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Building the Maxon House: Week 23

*In our latest Backstory series, Seattleite Lou Maxon recounts the thrills and trials of ditching the suburbs, buying property, and designing and building a modern house with Tom Kundig of [Olson Kundig Architects](http://www.olsonkundigarchitects.com/)***Week 23: A Maxon House Commission**

Last week I talked about some of the challenges, obstacles and unexpected headaches of our project. On a brighter note, I ended with the sentiment "shouldn't this be fun?" So, welcome to week 23. One of the joys of the journey is stepping away from the minutia of the day-to-day tasks and remembering that there is a fun side to the project. Easily one of my favorite parts of my design career and being a creative is collaborating and commissioning world-class artists, from photographers to illustrators, to help tell stories for brands and bring ideas and raw concepts to life. Just as an architect has his go-to craftsman or material palette, I too have my stable of favorites that I've collaborated with over the years.

One opportunity with our project was to think about ways to bring art and craftsmanship into our future home by collaborating with artists and craftsmen. One of my favorite artists has always been Gary Taxali, a Toronto, Canada-based artist (blurry photo below!). As part of our project we decided to commission Taxali to do a print that could eventually hang in the entrance to our house—something that would embody the creativity, art and craft of the project.

By: [Lou Maxon](#)

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We thought we'd share a couple of the sketches, as well as the final print which will be approximately five feet square. Here's is an interview with Gary that coincided with the commission of the print.

Can you share your background with us? How did you get into illustration and fine art as a career?

I always knew that I wanted to draw pictures for a living. When I was 4, my kindergarten teacher wrote in my report card that my favorite activity was listening to him read aloud to the class because afterwards I would draw pictures based on what he read to us. I guess you could say I've been illustrating since I was 4. It wasn't until I went to art school (Ontario College of Art) that I even knew what a professional illustrator was. The revelation came when I discovered that having a personal voice and style was integral. I always assumed that clients told you what and how to draw. That was it, I knew what I wanted to do. After a few years as an illustrator, my personal voice started getting louder and louder and I began doing gallery shows. That started growing and now I do more fine art shows and projects.

How does your personal work differ from your professional work?

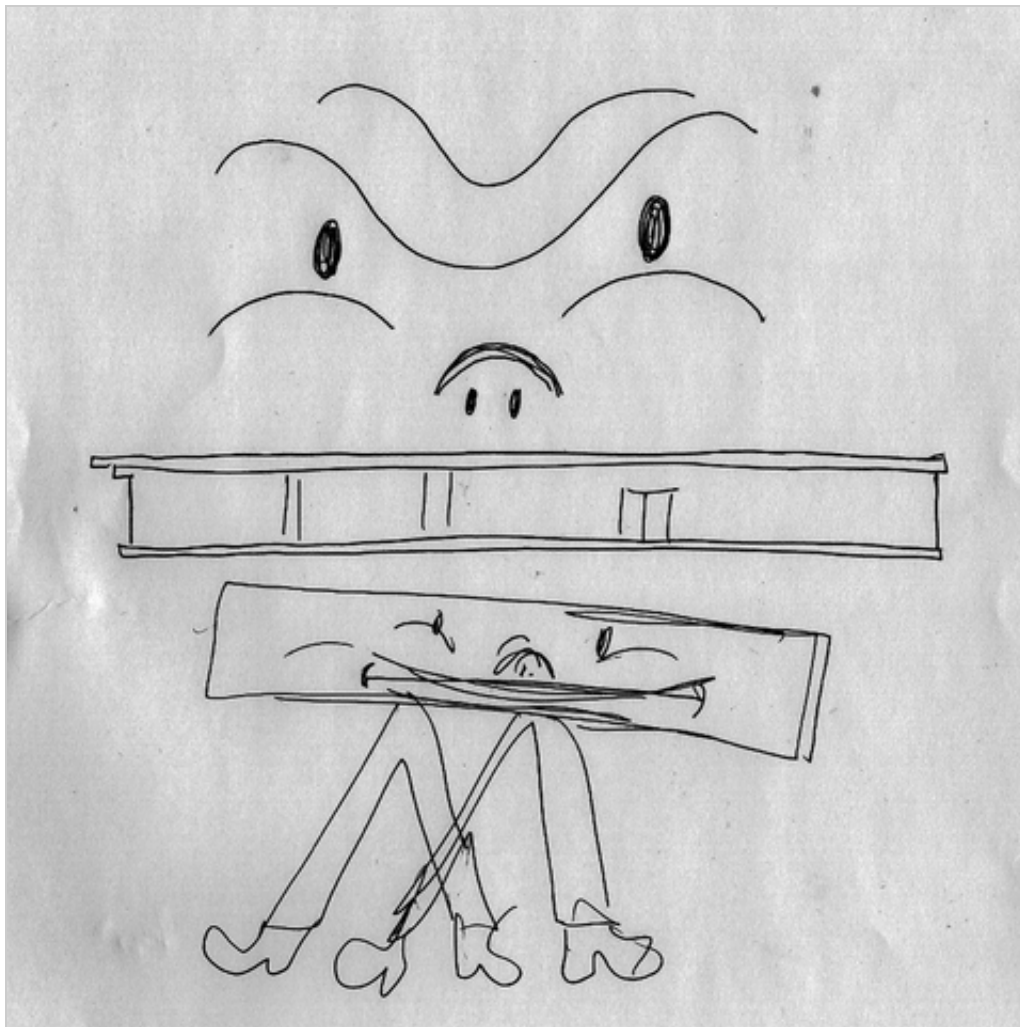
My personal work looks like my fine art work and maybe that's a testament to how lucky I am to have clients who let me do whatever I want. My gallery work consists of narrative themes, so the crossover is natural. When I can fit it in or if it's something that catches my fancy, I'll gladly take on an illustration project, but most of day is occupied with my career as a fine artist. For example, I'm working on my next show which will be in April at Lazarides (Greek St) in London, UK. It will be my first solo show with that gallery and I'm very excited.

