

# Baker Street Boys, Stars of CBS Show Europe ByDesign, on Using Rust to Reimagine Objects

The London studio believes rust is the new gold—and its products are living proof

By **Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar**

As a child, Tomasz Danielec was always surrounded by beautiful architecture. Born in the Polish village of Twardawa, he grew up in unusual homes: among them an apartment in Twardawa Castle, and later, a modernist dwelling of his parents' own design. The construction of the latter was an experience the architect now recognises as an epochal watershed. "I loved coming to the construction site. I'd play with bricks or watch concrete being mixed. It was fascinating, and in that way, architecture followed me from my early years," says the co-founder of London-based design studio Baker Street Boys.

His interest wasn't limited to architecture alone. As a child, he often played fashion designer, organising impromptu runways, conjuring tablecloth catwalks and dressing his cousins in their weekend finest. Those experiences followed him too, kindling in him an equal love for design, specifically modernist design. So much so that when it came time to select a university for his master's degree, he had his sights set on the Silesian University of Technology, a school noted for its modernist bent. He got in, graduated, and shortly afterwards clinched a job with Polish fashion designer Tomasz Ossoliński as a scenography and lighting specialist for a fashion show commemorating an anniversary of the historic Polish brand Bytom. Then came 2005, the year he decided to flex his architectural muscle. He moved to London, where, in due course, he got the opportunity to collaborate with such industry doyens as Robin Partington and Rafael Viñoly, across projects including an award-winning middle school redesign in Białołęka, Warsaw; the masterplan for the University of Oxford; and a specially commissioned mixed-use development on Oxford Street for the royal family of Qatar. Plaudits poured in—chief amongst them a national accolade in 2005 from the prime minister of Poland, and a Leonardo award for best public building in 2007 by the International Union of Architects.

With glory came gumption. And in 2015, after a long and successful career as an architect, Danielec decided to take a step back. "I reached a point where doing big projects didn't satisfy me anymore. I then started product design and fell in love with objects I could touch and move, contrary to the huge-scale architectural projects I had been doing for years," avers Danielec. It was a sentiment he shared, albeit in a different context and capacity, to his partner in life and career, Arkadiusz Glanowski, a former hairstylist. Danielec's design knowledge and Glanowski's expertise in luxury environments meant that they had just the blend of skills they

needed to segue into product design. And so they did, taking a leap of faith at their favourite coffee shop on London's Baker Street, and aptly christening themselves the Baker Street Boys. The experience was special all on its own, but what made it even sweeter was the location they chose for their atelier: Twardawa Castle, Danielec's childhood home, which the couple purchased in a bid to restore it to its former glory.

In time, Danielec's modernist sensibilities found new expression, demonstrating a clarity of form none more evident than in the studio's maiden collection, THE LINE. Launched during the Clerkenwell Design Week 2016, it saw two seemingly antithetical materials—raw steel and 400-year-old reclaimed oak—coalesce in a collection of bar tables, coffee tables, bar stools and footstools. The collection was minimal, functional, and above all, successful, eliciting a bevy of orders including one from the royal family of Dubai. The studio's second collection, THE CONNECT was directed at a different need. "It was born out of my love for baguettes, which I just couldn't fit onto any of my existing serving boards," Danielec admits with a smile. And so, he set out to make his own, for himself and others like himself, in the way of long interlocking serving boards operable independently or together. The 5-piece collection is available in combinations of Nero Marquina, Bianco Carrara marble, oak, walnut, and Rosa Beta granite. "The functional benefit is obvious. What's not is that the indent of the handle mirrors the cut line used in architectural blueprints," says Danielec of the hat-tip to his past.

Yet the designer's most prolific collection is also his most unlikely one. "The idea came to me while drinking coffee at a Starbucks in Warsaw. I used a napkin to draw out the first sketch," Danielec recalls of the series, titled THE BOX, which he co-created with his younger sister, chemical engineer Agnieszka Bar. As he explains, the collection, which took over two years to conceptualise, is noteworthy not because it is perfect, but because it is not. Informed by the imperfections of rust, THE BOX reimagines iron oxide in wondrous forms. "My dream for this collection was to take something popularly defined as ugly or damaging and turn it into something beautiful," Danielec notes. "I love saying rust is the new gold, because it perfectly embodies my philosophy of finding beauty in unloved materials."

It wasn't just Danielec and Glanowski who recognised its beauty. Producers from American media company ByDesign TV soon approached the pair to cover the collection in Europe ByDesign, a new documentary series featuring path-breaking European design innovators. "I was happy that we could show the audience what the process really looks like because no photos can perfectly capture its uniqueness like a live camera can," avers the designer, who admits to being a tad emotional on seeing a professional camera crew in his childhood home. In terms of casting, Danielec knew he was in good company, but he didn't quite know how good. "Just before we started the series, I was shown examples of other episodes they had recorded. Amongst the great figures they had featured was Rafael Viñoly, with whom I had worked early on in my career and who had passed away just a few months prior. It made me even more proud and sentimental," he remembers.

Danielec cites Tadao Ando amongst his greatest inspirations, believing he is one of the few in

the world with the ability to create maximum emotion with minimum form.” Le Corbusier, he reveals, is another role model. “Both architects had a similar eye for spotting beauty in unappreciated materials. I see myself now following in their footsteps when redefining rust from damage to art,” he reflects. It’s an analogy that probably isn’t entirely accurate, for Danielec, evidently, has blazed a trail all of his own; one that seems to have no end in sight.