



DAVIDHARBER



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*“I love a sense of theatre in my work.
Each piece must perform. It must catch the eyes
and fire the imagination.”*

- DAVID HARBER

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ETHOS

David Harber creates beguiling interactions between light, reflection and illusion. He combines values of craftsmanship and ingenuity, striving for intrigue and drama by reshaping and reinventing materials, techniques and forms.

Spontaneity, flair and collaboration are some of the facets that shine out of David Harber's artistic personality. His creative approach stems from an ardent determination to push the boundaries, always questioning and 'thinking round corners' – a commonplace phrase in the studio and workshop.





Illustration by Sarah Blomfield

DAVID HARBER

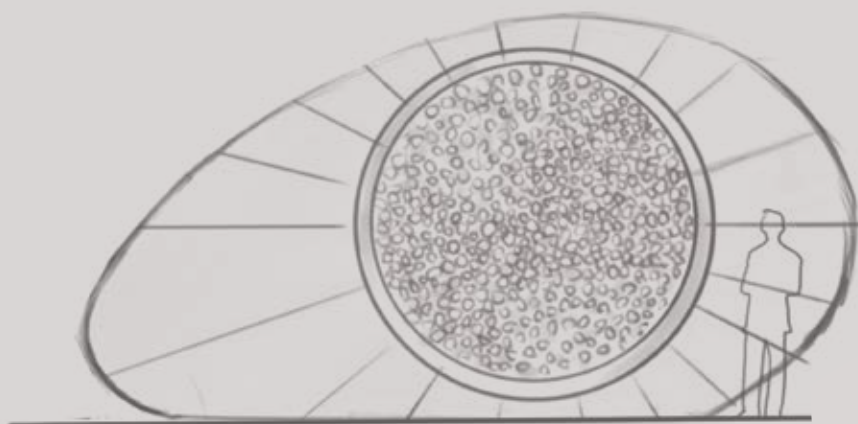
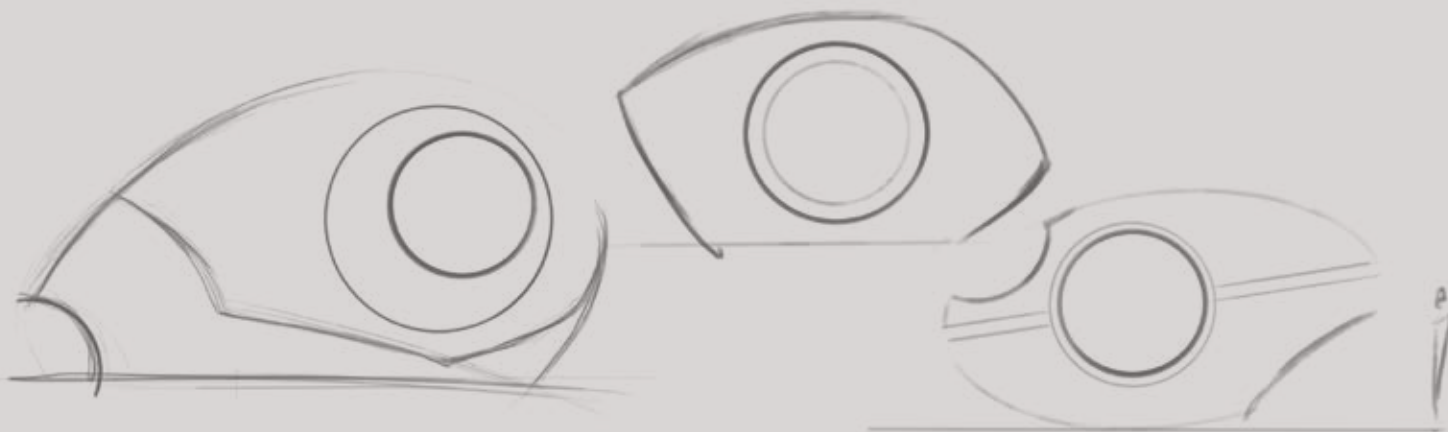
BEGUILING BY NATURE

David Harber's Oxfordshire studio is a reminder of how sculpture was once made: not by a single person but a visionary artist-craftsman in charge of an atelier, making art for passionate patrons.

In the shadow of a Bronze Age hill fort sits David Harber's growing workshop. It is a hive of activity. In one building, craftsmen painstakingly attach hand-selected Welsh slate within the mould of a huge hemisphere. In another, an engineer polishes stainless steel to shiny perfection, so that it will catch and reflect the sunlight when placed in situ. It is a glorious example of the artist's studio, perfected since the Renaissance, and updated with David as leader, stopping to check on progress and quality as he walks around the site.

