

# IN CONVERSATION WITH MARTHA STURDY

Most Islanders know of the Vancouverite artist, Martha Sturdy and her 30+ years of artistic endeavours. They know of her over scaled artwork and sculptures that are both bold yet minimalist, and her furniture and lighting designs that have taken not only locals, but the world by storm. She has donated large-scale works to public causes such as the Vancouver General Hospital and the Pemberton Sculpture project. Martha's designs are currently distributed by the highly regarded Baker furniture throughout the United States, on showrooms that concurrently house design sensations such as Barbara Barry and Andre Arbus. She's grown to be an international success, but her designs are still created in her Vancouver gallery/studio.

Martha works primarily with two types of materials (both independently and combinations thereof), resin and metal. Both mediums are prized for their unique characteristics and limitless design possibilities. Her inspiration and materials come from around the globe from her travels within North America, Europe, Asia and North Africa. But her design career begun on a much smaller scale; after completing her schooling at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Martha began designing jewellery. She was an instant hit with the public and fashion magazines alike, and began selling out of high-end department stores in New York.

Fast forward to the late 1980s when Martha created her first collection of resin tabletop and home accessories, it was this launch that led to connections within industry giants, global clientele, and top designers – she participated in trade shows in Paris, New York and London. A new venture was born and Martha undertook larger projects: furniture pieces, which eventually led to her developing her earlier interest in sculpture in 2000.

In recent years, Martha Sturdy has received several honours: an Honorary Doctorate from Emily Carr University of Art + Design, an induction into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA), and a Golden Jubilee Medal from the Governor General of Canada. She has also graced the pages in many top magazines including NUVO, BCHome, a recent home feature in Architectural Digest, and being named 'one of the top 20 designers/artists to watch for in the next decade' by Metropolitan Home magazine.

As my readers know, I love promoting local talent and I couldn't be happier to have this interview with our local art world celebrity, Martha Sturdy. Please read on to get in on the conversation...

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Iván Meade – What was your first experience with design?

Martha Sturdy – As a very young child, around the age of five or six, I loved to spend hours outside creating elaborate structures in the dirt. I would design houses and cityscapes, and sculpt them out of whatever modest materials my yard had to offer.

Iván Meade – How would you describe your style?

Martha Sturdy – Clean, minimal and earthy. The latter is imperative; I believe modern design can be very unapproachable without an element of earthiness.

Iván Meade – I believe you have 2 signature materials, one being that wonderful resin that has your trademark name all over it and the other metal – I can already see the metal being a crucial part of your everyday life as a sculptor, but what is the story behind the resin? What is the story behind that “aha” moment that has given you so much presence around the world?

Martha Sturdy – In my second year of sculpture studies at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, I took an invaluable class which covered metals, castings, wood and plastics. During the six weeks of plastic studies, we worked with Plexiglas, acetate and resin. That was the extent of my formal training with the material, but I spent the next three decades perfecting my craft.

Iván Meade – I also believe that the fusion of these materials is really inspirational and showcases your work as art work, but also allows you to create everyday pieces with a sculptural quality. How was this transition for you? How were you able to create this full circle between being an artist, a jeweller, a product designer and finally becoming a sculptor once again?

Martha Sturdy – I have always had a penchant for the big and bold whether I was creating a bangle, a chair, a sculpture or an entire landscape, but as my career has naturally evolved I have been fortunate that my success has allowed me to return to my roots.

As I mentioned I studied sculpture in university, but as most young artists know, making a decent living as a contemporary sculptor can prove to be extremely difficult. Jewellery was a marketable transition that allowed me to work with the fundamentals of my education on a much smaller and affordable scale. In the early 90s, I began to experiment with larger designs which included home accessories, furniture and more recently art for art's sake.

Iván Meade – What are you excited about right now in the world of design?

Martha Sturdy – Technology, and how it facilitates communication between the international design communities, is very exciting. Social media is becoming an important tool for artists and designers, and the opportunities for collaboration and promotion have never been more accessible. I have yet to commit to all of these new

medias, but interviews like this and my upcoming guest blogs on Baker Furniture's "The Language of Style" are amazing new ways for me to connect.

Iván Meade – If you could pick one word to describe your work, what would it be?

Martha Sturdy – Strong.

Iván Meade – You have accomplished something very unique when one sees a piece of yours, it doesn't matter if it is a furniture piece, a bowl, or an over scaled sculpture, they all evoke emotion. All these pieces have been created by you. How do you achieve this emotional resonance with your pieces?

Martha Sturdy – Thank you, Ivan! That's very kind of you to say. Throughout my career, I have had an incessant desire and ability to stay true to myself. My process is visceral and my statements are both personal and honest. I suppose it's that unwavering authenticity that evokes emotion.

Iván Meade -Your sculptures are teeming with lavish and inviting textures. Why is texture such an integral component of your work?

Martha Sturdy – My designs are minimal so texture is imperative! Texture relaxes my aesthetic and adds an earthy, soft and even sexy complexity.

Iván Meade – Do you think becoming a successful designer has hurt your credibility as an artist? As we all know, the art community doesn't like commercialism or success via sales.

Martha Sturdy – It's very possible. Society tends to pigeon hole. I consider myself a renaissance woman with a broad skill set, and I refuse to be limited to the constraints of one medium. I strive to be creative in all aspects of my life – not just art and design, but my garden, cooking, wardrobe and of course, my environment.

Iván Meade – What do you do to keep inviting the inspiration to come – Do you have other passions that recharge your creative juices?

Marta Sturdy – I try to divide my time equally between the city and the country. To be honest, it's the latter – the other half of my life – that keeps me truly inspired. I have no desire to be exclusive to art. Nature, animals, travel and family are endless sources of inspiration.

Iván Meade – What is your next design venture?

Martha Sturdy – I'm not quite ready to say.

Iván Meade – Lastly, You have already gone through many transformations with your work and found great success, what would you like your legacy to be?

Martha Sturdy – Legacy is a difficult thing to predict... but I would love if my example influenced a woman to work hard at her passion and succeed. If I can do it, anyone can.

Martha Sturdy art and home products are locally available at:

Emporia on Government St and The Gallery at Matticks Farm, in Cordova Bay.

Ivan Meade is a local designer and principal of Meade Design Group, a multidisciplinary interior and graphic design studio in the heart of downtown Victoria –

[www.meadedesigngroup.com](http://www.meadedesigngroup.com)

<https://lifemstyle.com/2011/06/30/in-conversation-with-martha-sturdy/>