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how to spend it

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REVIVAL OF THE FITTEST



From top: Echlin bespoke oxidised-steel staircase, in a Chelsea private residence; similar projects, price on request. Studio La Fibule burnished bronze Tango side tables, from £425, from Urban Living Interiors. Mammalampa corroded steel and gold Queen pendant, from £1,274 each, from Within Four Walls

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several features made from oxidised steel (such as a staircase, pictured top; similar projects, price on request). “The metal finishes are achieved through chemical oxidation,” explains Echlin’s in-house metal expert and designer Richy Almond. “We submerge it in a series of acids before drying and sealing it with layers of traditional oil and wax. As opposed to natural rust, which can be many millimetres thick and destructive to the structural integrity, the induced version is only a few microns thick – and smooth and incredibly tactile.”

The main problem with rust, whether natural or induced, is that it’s not stable. Steel and iron will continue to oxidise, even if kept inside and covered with a protective barrier. Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari, a London-based interior designer who commissioned a rust-topped dining table (£11,500) for her own home from Archer & Smith, sees this as both the material’s charm and its biggest drawback. “The unexpected is rust’s core value,” she says, “but it scares people. They worry about not knowing how it will age.”

Some in the design world are getting round this by faking it. Laura Hammett, an interior design and

architecture studio specialising in unconventional finishes, uses a natty, hand-applied bronze powder that gives a rust effect so as not to leave colour outcomes to chance (such as kitchen units in a London mews house, pictured overleaf; similar projects, from £60,000). And London’s interior design studio/furniture showroom Urban Living Interiors offers Studio La Fibule’s multihued Tango side tables (from £425, pictured above right) in burnished bronze that have been treated to look like rust. “Warm metals are an established trend,” says company creative director Mark Riese, “and we are now seeing more rust effects coming onto the market as the neo-industrial look extends beyond London’s East End warehouse conversions, and puts another nail in the coffin of chrome.”

Others are opting for Cor-Ten steel. Often used for cladding the exteriors of statement buildings, Cor-Ten is a steel alloy specifically designed to rust in an aesthetically pleasing way – and is fast becoming the must-have finish for fashion-forward outdoor spaces. David Rockwell, founder and president of interdisciplinary architecture and design firm Rockwell Group, has just installed a one-



off Cor-Ten fire bowl (pictured on previous page; similar fire bowl, \$20,000, from Fire Features) on the roof terrace of a Washington DC residential block. “You can pre-rust Cor-Ten so you know what you’re going to get,” he says, “but, importantly, you can also mould the steel into very precise shapes for this lovely contrast between a sharp, clean form and a very rough finish. That tension between the pristine and the primal is key to this look.”

There are also plenty of designers embracing rust in all its unpredictable glory. Cathy Azria has been making metal fire sculptures under the label B&D Designs for the past 14 years. Some clients ask her to paint the steel to stop rust forming, but a growing number are opting for natural versions, rust crust and all. Interior designer Fiona Barratt-Campbell commissioned a natural steel Planes sculpture (from £3,800, pictured overleaf) for her garden, while the soon-to-be-opened Hyatt Regency in Changchun, China, is installing a similar piece in its lobby. “We are used to associating rust with destruction,” Azria says, “but my structures won’t disintegrate. They will change colour and evolve, but that’s part of the attraction. Watching metal change is like an adventure.”

Italian sculptor and light designer Gianluca Pacchioni has also been working with rust for a long time, making his first iron pieces in the 1990s. The attraction is how the material reflects light. “The surfaces produce a spectrum