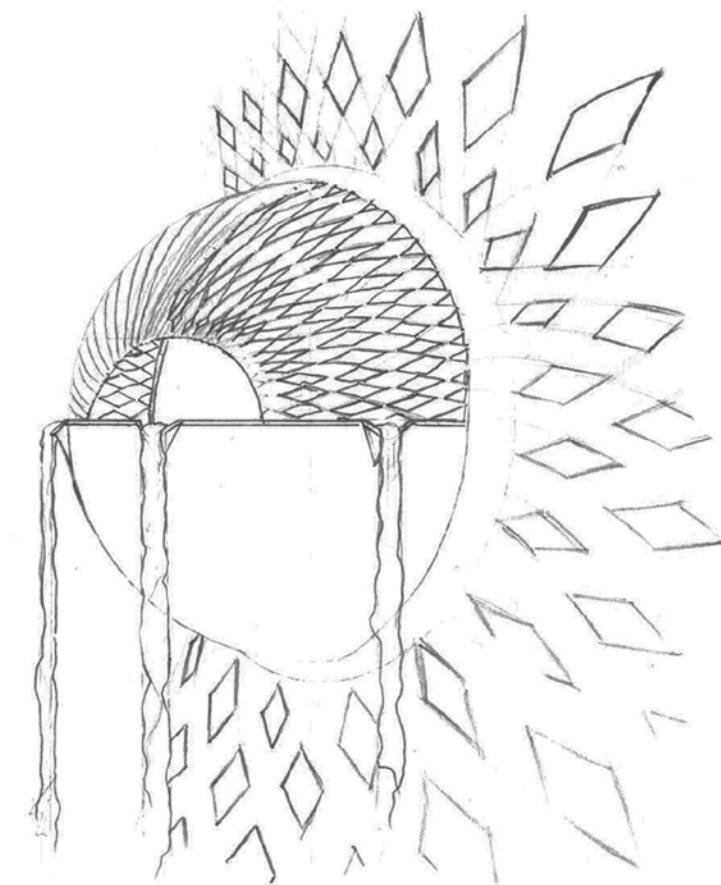
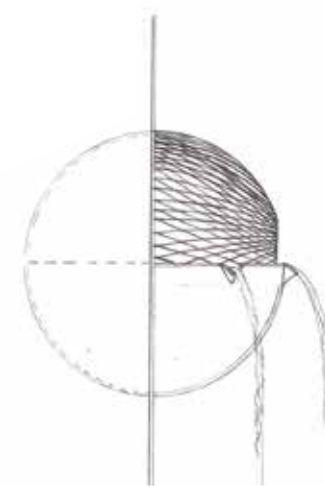
From beginnings making sundials, David now creates a huge array of artworks – some in editions, others one-off – for a growing list of clients around the world. 'I started in a small shed and it has somewhat expanded,' he says with characteristic understatement, surveying his domain. David's work has moved from his earlier specialism of sundials to artworks for exteriors, interiors and, latterly, the creation of large pieces for public spaces, with a growing waiting list of people aiming to commission a bespoke piece from the workshop.

It is easy to see where ideas come from on a walkabout with David. He displays an inquisitive mentality, grabbing objects and holding them up for inspection in the light. A thumb-sized item resembling a glass honeycomb is taken off a shelf in his office, and rotated in front of my eyes. As David turns it, one can see that it is made up of hundreds of tiny tubes that disappear from sight at each end, only to re-appear in swirling, silver-grey patterns as the line of sight changes. 'Imagine this on a larger scale,' he explains.



“... I like to reawaken a contemplative spirit that we seem to have lost. People with no time to spare become spellbound when you show them an altered reality in the fabric of a sculpture.”

- DAVID HARBER



Of course, David has imagined it, and has started to make a piece – called the Alveare. In an adjacent room he shows me a model of it, about half a metre high, with long tubes within that make the changing patterns of light and shade all the more miraculous and beguiling. ‘Now imagine that each of those tubes within has a reflective inner surface,’ says David, ‘so the outside world is also on the inside, an integral part of it...’ It is a work in progress, and in the studio downstairs there is a computer simulation that is already bringing the Alveare to ghostly life.

This is how a David artwork happens. A simple physical event like a shadow, reflection or ripple might produce a visual effect, leading him to experiment with materials to achieve and crystallise the effect in an artwork. Harber often describes these events as ‘double-takes’: moments of high visual intensity where something is revealed.

