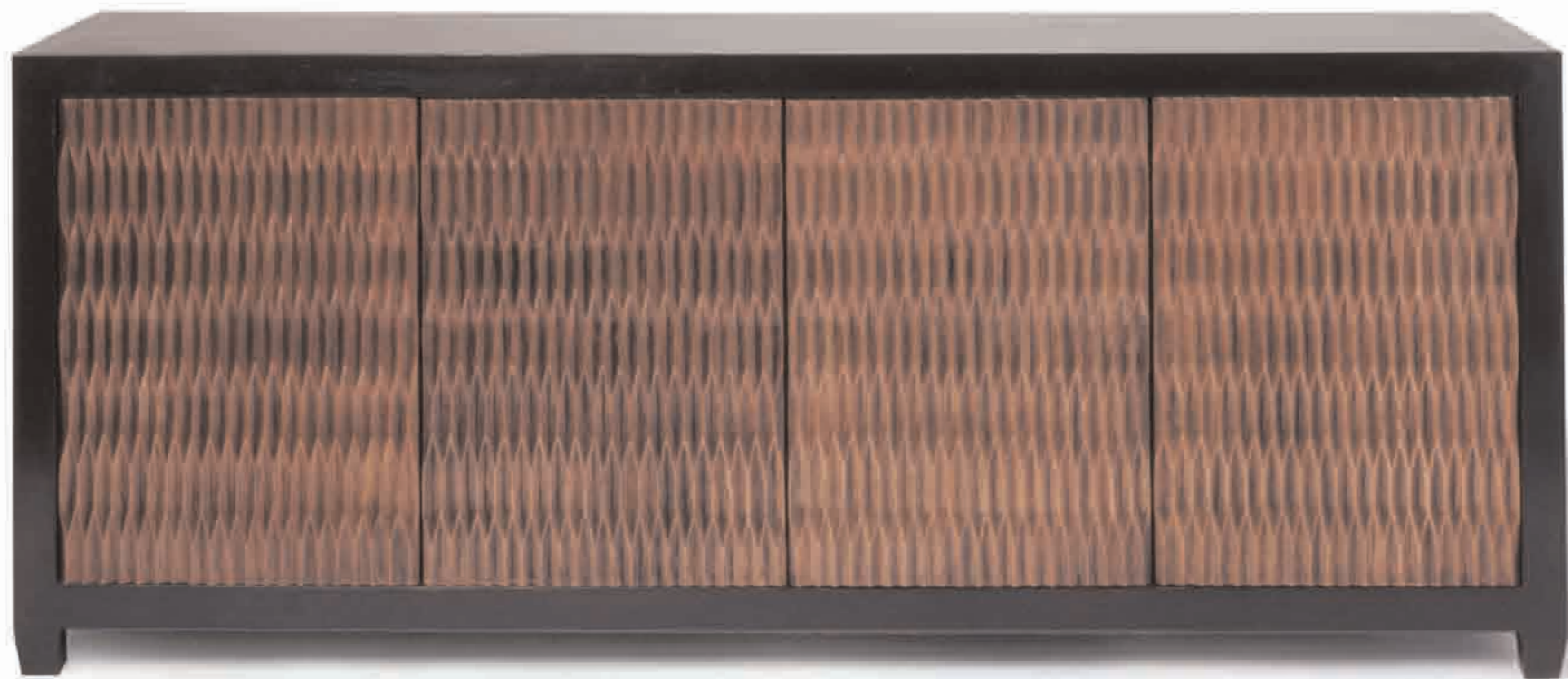
ARMOIRE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

