



1. T.H. ROBSJOHN-GIBBINGS'S MESA TABLE IN A HAWAIIAN RETREAT DESIGNED BY JON DE LA CRUZ. 2. AD100 TALENT PIERRE YOVANOVITCH'S 17TH-CENTURY FRENCH CHÂTEAU. 3. ROBSJOHN-GIBBINGS. 4. THE MESA TABLE. 5. A CÔTE D'AZUR HOME BY JEAN-CHARLES TOMAS.

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How a 1950s antidote to antiques fatigue became a design trophy du jour

American houses have become the rubbish dumps of Europe," wrote the London-born designer T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings in *Good-bye, Mr. Chippendale*, his comical 1944 rant about the unabating Stateside obsession with antiques. He urged the nearly postwar public toward something fresh—not the cold modernism sweeping Europe but a contemporary kind of Americana with roots in pre-Columbian and early Colonial styles.

When the Widdicomb Furniture Company, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, asked him to design a collection in the 1940s, he had a chance to bring his ideas into physical reality. Inspired by the Southwest, his sinuous forms, nearly all realized in walnut, captured a laid-back quality he had described in *The New York Times*: "The essential luxury of life in America is informality."

One piece from that collection, which debuted in the 1950s, has taken a star turn in recent years: the biomorphic Mesa cocktail table, inspired by the free-flowing forms of Arizona terrain. Its terraced silhouette could, as Helen Little put it in a 1952 issue of *House Beautiful*, "hold everything from the morning papers to a cherished bit of Tarascan pottery." Available in two sizes and a range of finishes, the table steadily sold for under \$100,000 until 2020, when it began earning two and three times that. Last October one went for \$362,500 at LA Modern Auctions.

"It's become one of those It pieces. Like a Royère Polar Bear sofa," says Richard Wright, CEO of Rago Wright, who estimates he's sold around 10 in his 22-year tenure. Right now, it's a top request from clients. "The demand is being driven by a wealthy art market and its interior designers."

One of those is AD100 talent Pierre Yovanovitch, who lives with a Mesa table in his 17th-century home, the Château de Fabrègues, and used another in a residential project in New York City. Says Yovanovitch, "The table embodies Robsjohn-Gibbings's ability to create some of the most important, classically informed, yet gracious and livable modern furnishings of the era." —HANNAH MARTIN