These visual effects might be called illusions, mirages or trompe l’oeils, but Harber determines to make them

lasting, translating them into physical form using materials – brass, copper, steel, stone – that will last hundreds of years. ‘If I were only interested in ephemeral effects, I probably wouldn’t be working like this,’ he says. ‘These are massive, solid materials, and the whole point is that they’ll last for generations, not just for a temporary effect. But somewhere along the line you’ve got to give them that spark, that magic that goes beyond their sheer physicality.’

One of Harber’s great personal memories dates from the mid-1990s, when he was restoring a 16th-century sundial. As he removed half a millennium of accumulated verdigris, he was suddenly confronted with the original maker’s name, shining from the exposed metal like a semaphore – a message from a mind that had grappled with exactly the same issues of light, shadow, location and time that David himself is always trying to resolve. This echo through the ages showed him the shared values of these sculptors: transmitting elemental delight to our own generation and beyond.

DRAWING INSPIRATION

COSMIC MUSE

With a deep appreciation of the cosmos, David is inspired by the night sky as well as appreciating it as a means to escape life's hectic pace. Harber's keen interest in astronomy and the stars allows him to bring celestial mechanics to life, capturing the passage of time and space.

It was a serendipitous event for David to find, a few years ago, that he was a direct descendent of the Elizabethan mathematician and scientific instrument maker John Blagrove, and that this historic figure lived most of his life some twenty miles from Harber's workshop in Oxfordshire.

“All cultures throughout history have sought inspiration and guidance from the heavens; we each have an intrinsic, instinctive awareness of our connection with this reassuring and cathartic shroud.”

– DAVID HARBER

LIGHT AND LIFE

REFLECTIONS

One of the most tantalising aspects of David Harber's work is his use of light and reflection. Often his sculptures seem to usher you into another dimension, by the use of shape, media and materials. Highly-polished stainless steel becomes a mirror to its environment, showing the motion of foliage and reflecting seasonal change. David is also inspired by the energy of water and how it can create a certain magic and sense of calm.



“My works often aim to evoke enchantment via a kind of sculptural playfulness: as if to invite the viewer to question what they see.”