42 x 22 x 50 inches OH

122 x 56 x 127 cm OH





No. **RK-761**

BUFFET

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

84 x 22 x 34 inches OH

213 x 56 x 86 cm OH



No. RK-702

BENCH

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

54 x 18 x 20 inches OH

137 x 46 x 51 cm OH





No. RK-781

LOW TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

58 x 38 x 19.5 inches OH

147 x 97 x 50 cm OH



No. RK-791

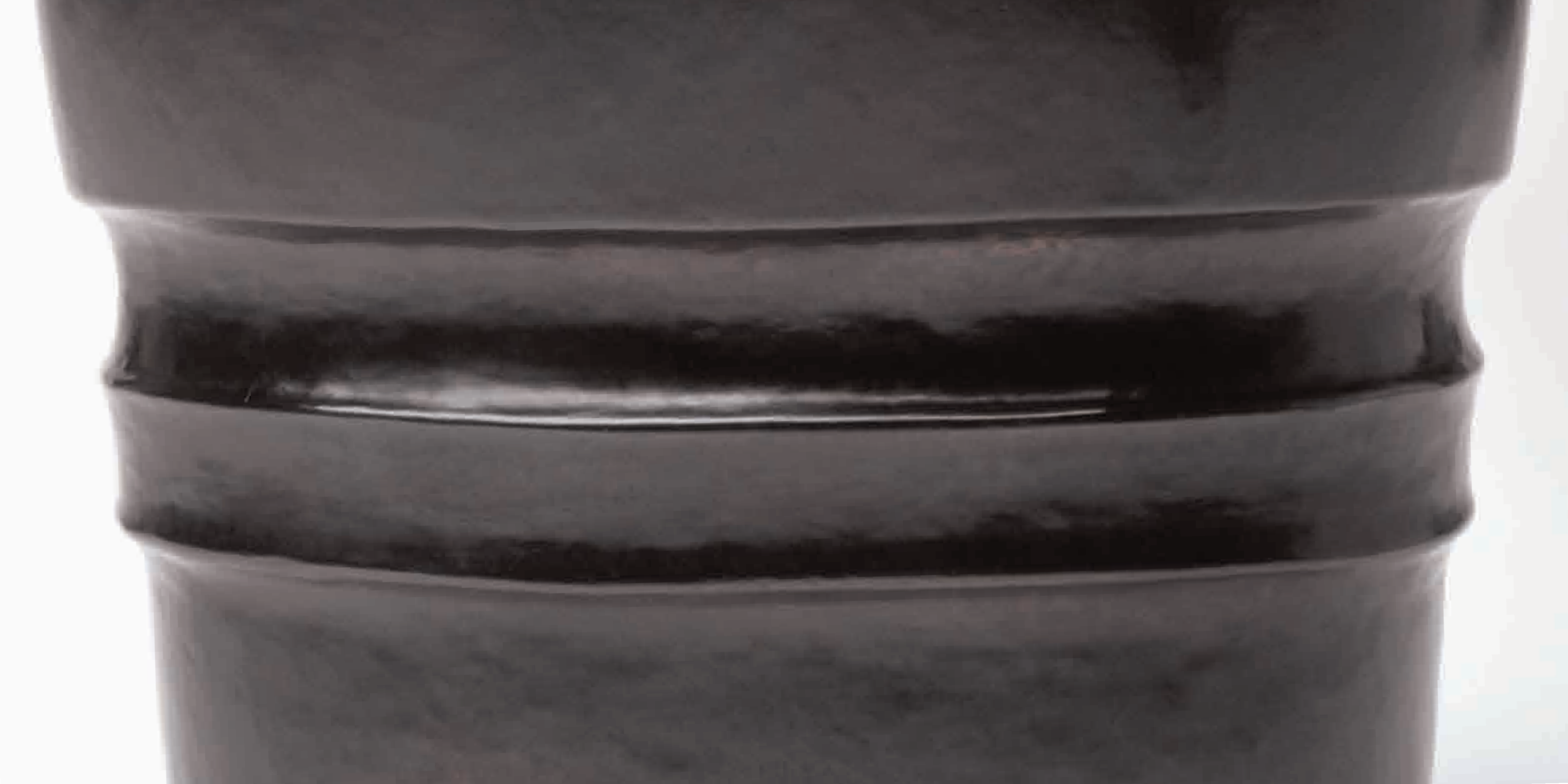
CONSOLE TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

54 x 18 x 33 inches OH

137 x 46 x 84 cm OH





No. RK-623

OVAL DRUM STOOL

Copper Repoussé. Signed and dated.

