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PORTRAIT OF NATURE

Concept: To create a bond between machine and nature, Austria's Thomas Traxler started with a tree. "A tree is a product of a specific time and place. It grows according to its surroundings and constantly records various environmental impacts," says Traxler. "Each single tree tells its own story of development." For his graduation project at the Dutch Design Academy in Eindhoven, he used this inspiration to create a solar-powered machine that builds one-of-a-kind furniture based on the sun's changing rays.

Process: As the first rays of sunlight emerge, the Idea of a Tree begins to work. The glass-enclosed, loomlike device uses a series of pulleys to pass thin layers of thread through a colour bath and glue before winding them around a mould (the size depends on the desired shape). Though the mould dictates the object's general form, other details are defined entirely by the sun. A cloud or the shade from a nearby building momentarily slows down the machine, which makes the thread sit longer in the bath, intensifying the colour. Meanwhile, the object's length completely depends on how long the sun is out, and how long the machine can weave for. On a bright summer's day, the harvested piece will be a bench over a metre long; in winter, it will be a short stool or even a lampshade – either way, it's out of Traxler's hands.

Response: At the graduation show of the Dutch Design Academy last July, Traxler was celebrated not just for his sun-made objects or massive spinning device, but for displaying such respect for nature. Department head Gijs Bakker, a partner in Droog Design, liked the project so much he took it to his Amsterdam gallery for a summer show. The Idea of a Tree gained further exposure at Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven this past October.

Going forward: "The machine is producing by itself, so there's no need for a manufacturer," says Traxler, who is further developing the objects through his design studio, Mischer'traxler. He is currently looking to collaborate with a gallery to directly produce and sell his sun-built furniture.

INGEBORG VAN LIESHOUT



Above: The size and colour intensity of the object created by the Idea of a Tree depends on the strength of the sun's rays. When the sun sets, the piece is finished. **Below:** Traxler's machine requires no manpower to function. It uses solar power to pull thread through dye and glue before weaving it around a mould.

