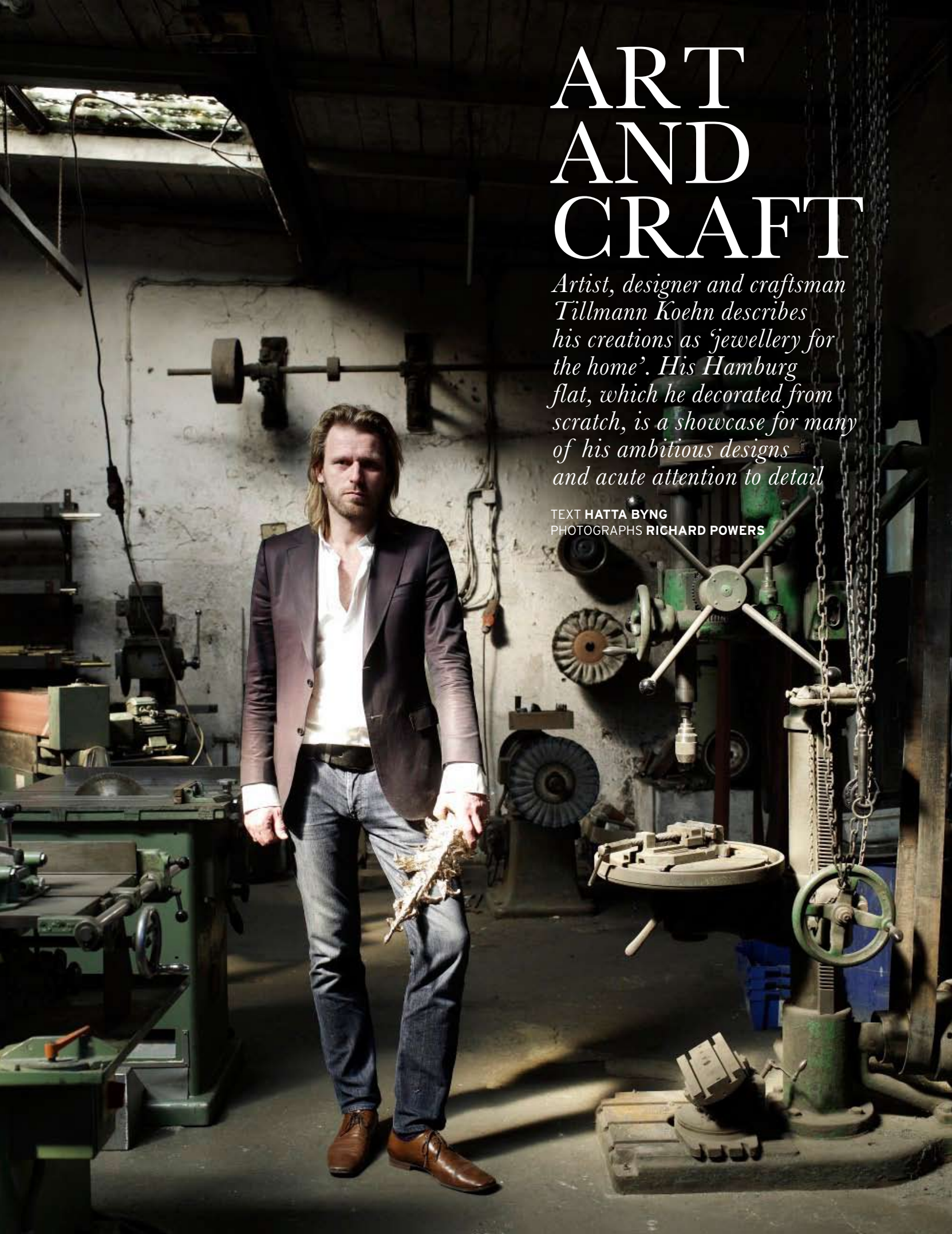


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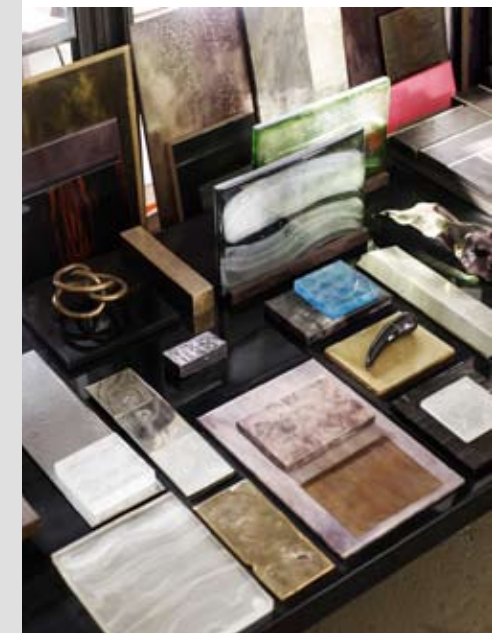
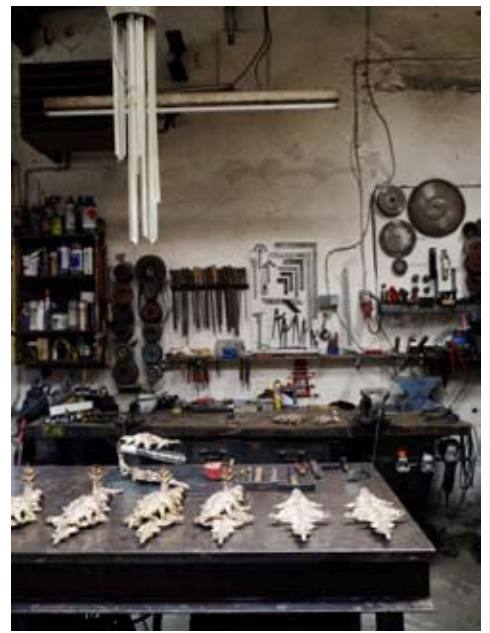
Artist, designer and craftsman Tillmann Koehn describes his creations as 'jewellery for the home'. His Hamburg flat, which he decorated from scratch, is a showcase for many of his ambitious designs and acute attention to detail

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PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD POWERS



OPPOSITE Tillmann is pictured here in his workshop surrounded by his machines, some of which are more than 80 years old. THIS PAGE Several of Tillmann's creations can be found in the sitting room of his west Hamburg home, such as the chased-bronze 'Acanthus' wall lights and the hexagonal table by the window with its amethyst fused-glass top and bronze legs





Tillmann Koehn does not have a website – yet – or even a catalogue. ‘My ideas are as good as my clients,’ he explains. ‘Clients have to be brave.’ This is what excites him; a catalogue would be constricting, as people inevitably ask for what they see, rather than allowing new ideas to develop. Tillmann, whose background includes working for a boatbuilder – where he learnt about ‘using my hands to create beautiful things’ – avoids easy pigeonholing. Designer, sculptor, furniture maker, craftsman;

he seems to combine all of these and more. As well as creating one-off, signed pieces that you might find in a gallery, he likes being involved from the start of a renovation or building project, ‘to be the creative eye next to the builder’. His creations, which include sculpted-bronze stair rails, beaten German-silver chimneypieces, ethereal light fittings, kitchens and anything a client is adventurous enough to let him get away with, ‘are not decoration, but architectural solutions that will remain,’ he explains emphatically. He describes them as ‘jewellery for the house’.

For Tillmann, making is an integral part of the design process, so he tends to have just one part-time assistant. ‘Difficult pieces I have to do

on my own,’ he says, ‘to find the manufacturing solution myself.’ His designs, often combining multiple materials, evolve as he works and he rarely does sketches for clients. ‘Following the flow is my motto,’ he explains. But clients get addicted. ‘Tillmann’s pieces are his creations, but in the context of one’s own identity,’ explains one, for whom the search for a door handle led to many commissions. Tillmann ‘finishes’ almost everything himself – ‘My wife can always tell if my hand has not touched a piece,’ he laughs.

