

# TOP GEAR

*Chelsey Baker* speaks to a young designer who has turned the tables on luxury cars



Lionel Virdee has created a unique take on some of the world's most luxurious cars, transforming the alloy wheels of such iconic automotive design as the Ferrari F430 into veritable pieces of art - coffee tables for the modern bachelor pad.

At the tender age of 20, what drives young entrepreneur Lionel is a burning desire to produce some of the hottest and most innovative products for the 21<sup>st</sup> century home in 2010: "My passion for motor racing has inspired me to design unique and irresistible handcrafted pieces for the guys who have everything."

The range of tables, created under the company name *Custom Designz*, incorporates coffee tables and slightly smaller side tables. Lionel has also developed office chairs from the plush leather seats of the McLaren SLR and timepieces using the carbon ceramic braking system from a Ferrari F430 Scuderia. Buyers are able to specify the colour of the wheel and caliper, as well as the glass dimensions.

"If there is a specific wheel you would like a table made with, or seat for an office chair then our Bespoke Designz service will help create the furniture of your dreams. The possibilities are endless!"

Lionel's eureka moment arrived during the refurbishment of his own bedroom at home: "I was re-decorating my room and needed a table. I wanted something completely unique and thought about creating a design with a GT3 alloy wheel I had in the garage."

Calling upon his improvisational skills, Lionel then sought inspiration for a stand in an unlikely source. "I bought a bar stool, took the seat off and placed the wheel on top accompanied with a piece of glass. I looked everywhere and there was nothing like this on the market. I

thought to myself that this was a niche market yet to be filled and developed the concept to produce different variants of the original design; which incidentally sits proudly next to my bed!"

Adapting to the current economic climate, Lionel also appears to have the knack for designing cost-effective products. Surprisingly, given the glamorous and exclusive appearance of these coffee tables, Lionel rescues the alloy wheels from specialist salvage yards. "I acquire the wheels, discs and calipers in poor condition that would otherwise have been scrapped. They are then refurbished to their original condition and this is definitely a unique selling point. In these modern times I think it is important to have a recycled element in a product."

Outside of the design studio, Lionel has played golf at a professional level, and holds an MSA National B racing license. Yet his dream is to combine his twin passions of motor racing and design. "I have been entrepreneurial even when I was at school and wanted to combine this with my creativity and passion for racing. This is a niche market but the response to the products has been amazing."

The tables have already proved a hit amongst various Premier League footballers, reinforcing its status as the ultimate boys' toy. And for young men with cash to spare and a love of fast cars, what better toy is there to have in the living room? A fusion of luxury car components and modern design, these tables ooze glamour, style and innovation. ■

*For further information, please visit [www.customdesignz.co.uk](http://www.customdesignz.co.uk)*