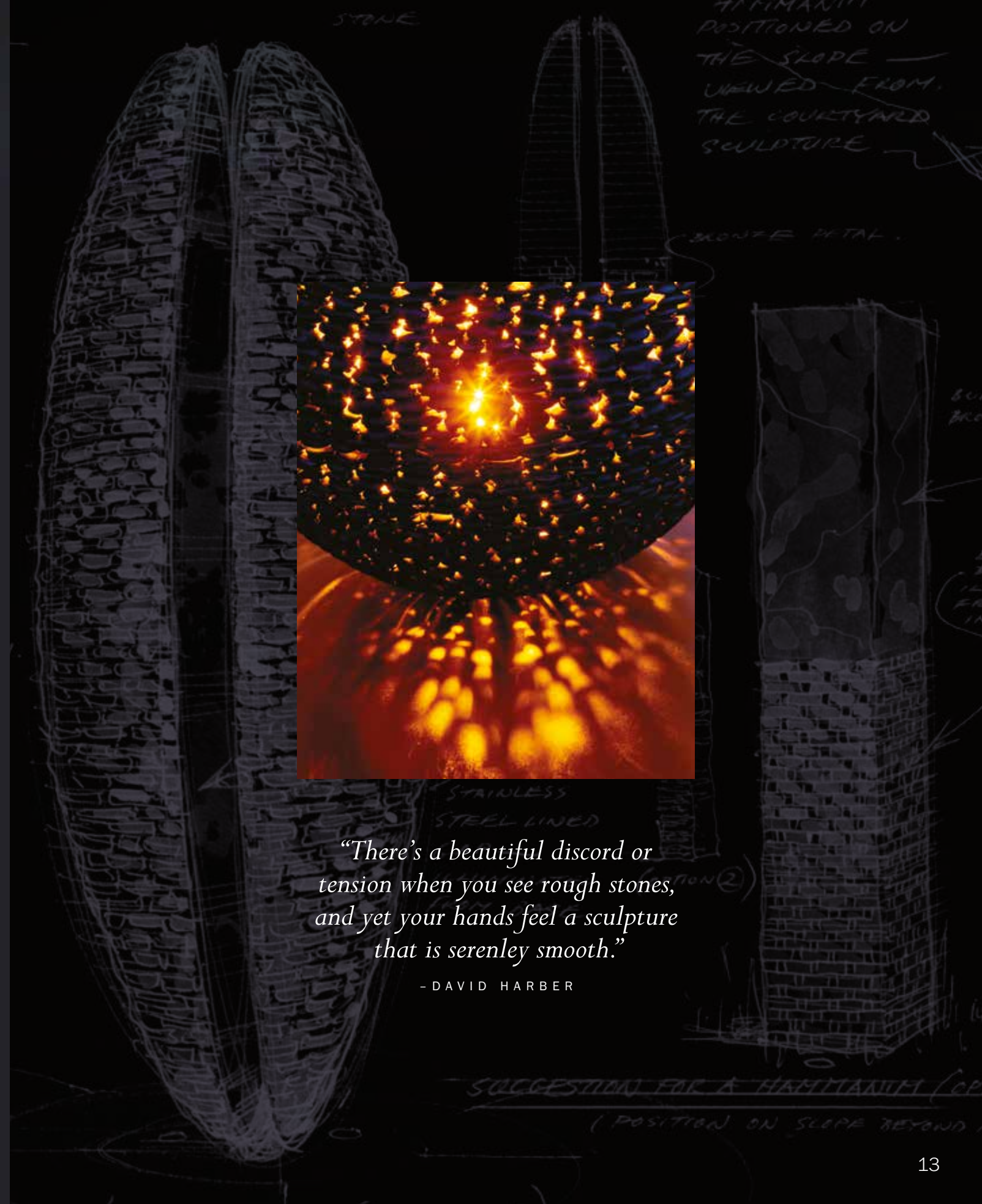
- DAVID HARBER



RAW ENERGY

TRANSFORMATION

The materials used by David Harber often play with a sense of contrast. Naturally brutal elements like rough-cut slate are transformed into smooth sculptural pieces, so that ruggedness is refined into something soft and tactile without changing its inner essence.



“There’s a beautiful discord or tension when you see rough stones, and yet your hands feel a sculpture that is serenely smooth.”

