

Into the Wild

Contemporary artist and outdoor enthusiast Ashley Tudor creates one-of-a-kind bronze sculptures of the game she's hunted. Now *that's* a badass chick.

BY SUE HOSTETLER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEFANIE MICHEJDA



Artist Ashley Tudor is the quintessential California girl: gorgeous, laid-back and modern, the perfect mix of savvy city sophisticate and adventurous explorer. “I grew up in San Francisco—smack dab in the heart of the city—but I have deep country roots,” she says. “I’m an avid outdoorswoman; I love to go where the trails don’t.”

Originally a nutrition expert and designer (she holds several medical-device patents) who wrote books about diet and health, Tudor later became a field-to-table chef, during which time she grew fond of hunting her own game. And in what has to be a truly unique path for an artist, that pursuit led to a series of spectacular bronze animal sculptures. “In the beginning I took up hunting [as a way to] attain healthy pastured meat,” says Tudor, who still calls San Francisco home, “but I fell in love with the sport for the athleticism, skill and time in the outdoors.”

While on a two-week hunting trip in the Frank Church Wilderness in Idaho a few years ago, Tudor and her brother stalked and killed an immense elk. “It was my first big-game hunt, and a sacred experience,” says Tudor, 32. “I knew I wanted to do something special with it, but European [taxidermy-style] mounts haven’t changed in hundreds of years.” So, using the elk’s skull as a guide, Tudor set about creating a contemporary sculpture cast in bronze, using the ancient method of lost-wax casting. Shined to a high polish with the spectacular original antlers attached, her one-of-a-kind, authentically figurative pieces are at once beautiful and haunting, exploring themes of immortality,

fragility and man’s dominance over nature. “The natural horns juxtaposed with the refined skull symbolize the idea of man working in harmony with nature,” says Tudor. She has since expanded the series, appropriately titled “Trophies,” to include impala and antelope pieces in bronze, gold, chrome and silver. (Her sculptures currently sell at chic interior-design showroom Coup d’Etat in San Francisco and BDDW in New York City.)

Not only is Tudor’s work creatively informed by her unique California lifestyle, it is also influenced by simple, everyday experiences. “California is a special place,” she says. “The speed of innovation is inspiring. There is a freedom and room to dream and think big [here].”

“Art—whether music, sculpture or design—has the ability to remind people of something they have always known but forgotten,” she adds. “It’s that ‘Aha!’ moment I draw inspiration from. It can be found in the opening of a new Apple computer or in the viewing of a great photograph. It’s that moment of simplicity, clarity and intuition that drives me to create.”

So what’s next for this NorCal Renaissance woman? “I am working on an African gemsbok that is extremely architectural and feels like a very modern mount,” says Tudor. She is also interested in creating a graphic sculpture featuring marine life. “The ocean is hard for people to understand. We don’t see what’s happening below the surface, so it’s out of sight, out of mind. But our oceans are a vital organ to the planet—their health affects our health. Art can help make abstract information resonate in profound ways.” *EF*