20 x 15 x 17.5 inches OH

51 x 38 x 44 cm OH



No. RK-621

PILLOW DRUM STOOL

Copper Repoussé. Signed and dated.

13 x 11 x 19.5 inches OH

33 x 28 x 50 cm OH

No. RK-622

MALLET DRUM STOOL

Copper Repoussé. Signed and dated.

14.5 diameter x 18 inches OH

37 diameter x 46 cm OH





No. RK-523

ALTAR TABLE

Rosewood (hualimu) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

72 x 18 x 35 inches OH

183 x 46 x 89 cm OH



No. RK-533

SIDE TABLE WITH DRAWERS

Northern Elm (yumu) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

26 x 20 x 28.5 inches OH

66 x 51 x 72 cm OH



No. RK-553

CUBE TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

18 x 18 x 18 inches OH

46 x 46 x 46 cm OH

No. RK-513

SPOT TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

14 x 14 x 24 inches OH

36 x 36 x 61 cm OH



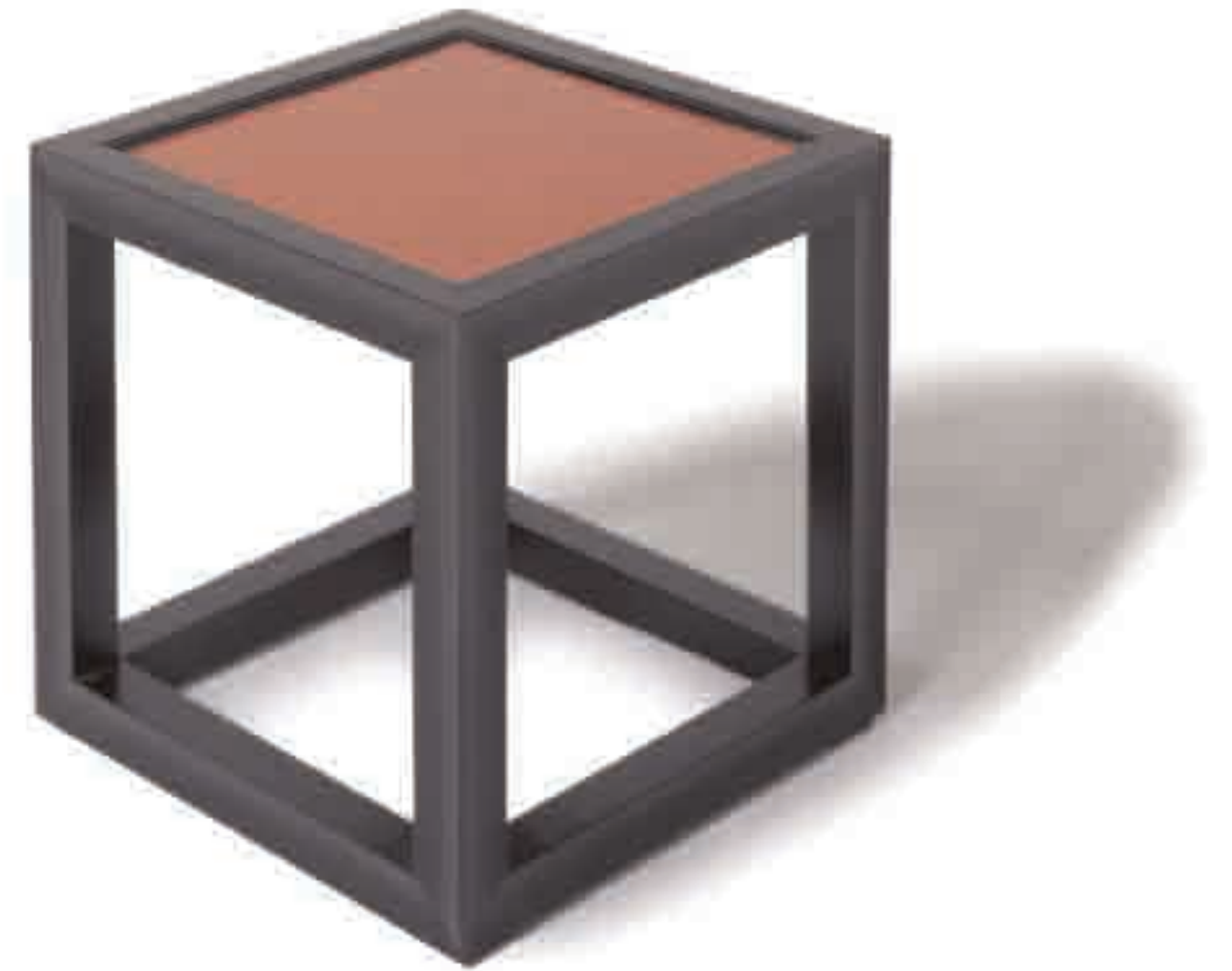
No. RK-552

CUBE TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Red Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