- DAVID HARBER

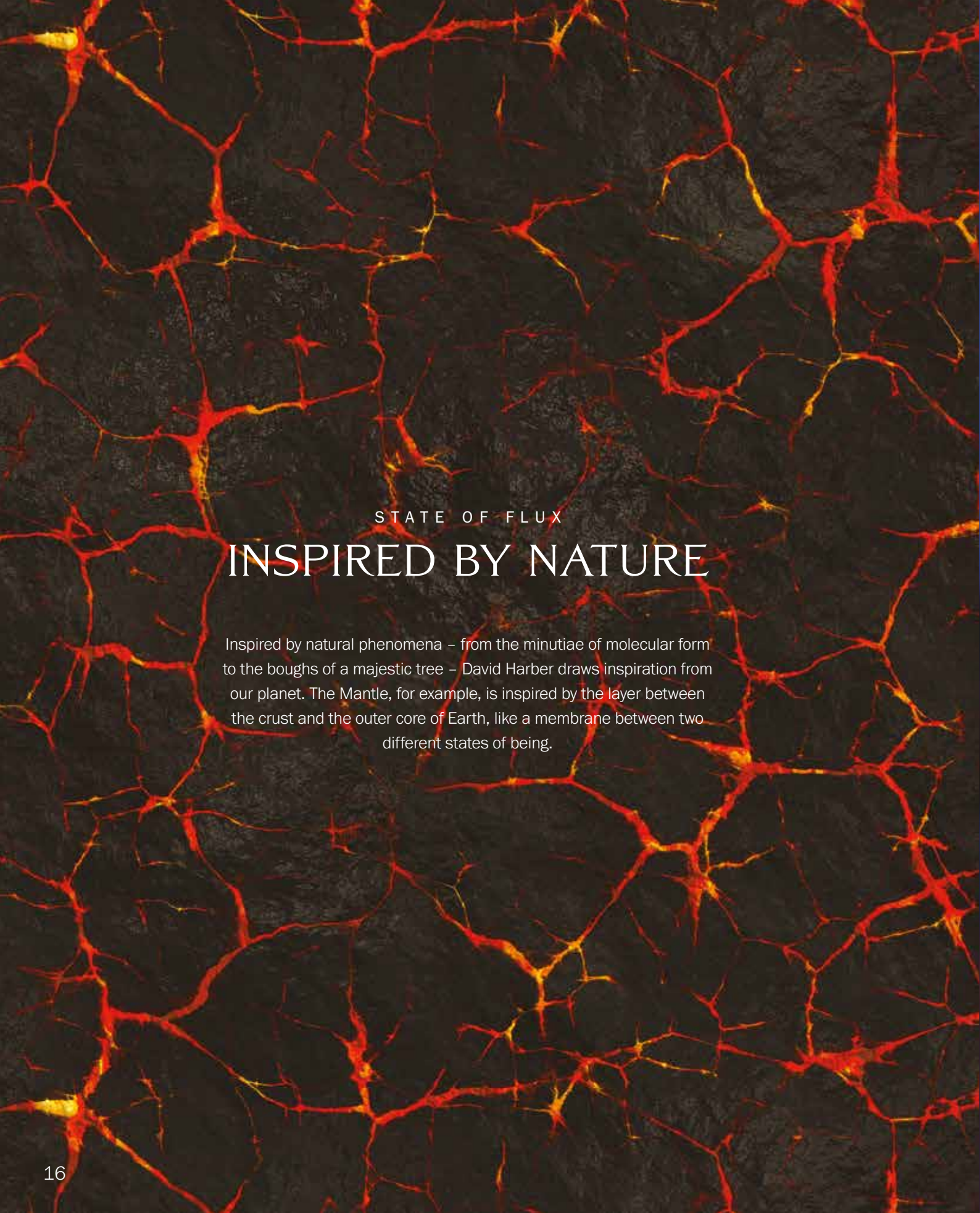


MATERIAL MAGIC

PERCEPTION AND ILLUSION

One of the factors that marks out a David Harber piece is a sheer sense of illusion and the uncanny – that the sculpture is less solid than it first appears, or that beneath a seemingly impervious surface suddenly there is a hidden interior, waiting to be revealed.

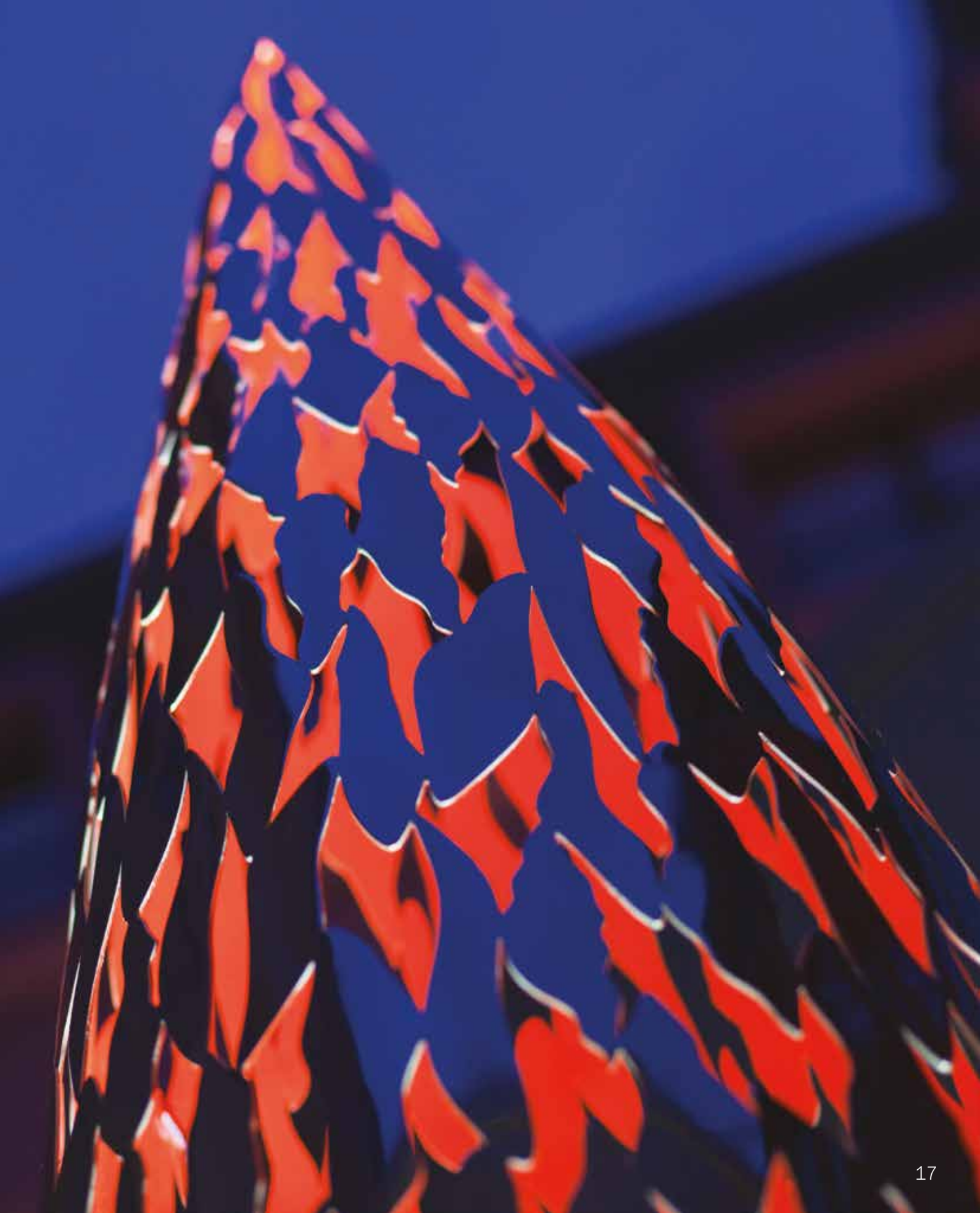
It is testimony to David's constant desire to make pieces that confound perception.



