



FORCE OF NATURE

Martha Sturdy may have made her mark with her bold jewellery pieces and organic resin accessories. But Sturdy's true passions lie in the dramatic canvases she renders out of metal and the earthy inspiration she finds at her Pemberton Valley farm

TEXT **CAROL CRENNNA** PHOTOS **RAEFF MILES**



EARTHY PERSONA "I need to be hands-on," says Sturdy, whose signature pieces include resin furniture and large vases and vessels.

If you're not familiar with artist Martha Sturdy's past and passions, you would assume that she, like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, made a transition from fashion, a first love, to interiors, a secondary interest. You might also consider her latest work – wall sculptures combining steel "canvases" painted with bold, colourful resin – an artistic impulse that many creative people instigate in later stages of a career. Sturdy, however, was and still is an artist first, with a preference for large sculptural pieces, and her newest dream of crafting an equestrian sculpture park of sorts, will be a dramatic focal point on her sprawling Pemberton farm. ›



ART + INSPIRATION Sturdy (above) is mixing her artistry with her love of horses by building an equestrian sculpture park on her Pemberton farm. **EAST MEETS WEST** Sturdy's favourite candlesticks (purchased when travelling in Asia) sit atop one of her steel and resin tables (right). One of her brass and steel weaves bedecks the wall. "Broken," a new brass sculpture (below) recently exhibited in San Francisco, is displayed on one of Sturdy's brass bench tables.



Sturdy doesn't like to be bored. And there are not many facets of design she hasn't tried. Convention has never been part of the equation in her jewelry, accessories, furniture and artwork, but these creations are never flashy – always sensible – and therein lies the secret to her success. Her trademark jewelry is worn by the global elite.

Her home furnishings grace the mansions of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Lopez and have been personally showcased by Donna Karan in her London and New York boutiques. And her beloved sculptures are on exhibit internationally at B&B Italia in London and close to home at the Vancouver Art Gallery and Sturdy's own local gallery.

Sturdy's artistic endeavours have been chronicled in notable publications from *Architectural Digest* and *Metropolitan Home* to Italian, French and English *Vogue*, *Elle Decor* and *Harper's Bazaar*. She's also garnered awards such as the Governor General's Golden Jubilee Medal. Here, Sturdy describes her exquisitely designed life.

Why did you design jewelry? When I graduated from art school, since it's not easy to support three children with sculpture, I designed jewelry to make a living. The work continually evolved into more dynamic larger-scale pieces, and sculpture is once again my biggest passion, which I spend the most time on.

Do you use an artist's eye in everything you do? As a creative person, I'm a maker of things. It's who I am. From the furniture in my home to what I wear, to gardening and the food I eat, it's my whole life. I call myself an "earth person," which means I need to be physically involved and hands-on to be happy.

What's another passion of yours? Horses. I have a 250-acre farm in Pemberton where I have





FORM + FUNCTION Dishes and dipping containers (above and below) were designed by Sturdy exclusively for The Bay. **BIG GIVE** Sturdy donated this massive sculpture (right) to Vancouver General Hospital. It's rendered in the artist's favourite hue: Icelandic Poppy Red.



three horses – a bay, black thoroughbred, and a white Arabian – and I ride four days a week. I used to be a cowboy – in my 40s I took up riding cowboy-style – but four years ago I stopped and learned how to English-style ride, and love it. I built an indoor arena and I am now building a cross-country course for jumping that's about a mile long. It will be a massive outdoor sculpture using hundreds of tonnes of yellow cedar logs, currently dumped in a big messy pile in a muddy field.

warm to the touch, and the silhouettes conform to the shape of the body. I personally keep trying them out, sitting on them to make sure the form is right. For example, I've been making the classic Adirondack chair – traditionally made in wood – in resin, and it's very comfortable. Unlike other chairs, you can sit on the arms of mine comfortably . . . and they never wear out. I have never been middle-of-the-road, and there are a lot of designers who are – this has helped some of my designs sell better.

What are you inspired by? Outdoor environments, especially around my farm.

Do you have a favourite piece in your home? A Buddha's head in cast steel that I got in Asia many years ago, which sits in my living room.

What is your favourite colour? One that is use on my wall sculptures called Icelandic Poppy Red.

What type of furniture do you like? Chinese furniture. But anything I want I make myself, whether it's in steel, brass, resin, wood or leather. I figure out how to do it by testing it out in my

How do you make cold, hard steel and resin comfortable to sit on? The resin is



home first, even for designs that I later sell. I recently made resin floor and wall tiles, retiling my bathroom to find out how they would work. My outdoor furniture designs are in my backyard [so I can] see what happens to them after they have been exposed to the elements for a year.

and landscape designer Alan Fraser, and she created a glossy book as a gift for me titled *Martha's Garden*.

Do you like to cook? I do, and I rarely measure, creating my interpretation of a recipe. I never use the spices suggested because they're too boring. For a salad, recently, I used Belgian endive, toasted walnuts, Gorgonzola cheese, and I placed one plump fig on top of each plate. In my garden, figs are plentiful, so I poach and refrigerate them in large jars. I like interesting salads.

Where can we see your latest home furnishings?

Sturdy: I have a new line of home accessories at The Bay including vases and platters, inspired by the original Hudson's Bay blankets, in sand and black stripes. I'll be designing furniture for The Bay in fall 2010. It remains the same quality, style and taste as all of my pieces. When CEO Bonnie Brooks worked at Lane Crawford in Hong Kong, an amazing international designer store, she ignited it, completely re-branding everything from interior design to merchandise, and I feel that she is now at The Bay to put her stamp on it, and provide a distinct personality that is higher-end and fashion-forward. ■

You have a spectacular garden. I love gardening; Grace Gordon Collins photographed my extensive gardens at the farm, done by myself



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