

# FORM



**CULTURAL CAPITAL CRISIS**  
PLANNING SHOWDOWN IN UMEÅ

**MICRO WAVE**  
IS LILLIPUTIAN HOUSING THE FUTURE?

**DEBLIGHTING DETROIT**  
CHRIS REED ON HOW TO SAVE A CITY

**SOLERIAN RHAPSODY**  
VISITING THE DREAM TOWN ARCOSANTI

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## SWEDISH SUMMIT

SHOOTING STARS AT THE  
DESIGN WEEK IN STOCKHOLM



# THE SPIN DOCTOR'S STUDIO

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Practice makes perfect, according to Chilean-Swedish designer Anton Alvarez, who makes at least one object daily in his quest to master an unusual joining technique he developed himself.





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o become a master of a craft takes 10,000 hours, the “magic number of greatness” popularised by Malcolm Gladwell in his 2008 book *Outliers*. That’s roughly 10 years, if you consistently devote at least half of your 40 hour work week to one task. For the perfectionists among us, 10,000 hours might better be called “the magic number of neurosis”, ensuring that mastery remains ever unattainable and alluring, and keeps us clocking those hours.

“I have three years left before I’m a ‘master’ at tying things together,” says Chilean-Swedish designer Anton Alvarez as I poke around his studio in Stockholm. “Or five, depending on how you count. Or seven?” Alvarez has been developing his thread-wrapping technique for three years since graduating from the Royal College of Art in London. Longer if you count his output before and after *Konstfack* and cabinetry school at *Stenebyskolan* in western Sweden.

He’s spent those years developing a machine that spins thousands of metres of brightly coloured thread around pieces of wood and metal to join them, producing solid benches, stools and lamps without traditional joints of any kind. His work has already been exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum and is represented by Libby Sellers Gallery in London. In May, Gustavsbergs Konsthall will launch a four-month solo exhibition wherein the designer will wrap thread in situ, and visitors can watch as he passes pieces of felt-covered wood and metal through the machine to fill the building with a giant thread-wrapped structure.

The thread acts as an elaborate joining element, allowing the raw material being wrapped to be extremely elaborate without appearing so. “I am a cabinetmaker by trade and a trained woodworker,” Alvarez says. “Woodworkers tend to celebrate joints, to care about how elements come together. It came naturally to me to create a process wherein the joint was the focal point of the final object.”

Alvarez’s practice of wrapping furniture has developed into a nearly ritualistic daily exercise. Each day, he creates one object,

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which he labels with the date and either catalogues carefully (in the case of his larger pieces, like stools and lamps), or tosses on a pile and forgets (failed pieces, small "test" objects, etc).

**You produce one object every day and mark it with a tiny date stamp. To what purpose?**

– To create a daily routine of working. Even if I'm going through a period where most of my work is administrative, or a slump where I'm not sure which direction to take and am feeling stressed, I feel it's important to keep my brain trained on working and making. Even if I just put something together without thinking too much, and put a date on it and throw it on the shelf.

**In other words, the process itself is just as important as the end product.**

– Sometimes more so. I don't set out knowing what I'm going to make. I'm often seduced by the act of making, and get carried away by it. It's as though I don't really see myself as the maker of the object, rather that the object reveals itself to me through the process of making.

**The way you describe it makes you sound like a vessel through which furniture just manifests itself – like some kind of design medium.**

– Not at all. It just feels natural for me to build, and to let my previous experience with woodworking and painting converge in the process.

**But there is definitely a relinquishing of control. You apply a set of rules – a "system" of cut pieces that can fit together in a multitude of variations – and let the act of feeding these pieces through the machine dictate the final shape of the object.**

– Control is not an important part of the design process. The machine itself is very designed; I spent a lot of time considering the distance between screws and making sure it looked and acted exactly how I wanted. But the process itself is quite different. The objects are allowed to grow and change in the process of making them. If I add a piece, I cannot take it away. I can never make the same object twice, and I don't want to either.

**I was planning to ask you about your design influences, but I suppose that would be missing the point.**

– No, there's no way of answering that question. Because what I'm doing is something that I invented, or you could say, that came to me. Which is nice, in some ways, because no one can tell me what I'm doing is right or wrong. That's a form of independence. ☺