STATE OF FLUX

INSPIRED BY NATURE

Inspired by natural phenomena – from the minutiae of molecular form to the boughs of a majestic tree – David Harber draws inspiration from our planet. The Mantle, for example, is inspired by the layer between the crust and the outer core of Earth, like a membrane between two different states of being.

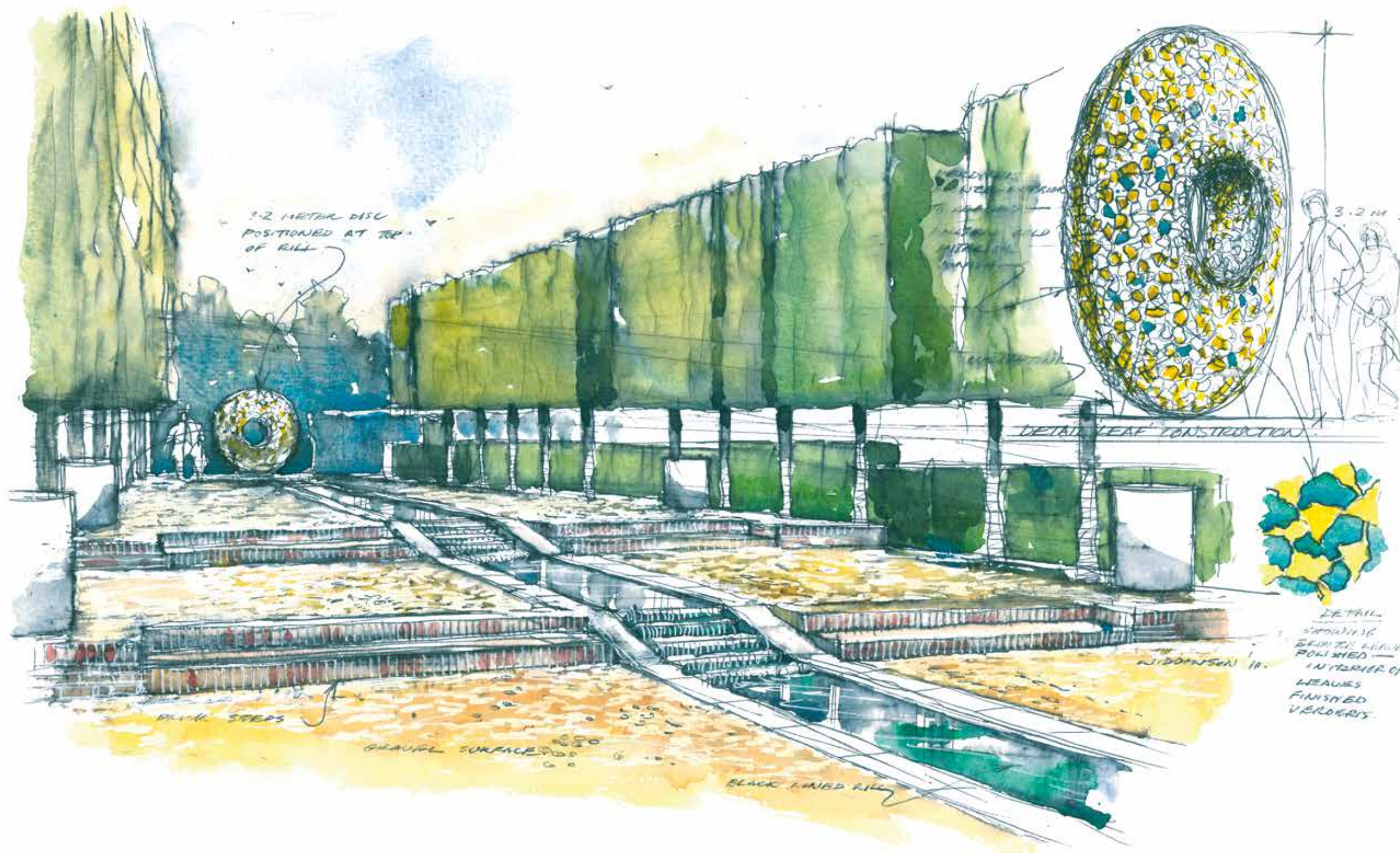




SUBTLE SHIFT

METAMORPHOSIS

David Harber artworks are never static. They change with the seasons and they mature along with their environments. They interact and become indivisible from their locations, achieving a sense of harmony. Harber plans the use of materials according to how they age: for example, bronze and copper oxidise, while stainless steel keeps its sparkling lustre.



