

STYLE MAKERS



Cooper sits in her studio in front of her *Peel* sculpture and next to a current work in progress. *Opposite: Interval* was designed by Cooper for an airport in Rhode Island.

PORTRAIT: KENDALL KARMANIAN, OPPOSITE: ERIK GOULD, TOP RIGHT: EILEEN RYAN

Patrons of the Avalon Branch Library in Chicago regularly participate in an ongoing conversation—without breaking the silence. Gazing at Barbara Cooper's *Current*, an undulating, 20-foot-long wooden sculpture suspended in the library's atrium, is all the encouragement they need. "It really interests me, this idea of working in a particular space, and trying to think about how people are using the space and kind of having a conversation with its function," says Cooper. Although on a larger scale, *Current* is emblematic of the Chicagoan's signature aesthetic: Its organic form, comprising many painstakingly assembled layers, appears to be frozen mid-motion. Cooper also draws, but sculpting—typically pieces illustrating the transformative forces of nature, composed of wood, glue and sometimes metal—is her main focus. While her work addresses both the bonds and fissures between man and Mother Nature, Cooper's underlying message is clear: "I always see nature as a metaphor for how we should live our lives." barbaracooperartist.com; 773.784.4832

Layers of wood veneer form Barbara Cooper's *Coma*, 2006.



THE NATURALIST

BARBARA COOPER



Inspiration:

Forms, structures and processes in nature. We can never invent anything as amazingly complex as what already exists.

Current Obsession:

Bees! They seem like the next step in the nature/nurture issue that lies at the heart of what a garden is about.

Influences:

Martin Puryear and Anish Kapoor are two of my favorite visual artists.

Luxury Defined:

Taking the time to appreciate where I am at the moment and, in so doing, being able to tune into the small things that make me truly aware.

Prized Possessions:

The skeleton of the nose of a paddlefish, as well as that of a glass sponge. They are both strong, lightweight and exquisite structures.

On My Nightstand:

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed by Jared Diamond; *The Botany of Desire* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan; and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver.