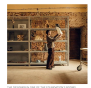
THE DESIGNER IN ONE OF THE FOUNDATION'S ROOMS, HOUSED IN AN 18TH-CENTURY VILLA ABOUT AN HOUR'S DRIVE FROM WARSAW, WHERE THE STUDIO IS BASED. PHOTO BY PION STUDIO

DOOR | August 20, 2026

In a centuries-old estate outside Warsaw, where flowers last forever

Entropy at the end. Marcin Rusak is convinced of this, and he loves to experiment with the eternal contradiction between beauty and transience. On an estate not far from the Polish capital, to preserve the ephemeral, he transforms leaves into furniture and flowers into contemporary fossils. But above all, he acknowledges that everything ages.

by Alessia Pincini

—

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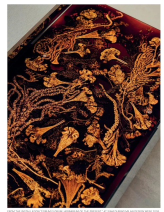
Nature, for Marcin Rusak, is an unstable archive: it is not preserved, but observed as it evolves and disappears. A Polish designer born in 1987 to a family of floristry and trained in design in Warsaw, Eindhoven, and London, he considers the plant world a complex system of memory, economics, desire, and industry. In his hands, flowers become a medium for reflecting on the eternal contradiction between beauty and transience. He vitrifies them, glazes them, metallizes them, 3D prints them. He glorifies and destroys them with equal grace and skill. As a philosopher-sorcier, he turns them into building materials for living furnishings, or remains for fossils that encapsulate a fragile time. Control and abandon, fragility and monumentality, stability and adventure are the extremes in his research, which, with deliberate ambiguity, transforms ornamentation into method; what appears spontaneous in the product of extreme design. After the Forum Florum installation in Milan—where he exhibited the studio's latest works, including a herbarium with two-and-a-half-meter-high panels—he is working on new experiments, reasoning through the senses and exercising entropy.


FROM THE INSTALLATION "FORUM FLORUM: HERBARIUM OF THE PRESENT," AT SIAM DURING MILAN DESIGN WEEK 2026, A DETAIL OF A GLASS COFFEE TABLE WITH FLORAL DECORATIONS. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCIN RUSAK STUDIO

When did you realize that your heritage could also represent your future?

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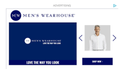


"Rather late, actually. One day, while I was studying at the Royal College of Art, I was asked to think of a piece of furniture that evoked strong emotions. I thought of the large wooden cabinet, in the Dutch Baroque style, in my grandfather's house. It was carved with floral motifs, and this made me reflect on humanity's eternal fascination with plant decorations."

So much so that he wanted to recreate that cabinet using leaves as building material.

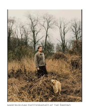
"Exactly. But it was when I discovered the cut flower industry—and the global economy, engineering, and waste that go with it, a subject still dear to me—that my family's relationship with plants became the most interesting resource I had access to. The discarded flowers I collected while visiting London markets were my pigments: I combined them with various materials, from natural and biodegradable ones to industrially produced ones, generating compounds with which I could either observe decay or try to preserve the ephemeral. And in the meantime, I became fascinated by the biotechnological aspects of growing and selling ornamental plants. Did you know that compared to one grown in the garden, a rose sold at the supermarket, engineered in a laboratory to have a straight stem, vivid color, and a longer vase life, is almost fragrance-free?"

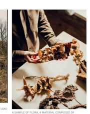
He even created Monster Flower, a sculpture of a super-flower that doesn't exist, excessive and contradictory, which sums up all the absurd human expectations about flowers.

"I think much of my work stems from an attempt to negotiate a contradiction: humans desperately want to preserve things that, by their very nature, are temporary. Flowers are the perfect example. In the studio, we push this tension further, creating contemporary fossils. But I'm equally interested in allowing things to evolve, transform, and even disappear: like the vases in the Perishable series (made from organic materials combined with natural binders like flour or sugar, ed.) or the biodegradable plastic sculptures Ghost Orchid, which, when treated with special enzymes and microorganisms, can slowly dissolve into the soil and even nourish it."

One of the key words in design today is "timeless": how does it explore transience as a generative and poetic force rather than as a synonym for failure?