“How might we evoke the atmosphere of the landscape? How can we add meaning and magic to the space?”

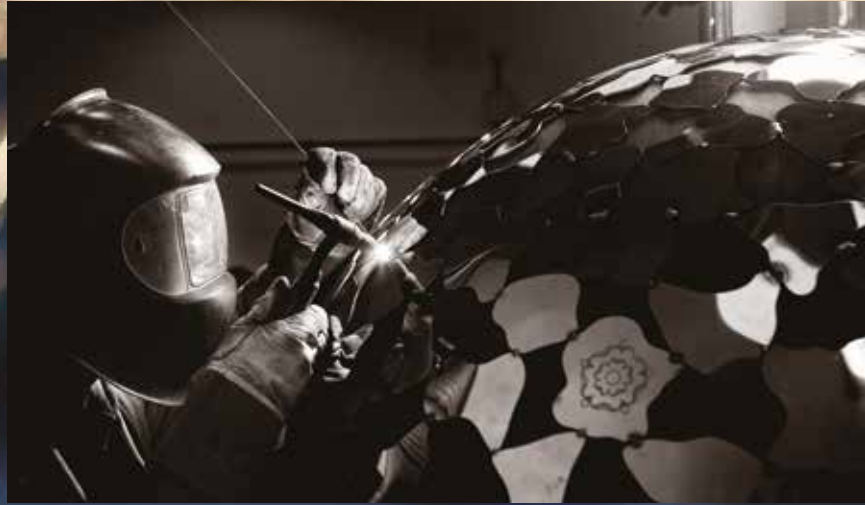
- DAVID HARBER

SENSE OF PLACE

GENIUS LOCI

Each of David Harber’s works helps to celebrate the space in which it is situated. It is very important that they not only fit each environment well, but that they enter a dialogue with them – with the ultimate goal of enhancing the viewer’s experience. Those who commission a David artwork enter a process of taking account of the dynamics of the site and the placement of the piece; of reaching an understanding and awareness of the actions of the sun and the movements of shadows. Just as David’s early work featured sundials that tell the time, his current pieces reflect their own time and space.