How would you define your visual style or approach to art?

I would describe it as being part of the Pop Art school. I'm proudly a student of Warhol's, yet the similarities end when it comes to the imagery used to convey the connection with the viewer and how they relate to the piece. In my case, my characters and drawings are wholly original and not repurposed graphic and photos. My goal is to have the viewer feel like they've "seen" the work before. I love for nostalgia and ephemera, and the mark-making methods I employ harken to the old. Yet I aim for timelessness and with that, use themes of the human condition... struggle, hope, angst, etc.

What sort of background info did you use to familiarize yourself with the Maxon House project?

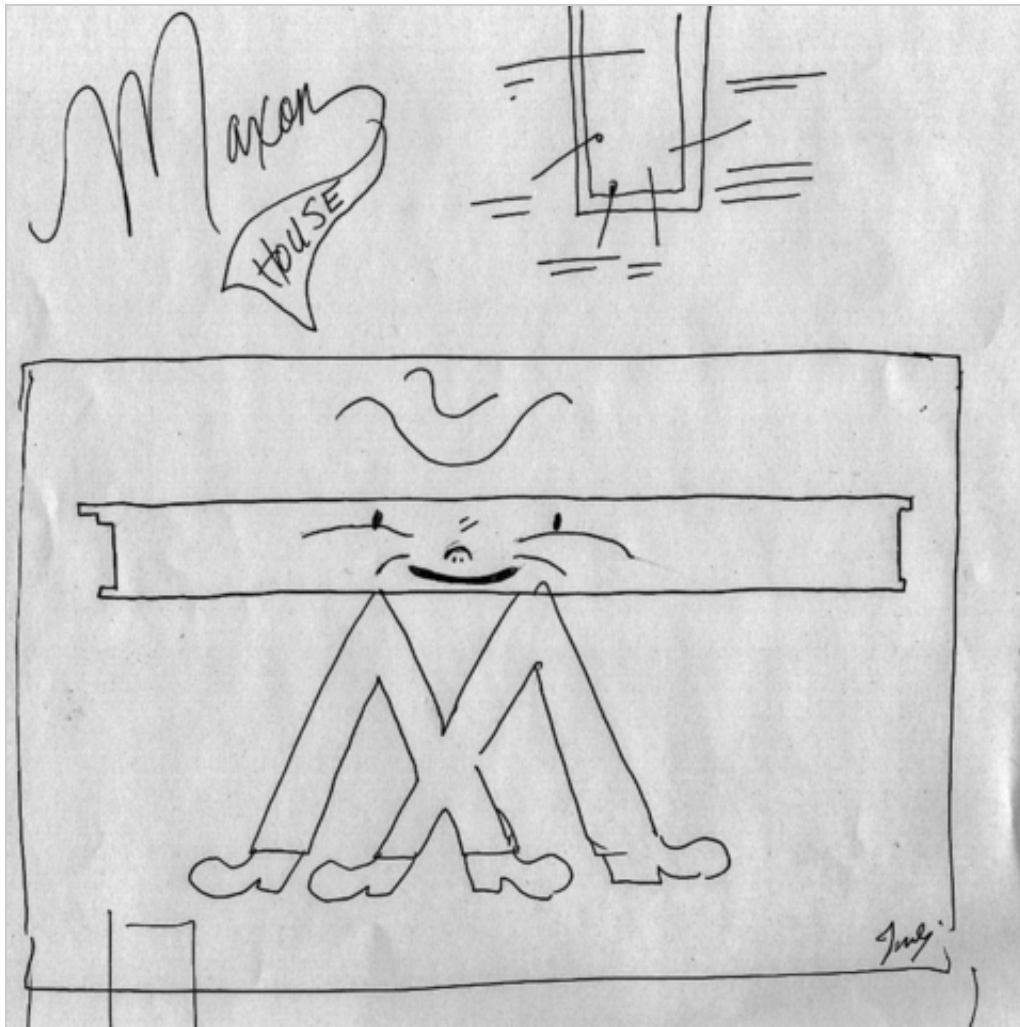
Lou Maxon and I have worked together a few times in the past so I was immediately comfortable. I knew this was a project where he wanted me to bring my own vision and idea to the art, so from the get-go it was a relaxing, fun vibe. I also have an idea of the things Lou likes so that helped a lot. He sent me photos of the house, some architectural drawings, the url to the project's website along with his family logo. I was armed with plenty of reference and from there I began to draw. I came up with a morphed graphic character utilizing the house and the logo. I love the way the 2 fit together so nicely and from there, the small addition of a face and some shoes gave the character some personality. It was so obvious that he needed to happen.



Some initial sketches, to develop the idea.

Tell me about the different visual elements you incorporated into the art?

I used a photo of the house, the Maxon logo, two architectural elevation site maps and a wonderful photo of a steel cog suspended by two chains. They seemed to fit together so well, like putting a puzzle together. I thought they created the best solution.



The idea develops further...

From the architecture side, it is said that Tom Kundig often likes to make architecture out of the owners story. How do you go about making art out of the different parts of the Maxon House project?