I've never really believed in timelessness. Everything ages: materials, buildings, people, ideas. Pretending otherwise seems bizarre to me. Entropy, in the end, wins. While some projects, as we've said, embrace deterioration, others age more subtly: flowers preserved in resin change color, the metals we use to coat plants oxidize and darken, and the exotic leaves in the Protoplasting Nature series evolve from vivid green to golden and brown hues. I embrace the fact that a work continues to change even after it leaves the studio. It means it's still alive.


MARCIN RUSAK PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE ŚWIDNO FOUNDATION ESTATE IN POLAND. PHOTO BY PION STUDIO


A SAMPLE OF FLORA, A MATERIAL COMPOSED OF TREATED FLOWERS ENCAPSULATED IN RESIN. PHOTO BY PION STUDIO

How do you judge the relationship that humans have with nature, in our present?

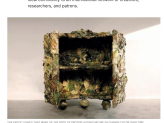
"The illusion that nature exists outside of us, as something decorative or exploitable, is dangerous. Much of our material landscape has been built around the ideas of efficiency and constant growth. We create objects designed to be quickly consumed and easily replaced. Yet many of them remain in the environment indefinitely. Overproduction, planned obsolescence, and the endless search for novelty have created a disconnect between the durability of what we create and the systems we depend on. Flowers have taught me that the more we optimize nature, the more fragile and subordinate it becomes to humans. So, if everything is part of a process of development, transformation, and return, the challenge lies in reintroducing decay and responsibility into what we build. To do this, we can decide to work with perishable materials or ask ourselves which objects are worthy of being passed down and preserve only what is important, redefining longevity according to emotional relationships."

Memory, transition, permanence, decay also form the conceptual core of the Świdno Foundation, which he established with the studio's operational director and partner, Tamara Róża Pilawska Baranowska.

Świdno is our botanical incubator. We envision it as a long-term platform where artists, architects, and researchers can explore the relationship between time, nature, and matter—just as it was in the 1970s and 1990s, when the building was managed by the Polish Academy of Sciences. Here, scientists studied how the brain is able to detect extremely faint signals hidden in background noise. It's called the threshold of perception. We want this place to continue developing the ability to use the senses.

You are planning residencies, workshops, and educational programs, while also continuing the restoration of the estate.

The work involves an 18th-century villa and the surrounding park, which extends toward a protected reserve, and is progressing gradually and carefully. The intent is not to erase natural processes, but to create conditions that slow them and allow them to unfold with dignity. We consider ourselves temporary custodians, and in addition to restoring the physical structure, we are seeking to restore the spirit of the place, opening a new chapter that maintains a dialogue between its history and the surrounding landscape, connecting the local community to an international network of creatives, researchers, and patrons.


THE EXOTIC LEAVES THAT MAKE UP THE BODY OF PROTOPLASTING NATURE 04 CHANGE COLOR OVER TIME, EMPHASIZING THE NATURAL CYCLICALITY OF ORGANIC MATERIALS. A CHAIR FROM THE SERIES HAS BEEN INCLUDED IN THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF THE CENTRE POMPIDOU IN PARIS. PHOTO COURTESY MARCIN RUSAK STUDIO

Speaking of senses, in 2025 you presented Plant Pulses with Perrier-Jouët: a large botanical resin sculpture that translated the biological signals emitted by plants into images and sounds. How is this research progressing?

Plant Pulses has opened up new avenues of investigation, going beyond the idea of creating an object to become an exercise in attention. The project was born from a collaboration with Bartek Chojnacki and Klara Chojnacka, researchers at AGH University in Krakow who study the ultrasound signals emitted by plants when they are stressed or dehydrated. These modes of communication and interaction are largely imperceptible, but if amplified—in this case, thanks to an installation created with composer Justyna Stasiowska and digital creator Eli Magaziner—they could change our experience of the plant world: from a passive background to a reactive system. At the presentations in Tokyo and Miami, and in Milan during the last Design Week, it was evocative to see the audience immerse themselves in an abstract environment of images and sounds, entering a state of contemplation and even repose. It made me realize that my work can go beyond material exploration, to create spaces and conditions that encourage a deeper awareness of our relationship with other plants. species. A sort of herbarium of the present, in which forms but also connections, memories, and exchanges are preserved. Which normally remain invisible."

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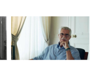
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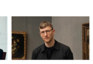
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