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How To Spend It Design

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The Visionaries: Tom Dixon and the mass appeal of brass

New-season metallics are following the golden rule



"This piece is my ethos of expressive minimalism epitomised in one object," says British designer Tom Dixon. "It looks like a table, feels like a table – an archetype – but is made in an extraordinary and noble material." Dixon is talking about his Mass table, a solid slab of brass supported by two "V" legs. It's part of the new Mass collection – which also includes a set of brass shelves and a four-poster bed – launching this month. "I wanted to create something super-basic in terms of construction so that it's very reduced, minimal and logical," he explains of the table's design. "But simultaneously it's the opposite in aesthetics, in that it is extremely precious and desirable. When you view the collection as a whole it's like a seam of gold – as if you've walked into a vault."



Elan Atelier Khetan bench, from \$4,081



Tom Dixon Etch Web Light, £1,500



Tom Dixon Beat vessel, £770

Dixon has used brass to weld joints for years, as both method and decoration. Most recently it has featured in his pendant lights and table accessories, but the release of this solid-brass capsule collection signals the designer's intensified interest in the stuff. He's not alone. A roster of creatives are using it in new and experimental ways, marking the return of metallic finishes with a lustrous, golden sheen.

"There is a return to craftsmanship and more genuine materials," says Warsaw-based designer Jan Garncarek, who showed his brass Metropolis lamp

at this year's *Collectible* exhibition with New York-based Galerie Philia. Resembling a satellite, the lamp consists of a concave shield and a sphere that holds a lightbulb, so that the light bounces off the disk and into the surrounding space. It was the flexibility of brass that allowed Garncarek to create such a precise, geometric form.



Jan Garncarek Design Metropolis table lamp, €3,280



Martha Sturdy wall sculpture "Brass Weave 1910107, 2016, \$28,000

But it's also the metal's clarity of colour – and the promise that, with time, the patina will unexpectedly change the object – that draws many designers in. “Brass has a good balance with the other colours I see in the natural environment,” says Vancouver-based artist Martha Sturdy, who creates large-scale geometric wall-mounted brass sculptures by crushing, folding, cutting and layering the material. “Humidity, dust and even rain will bring out more brilliant blues and browns on the surface over time, but it stays protected by a natural resistance to rust.”



Tom Dixon Form teapot, £170

Christopher Noto, co-creative director at New York studio Elan Atelier, works with brass for a very different reason. “We like to think of our brass furniture as the jewellery in a room,” he says. For Noto and his design partner, Alison Legge, there's a sense that ancient materials such as brass and bronze (which they often

fuse together in their creations) appeal right now because they instil a feeling of reassuring longevity in contrast to more synthetic options. “You can see this in the brass-accented furniture and lighting from the '60s and '70s that has become fashionable again,” Noto concludes. “But more than that, it is a timeless, honest material. We are seeing the renaissance of quality and solidity, and materials that have some gravity to them.”



Elan Atelier Lucca stool, \$3,243