Illustration by Tim Widovson

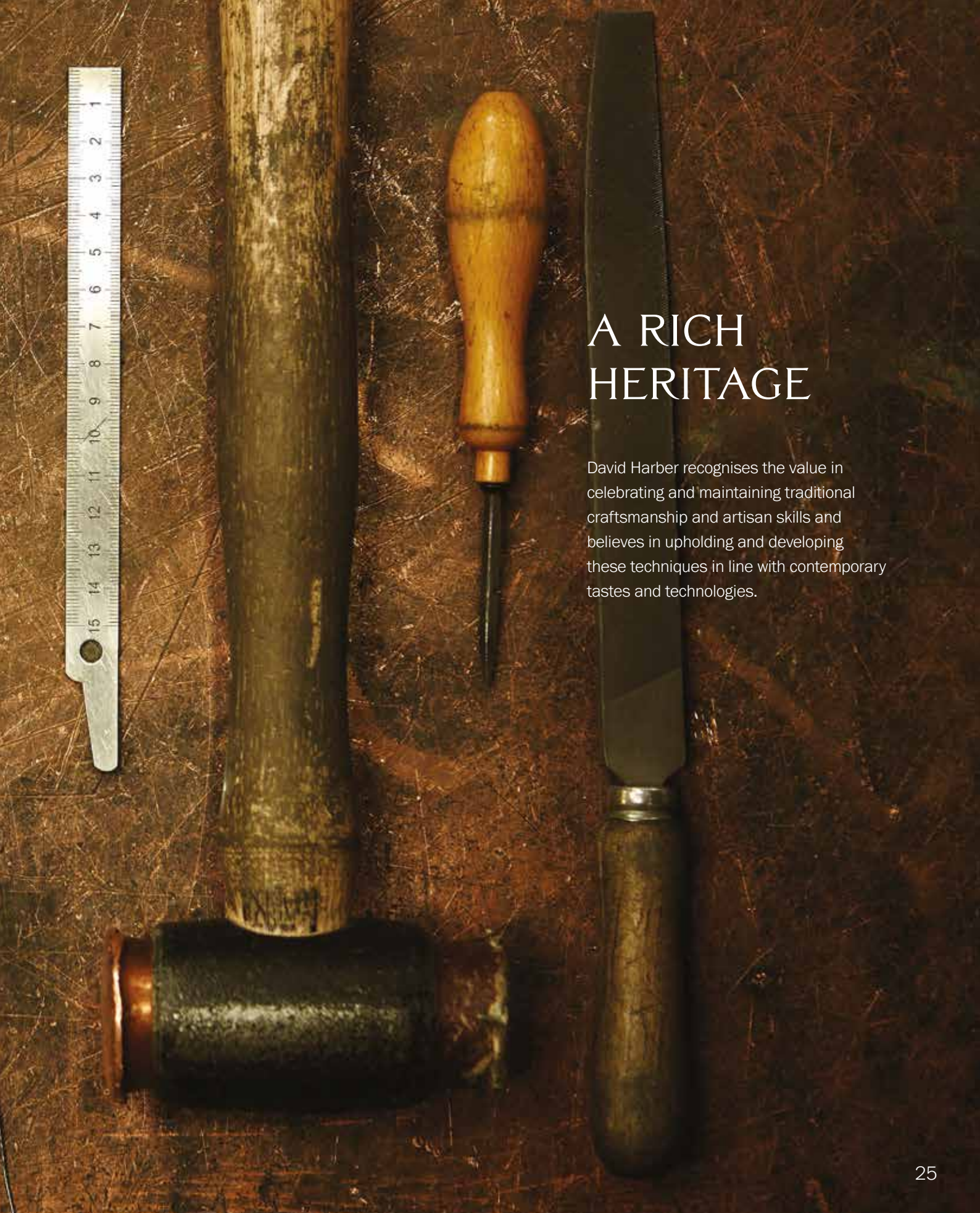


MASTERY OF MATERIALS

The workshop practices time-honoured methods using hand tools and artists' materials, which add depth and meaning to a sculpture. With an extensive understanding of project requirements, David Harber also uses modern machinery and technologies where appropriate.

This approach endows each work with a timeless blending of old and new, classic and contemporary – principles embedded in the design as well as in the making, and often expressed in the private and public spaces David's pieces find their way into.





A RICH HERITAGE

David Harber recognises the value in celebrating and maintaining traditional craftsmanship and artisan skills and believes in upholding and developing these techniques in line with contemporary tastes and technologies.

WAYS OF WORKING

THE BESPOKE COMMISSION

Commissioning a bespoke David Harber piece offers you direct access to him, his dedicated attention and his artistic creativity. Capturing the essence of a space, David personally supports each client through the journey, helping them to shape their vision and using his experience to ask the most important questions about the intended artwork, creating a dynamic process and fully engaging with each client. David will spend time overseeing the project from initial site visits and concept sketches to shortlisted designs and working drawings – right through to the creation of the sculpture and its ultimate installation.

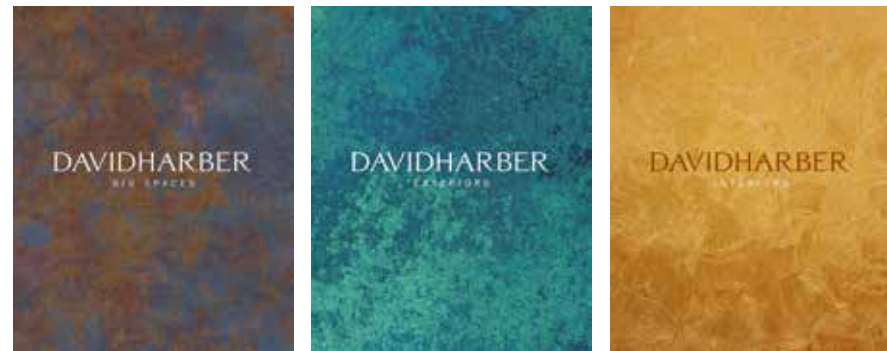
THE CUSTOM COMMISSION

The custom commission is another way of acquiring a David Harber artwork and offers a simpler approach than a bespoke one-off commission. This route involves adding your own imprint to an existing David Harber design, by changing the materials, size, finishes, etching and engraving – providing countless combinations that will make it unique.

A GLOBAL SERVICE

Distance is never an object as our experience extends to designing with all the particularities of the space in mind, as well as shipping and installing work around the world. Our careful planning and meticulous attention to detail is paramount when working on such projects.





NEXT STEPS

To make an appointment at our studio and workshop, to arrange a site visit
or to discuss your project, please contact us on

+44 (0)1235 859300
or at sales@davidharber.com



DAVID HARBER LTD

Blewburton Barns, Hagbourne Road, Aston Upthorpe
Oxfordshire OX11 9EE England

+44 (0)1235 859300
sales@davidharber.com

www.davidharber.com