18 x 18 x 18 inches OH

46 x 46 x 46 cm OH

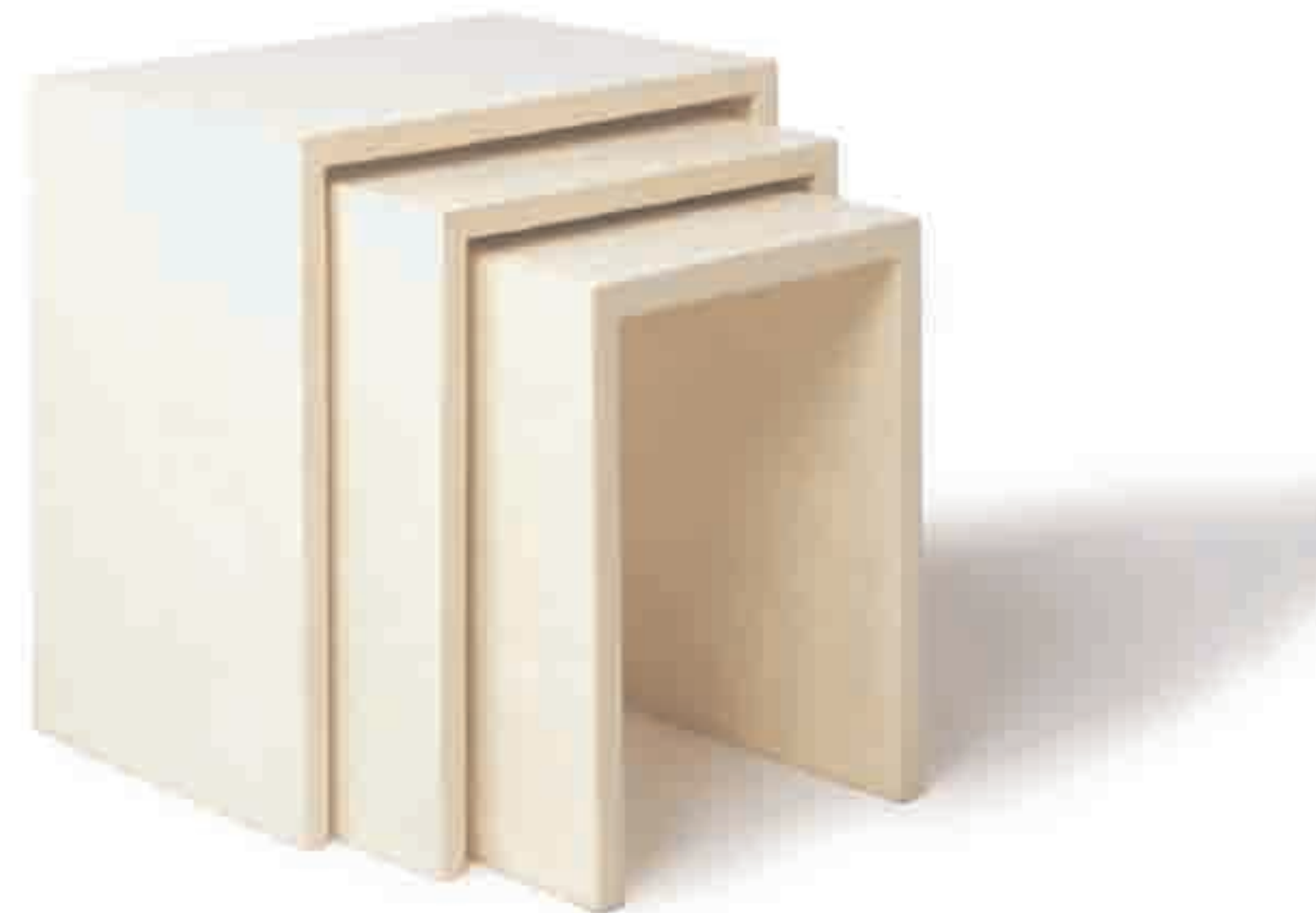


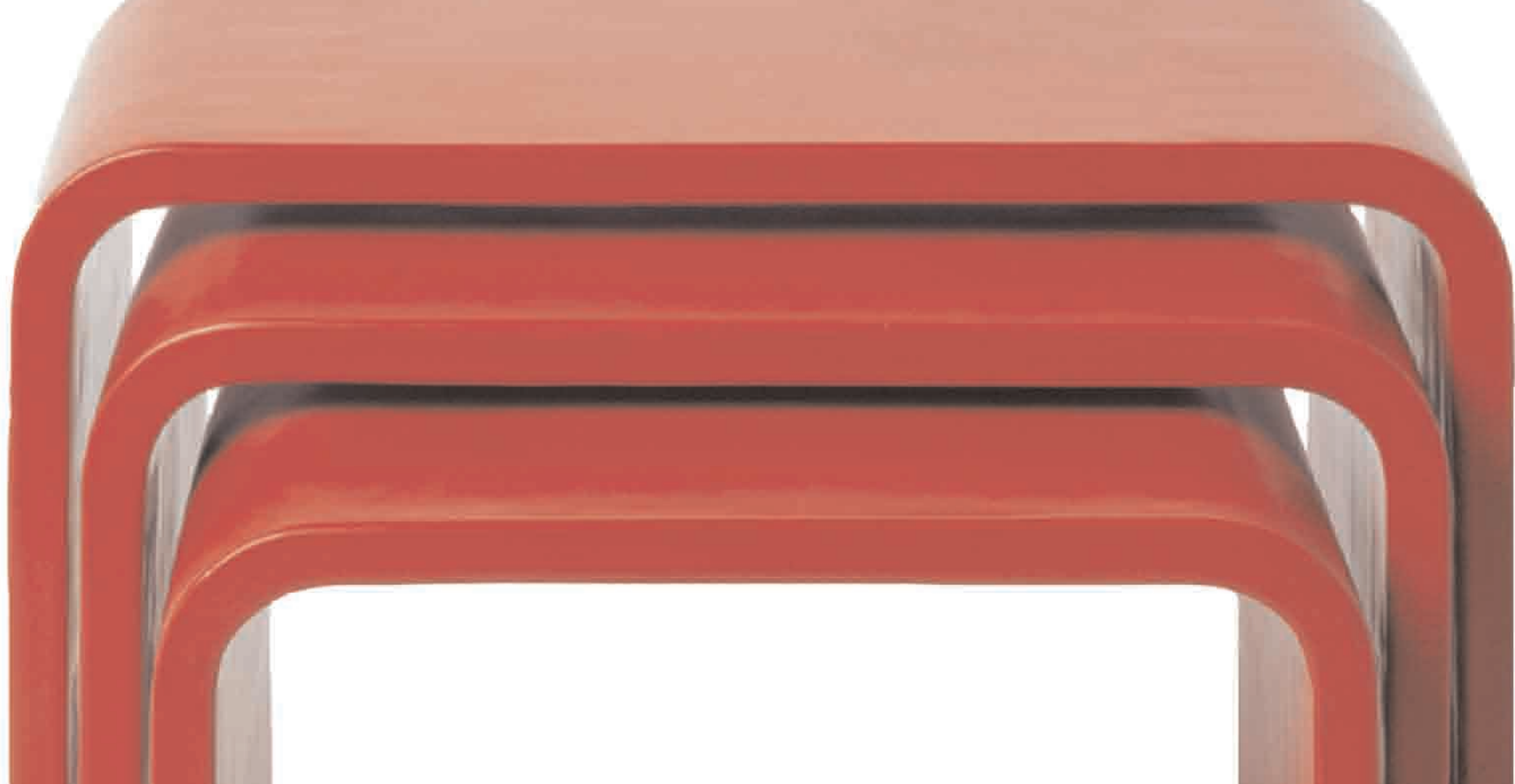
No. RK-333

SQUARE CORNER NESTING TABLES

Cream Lacquer on Wood. Signed, numbered, and dated.

25 x 16 x 25 inches OH	64 x 41 x 64 cm OH
21 x 16 x 23 inches OH	53 x 41 x 58 cm OH
17 x 16 x 21 inches OH	43 x 41 x 52 cm OH





No. RK-332

WATERFALL NESTING TABLES

Red Lacquer on Wood. Signed, numbered, and dated.

30.5 x 16 x 24 inches OH	77 x 41 x 61 cm OH
26.5 x 16 x 22 inches OH	67 x 41 x 56 cm OH
22.5 x 16 x 20 inches OH	57 x 41 x 51 cm OH





No. RK-364

THREE-PANEL SCREEN

Black Lacquer on Wood with White Bronze. Signed, numbered, and dated.