His workshop is minutes from where he lives, in a leafy suburb of west Hamburg. Once a blacksmith’s workshop hidden behind a row of houses, it feels like a forgotten place – a magical

ABOVE The cabinets between Tillmann’s sitting room and kitchen came from a design he did for a client. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Tillmann’s design studio is next to his workshop. His latest kitchen will include bronzed-wood tiles, latticed parchment and German silver. The ‘Throne’ stool is a favourite of his. Many of the materials he uses are on display in his studio. This wrought-iron and ebony stair rail was a commission. Parchment waits to be treated at the studio. Against one wall is an array of veneers. Wall sconces await finishing touches. Tillmann’s larger projects often start with a commission for door furniture

world of strangely beautiful tools and machines, many more than 80 years old. Tillmann likes the solidity and precision of these old machines. 'We don't have specific needs; we use tools free-style, as everything is experimental,' he explains.

Next door is his design studio, with a cornucopia of samples and materials displayed on tables and in steel-and-glass cabinets. An array of veneers lean against one wall, and raw parchment is piled in a corner waiting to be treated and transformed. By his own admission, Tillmann likes working with expensive 'ingredients', including hand-beaten, German silver, an alloy that requires 16,000 hammers per square metre.

He is currently designing a kitchen, which includes an island covered with panels of 'lattice' parchment, cupboards made of pierced steel, a German-silver trellis over the pizza oven, a wall of antiqued-mirror-faced doors and bronzed wooden flooring. 'It's more bespoke than you can imagine,' exclaims Tillmann.

He is also excited by a stool he has created, 'Throne', which consists of a beautiful glass bar, made by an Indian artist, held between bronze sides. The bronze is cast using a technique he has developed in collaboration with the foundry in order to create huge bubbles. 'The bronze comes very close to exploding during the casting process, so it is very risky. Most foundries wouldn't touch it,' he remarks. Just as most sensible people would not wrap kitchen units with parchment. Tillmann has clad several; the first took six months to perfect as the raw parchment had to be treated in the right way and the natural fat content makes it tricky to deal with.

Lighting also fascinates him. 'I don't like too much light, so my pieces are very minimal, and give very focused, intimate illumination,' he says. One light in particular, his miraculous 'Circle', is a slim bronze bar that appears only

just to brush with the super-fine bronze circle that attaches it delicately to the ceiling. It is designed to focus light purely on the dining table and chairs above which it is suspended.

Home, which Tillmann shares with his wife, Birgit, and their two teenage children, Anselme and Ida, is an airy flat filled with early creations, new experiments, and pieces Tillmann prefers not to part with. When they moved in it had not been touched for years, so they stripped every-

OPPOSITE Tillmann's daring 'Circle' light – this one in a client's house – illuminates only the table and chairs. **THIS PAGE** CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW A wall light in the hall is ??????????. In the bathroom is a German-silver basin set in a lacquered Surabaya-ebony vanity unit. The mirror in the main bedroom is made of ???????. Tillmann's kitchen is a mix of pieces from past homes and new items



thing out, stained and lacquered the floors, and removed the wall between the kitchen and sitting room, allowing space for cabinets like those in Tillmann's studio. 'They create a separation, yet preserve the transparency,' he says.

The kitchen units, including parchment-covered drawers, followed the family from their previous homes. 'We brought everything, including a 100-year-old sink, and made it fit,' says Tillmann, who also made the patinated-steel splashback and extractor hood. 'It's an improvised way of living; I have a freedom that I don't have with clients,' he adds. The sideboard, which he designed for the space, is made from industrial sheet metal, which he bent by hand – 'it's so thick it would ruin a machine' – and then polished so that its corroded surface is leather-like in colour. Tillmann likes the contrast with the refinement of the drawers, made from lacquered Caucasian walnut.

The children have been left to their own devices in their rooms, but the main bedroom, dark and atmospheric, has a walk-in wardrobe with veneered fronts, and the bathroom has a lacquered Surabaya-ebony vanity unit with a dazzling German-silver basin, German-silver skirting and typically discreet wall lights.

Tillmann's pieces are the antithesis of factory-made furniture – not only do they push materials to their limits, but they are intensely personal and hugely diverse in style and scope. As he gains a name for himself in London – a recent commission includes a four-and-a-half-metre table in 'undulating' ebony – one senses there is plenty more to come from this talented and original artist, designer and maker □

Tillmann Koehn can be contacted through Saffron Interior Arts (020-7225 0865; www.saffroninteriorarts.com)



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