

It's a Wrap

Anton Alvarez's cocooning tendencies

Anton Alvarez has endless energy for the new craft he has invented. Building his own special machine for what he calls *thread wrapping*, has enabled him to form objects and construct spaces by binding materials in the way he sees fit. Such things as wood, steel, and plastic can be readily assembled using this technique: at once replacing the standard, time-consuming methods of joining components together *and* creating especially decorative, multi-coloured patterns. With each project comes more experimentation and development, further enhancing the capacities of this impressive apparatus and the resulting production. Rumpelstiltskin should have been so lucky...

ANNA SANSOM
PHOTOS: MÁRTA THISNER (except where mentioned otherwise)



Anton Alvarez invented The Thread-Wrapping Machine as a sophisticated spinning wheel that could be used to cocoon pieces of furniture in glue-coated threads. Upping the ante, he has since been showing an enlarged version of it in an exhibition that he describes as "a crossover between art and architecture". Invited for a solo show at the Gustavsbergs Konsthall in Stockholm, Alvarez decided against presenting his pre-existing benches, chairs, lamps, and stools. Instead, he approached this four-month-long exhibition as a kind of artist-in-residence opportunity, to make a work-in-progress. Alvarez reconfigured his machine, designing and manufacturing a 'long arm' so that it could move along the arches, pillars, and tent-like objects that he is creating on site.

"This project is an improvised situation", says Alvarez, who is based in Stockholm. "I'm trying to explore the architectural context and enlarge the scale of what I'm making. There's this transitional point for me, where you're no longer looking down at a piece but it's looking down at you. During the summer, the installation has started to take shape and is now inhabiting the whole space and slowly growing." It has been an organic progression. "The technique is quite simple – I'm joining small sticks together with clips and glue, and wrapping them with threads", Alvarez explains. "The arch took one day to do, and we used ten-thousand-metres of thread."

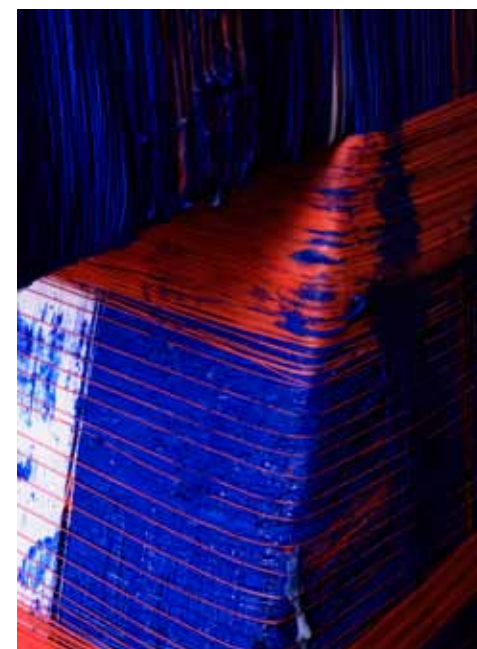


RIGHT OR WRONG

Making the machine bigger has been "a bit scary", admits Alvarez. "When one of the weights was not secured properly, the counter-weight fell-off and the other point rose-up and made a hole in the ceiling", he recounts. "The counter-weights on the backside weigh 500 kilos, so we have to be careful that nobody gets hurt."

The son of a Swedish mother and a Chilean father, Alvarez, 33, grew up in Sweden where he apprenticed with a cabinet-maker for two years, learning traditional joinery techniques. Then, after studying Interior Architecture and Furniture Design at Konstfack, the University College of Arts, Craft and Design in Stockholm, he did an MA in Design Products at the Royal College of Art in London. It was as part of his graduation project that he presented The Thread-Wrapping Machine, inventing his own tooling to make his objects. The machine operates by binding lengths of variously coloured thread and coating them in glue as they pass through the machine while it spins around, creating energetic, zigzag patterns.

"The machine was much stronger than I had imagined, and that opened-up the possibility of taking it further and trying to make more complex shapes", he says. "What I really enjoyed was that this was something new. In cabinet making, there are traditions to lean-on and people question what you're making. With this, I have the freedom of possessing my own craft and there's no-one who can tell me what's right or wrong."





FOREVER SPINNING

The range of colours that Alvarez uses is carnivalesque, something that he attributes to the experience of living in Chile for two years during his childhood. "It's something that I can't put my finger on," he says, "but it's [informed by] the colours that are around you in everyday life there, like the advertising banners on the streets, and [by] having some sort of relationship with the country."

Design professionals are paying keen attention. In an article in *The Spectator*, British retailer/designer Terence Conran praised Alvarez's "inquisitive, playful mind and strong personality". Elsewhere, *The Thread-Wrapping Machine* and the pieces it spun using Swarovski yarn embedded with crystals, were included in the *Digital Crystal* exhibition at the Design Museum in London in 2012, alongside works by Ron Arad, Random International, and Paul



Cocksedge. And in the same year, England's Outset Contemporary Art Fund commissioned him to make the seating for a 180-person dinner.

But it's not just recognition from the design world that motivates Alvarez. At the Gustavsbergs Konsthall, it was the encounter with an ordinary visitor that made him smile. As he tells us, "One man who was walking around for some time came up to me and said: You artists are so free to do what you want. I really don't understand what this exhibition is about but it really makes me happy." Alvarez's next adventure this autumn will involve making another room-size installation at Steneby Konsthall, a Swedish design and craft centre. The space will be square rather than rectangular, so he'll be testing-out ideas on how to spin the machine in new ways to create new shapes, further evolving and experimenting. <

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Anton Alvarez: *Thread Wrapping Architecture* is at Gustavsberg Konsthall, Stockholm, until 13 September 2014, and at Steneby Konsthall, Dals Långed (Sweden) from 4 September to 19 October 2014. gustavsbergskonsthall.se / steneby.se

THE THREAD-WRAPPING MACHINE
Photo: James Champion