54 x 1.5 x 72 inches OH

137 x 4 x 183 cm OH



No. **RK-363**

THREE-PANEL SCREEN

Cream Lacquer on Wood with White Bronze. Signed, numbered, and dated.

54 x 1.5 x 72 inches OH

137 x 4 x 183 cm OH





No. RK-592

ROUND TRAY TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Red Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

28 diameter x 28 inches OH

71 diameter x 71 cm OH

No. RK-593

ROUND TRAY TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

28 diameter x 28 inches OH

71 diameter x 71 cm OH



No. RK-583

TRAY TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Cream Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

22.5 x 19.5 x 23 inches OH

57 x 50 x 58 cm OH

No. RK-582

TRAY TABLE

Northern Elm (yumu) and Red Lacquer. Signed, numbered, and dated.

22.5 x 19.5 x 23 inches OH

57 x 50 x 58 cm OH





No. RK-239

SPOT TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cloisonné ("Tawny Shagreen" Design). Signed, numbered, and dated.

14 x 14 x 24 inches OH

36 x 36 x 61 cm OH

No. RK-238

CUBE TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cloisonné ("Tawny Shagreen" Design). Signed, numbered, and dated.

18 x 18 x 18 inches OH

46 x 46 x 46 cm OH





No. RK-236

DRINK TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cloisonné ("Moss Web" Design). Signed, numbered, and dated.

