



Designer Jacques Bilodeau created the 13-foot tall work for the Toronto Interior Design Show, which is taking place this weekend.

**Photograph by: DAVE SIDAWAY THE GAZETTE,
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By MAXINE MENDELSSOHN, The Gazette, February 7, 2009

The most chic and innovative home decor is on display this weekend at the Toronto Interior Design Show (IDS). This year, the show is featuring an exhibition called Crystal Clear, featuring Swarovski crystal installations made by Canadian designers. Jacques Bilodeau is one of the few Quebecers participating in the exhibition. The quirky Montreal designer constructed a glittering prototype for the Crystal Clear exhibition: a 13-foot chandelier called Totem. We sat down with Bilodeau in his Rosemont studio to find out about his crystal creation, his 25-foot beanbag chair and his thoughts on the state of design.

You're one of six Canadian designers chosen to create a crystal installation for the IDS. Tell me about this giant chandelier you made.

I call it Totem. It's 13 feet high and made of Swarovski crystals strung onto steel rods and aluminium rings. I also used rough pieces of charcoal to contrast with the polished reflective properties of the crystals. It's rare for me to create something purely decorative, but I think that's what I've done here.

What was your inspiration for the Totem?

I know people will tell you that nature or travel inspires them. That's baloney. My inspiration comes from the materials. I looked at the crystal and went inside myself to get inspired. Being inspired is like going deep-sea diving. Not literally, but the idea of being immersed and relentlessly devoted to creating something - that's inspiration.

After the Totem is exhibited at the IDS, will it be shown anywhere else? What will you do with it?

I'm very into the process and the prototype, not so much into anything else that happens after. Swarovski gave me all the materials to build Totem, and they're letting me keep it after the exhibit. There is more than \$12,000 worth of crystals on it and it's one of a kind. I can see it hanging in a hotel lobby or even in someone's fabulous home. I don't know where it will end up. I suppose I'd like to sell it; that would be ideal. But that's not my focus when I create things.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that after a design has been created, there could be some push to mass-produce it or at least reproduce it, but that doesn't seem to appeal to you. Why is that?

I've always done one-off things. For example, I made a motorized felt hammock. You sit in it and it lifts you up so you're swinging in this felt cradle in the air. Another thing I made was a giant beanbag: It was 25 feet long. So, you see, I'm a very conceptual type of guy. I have these ideas, I bring them to life and then, well, it sort of stops there for me. I also made this sliding steel table on wheels; it's a desk, a dining table and room divider. It's everything to me, but that doesn't mean it has to be in every home in Montreal to be valid. It's sort of an exercise in design. You understand?

I see. So you're happy to create things for a small audience. But how can people get a piece of your style?

You don't have to make a purchase to capture my style. If I inspire people, that's enough for me. If you go home and put your desk on wheels because you liked my rolling table here, then my job is done.

Your work has been described as being somewhere between art, architecture and design. Is that what you're going for?

That's an accurate description. I studied interior design; I'm not an architect. The architectural community has embraced me because I'm experimental. I'm coming from outside the traditional architectural perspective, so I'm not preoccupied with things like building codes. I just get inspired and create.

You designed the Alfred Dallaire funeral complex on Laurier Ave. in Outremont. It's quite an original space for a funeral home. From the outside, it looks like the lobby of some über-cool condo project.

The idea of a funeral home is centred on sadness, and I didn't want to explode that notion. I merely wanted to lighten the mood with cream-coloured walls, whimsical armchairs and some modern stained glass. I didn't reinvent the wheel there; I just created a space where people can feel comfortable with their emotions.

Can people visit your studio here in Rosemont? Is it open to the public?

This isn't just my studio, actually. This is my home. And, no, people cannot visit it - well, at least not uninvited.

All right, I understand. But this space is pretty amazing. You have steel walls that slide around, tables that glide on wheels and big windows that flood the place with light.

This used to be a bolt factory and I've conserved the industrial style. I like things that roll away and transform space. Walls glide and tables roll; furnishings are transformable. It's how I choose to live. This place is very representative of my style, the esthetic I've been working to develop for almost 30 years now.

So you've seen many changes in design over the years. Is this an exciting time for you?

I'm pushing 60, so I've witnessed a lot. To me, there hasn't been anything close to the 1970s in terms of vibrancy and innovation in architecture and design. Habitat 67 is still cool to me; it's utopia. Today, the social context is different; people aren't feeling experimental. Well, most people aren't feeling experimental, but I sure am.

For more information on Jacques Bilodeau, go to www.jacquesbilodeau.com. A bilingual book of his work titled Jacques Bilodeau - Habiter/Inhabited (Passage, \$44.95) by Jacques Perron is in bookstores. Some Bilodeau designs are exhibited at the Joyce Yahouda Gallery, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Suite 516, 514-875-2323.

The Toronto Interior Design Show is open to the public today and tomorrow. To find out more go to www.interiordesignshow.com.

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