12.5 diameter x 24 inches OH

32 diameter x 61 cm OH

No. RK-237

DRINK TABLE

Ebony (zitan) and Cloisonné ("Red Circles" Design). Signed, numbered, and dated.

12.5 diameter x 24 inches OH

32 diameter x 61 cm OH





No. RK-427

PEBBLE BENCH TABLE

Black Lacquer and Copper Repoussé. Signed, numbered, and dated.

50 x 18 x 16 inches OH

127 x 46 x 41 cm OH





No. RKL-30

CARVED ICE TABLE LAMP

Hand-Carved Rock Crystal on Copper Base. Pongee Silk Shade. Signed, numbered, and dated.

13.5 x 5.5 x 17.5 inches OH
shade: 16 x 9 inches

34 x 14 x 44 cm OH
shade: 41 x 23 cm



No. RKL-14

PEBBLE TABLE LAMP

Black Lacquer and Copper Repoussé. Pongee Silk Shade. Signed, numbered, and dated.

8.25 x 5 x 27.5 inches OH
shade: 16 x 12 inches

21 x 13 x 70 cm OH
shade: 41 x 30 cm



No. RKL-23

BEAD TABLE LAMP

Cream Lacquer on Copper. Cream Lacquer on Copper Shade. Signed, numbered, and dated.

7 diameter x 32 inches OH
shade: 15 inch diameter

18 diameter x 81 cm OH
shade: 38 cm diameter





ROBERT KUO

Robert Kuo was born in Beijing in 1946. He moved with his family to Taiwan in 1947 where he grew up in an artistic environment. His father, an art professor and Chinese watercolor painter, started a cloisonné atelier where Robert became an apprentice at age 15. Although he never engaged in formal art studies, he gained technical expertise and learned about decorative tradition from his father and from ‘hands on’ training. As he mastered each of the steps involved in cloisonné, from preparing copper bases to preparing enamels and firing the kilns, Kuo absorbed all the basics that were to serve him as he pursued his career as an artist.

A visit to the United States persuaded the young artist that the American environment would benefit him, both personally and professionally. In 1973, he immigrated to the United States and opened a studio for cloisonné in Beverly Hills. Kuo soon cultivated a sophisticated clientele that appreciated the way he ‘opened up’ Chinese decorative traditions. Utilizing the influences of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, Kuo introduced new shapes, finishes, and objects to cloisonné. It was during this time that the Smithsonian’s Sackler Gallery acquired his “Goldfish Bowl” for its permanent collection.

In 1985, Kuo shifted his focus from working in cloisonné to repoussé, the art of hammering decorative relief into metal. The artist began to experiment with shaping the copper itself to create new forms. He also developed different finishes to apply to the hammered metal. Kuo looked to China for artisans experienced in ancient repoussé techniques. He trained these craftsmen to adapt their skills to create new repoussé forms and objects. In 1997, Robert Kuo designed an innovative repoussé lighting collection for McGuire, and in 2000, he created a striking copper repoussé bathtub and lavatories for Ann Sacks Tile and Stone. Today he spends 4 to 6 months a year in China, working along side artisans to create new pieces which are appreciated and collected by an international clientele.

While most of Robert Kuo’s work over the past 15 years has been in repoussé, the artist has recently returned to cloisonné and has brought new levels of artistic and technical innovation to this ancient art form. In 2000, he designed and created a new collection of cloisonné lighting for McGuire, and today he continues to push the limits of traditional cloisonné techniques.

In 1999, he began to work in lacquer. As with repoussé and cloisonné, Kuo has taken this medium beyond the traditional colors and designs, and has combined it with repoussé to create stunning objects, some of which take up to one year to produce.

In 2001, McGuire Furniture Company commissioned Kuo to create an edition of furniture and lighting. This collection brings together the various mediums and decorative traditions that have inspired him throughout his career, and draws upon his knowledge as an experienced collector of Chinese antiques.

Robert Kuo lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Alice.



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