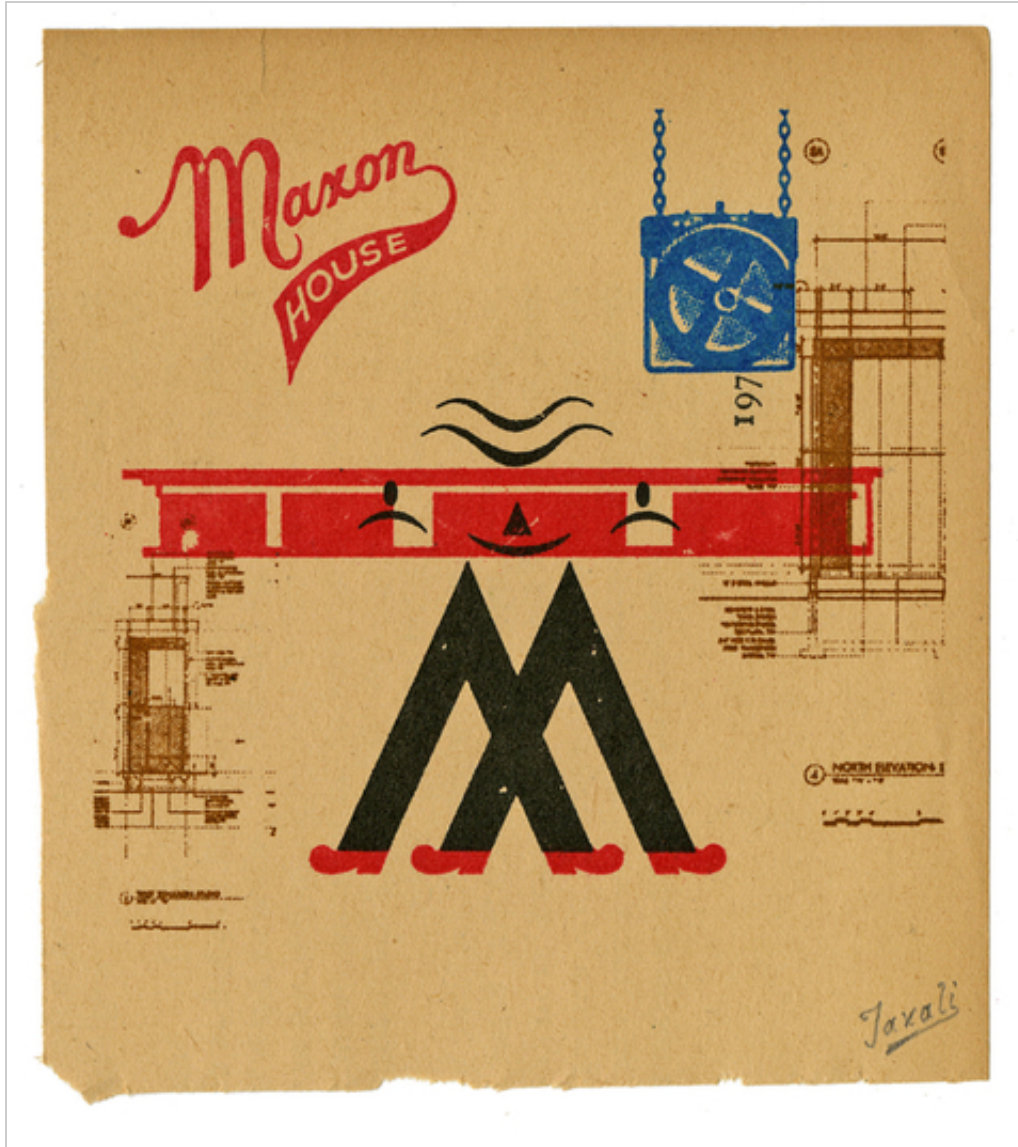
In the same way, to a degree. All art is a self portrait and even though it's Kundig telling the Maxon story, it's also Kundig's story. The same goes for the art I created. It's the Maxon story in that it's everything Maxon but it's how I see the Maxons and that part is key. The art is me taking what I know and saying, "This is how I perceive you." In addition to infusing the Maxon elements, I also created a faux logo as well and employed it in the art as part of my signature, which I do often in my work. Typography is an integral part of my work and it seemed fitting to balance it with the house character.

How did you choose the colors?

The house has a lots of earth colors, steel, and industrial textures. Therefore, I wanted to do a very minimal and graphic palette to reflect that spirit. I thought using red and black on parchment as the predominant colors would serve to make that happen.

What is your favorite type of architecture?

I love architecture that feels like a unity of human and environment. I love architecture that feels like a “gift” from the universe to aid us in how we interact in that space, yet feels like it was borne from the earth. I’m not talking about naturalistic constructions—that can be environmentally pedantic. Rather, structures that live like artistic sculptures. But the kind of sculpture that feels like they were always there, or just had to be. I don’t know how he does it so consistently, but Frank Gehry to me is a good example of an architect that understands this.



The finished print measures approximately 5 x 5 feet.

The Maxon House project is all about the collaboration of art and craft, what’s it like to know that your artwork will be permanently hanging in the house once its done?

It’s an honor. I really like Lou and am glad to be part of home and his life. And the house is so beautiful. Kundig did a remarkable job and when the universe unites positive, like-minded forces in this manner, the results are beautiful to witness.

Two new Gary Taxali artist monographs are being released. “I Love You, OK?” (published by teNeues) and “Mono Taxali” (published by 27_9). On Wednesday, September 21st, Gary will be signing both these books at a special release party at The Art Gallery of Ontario(<http://www.ago.net>) in

Toronto and on Saturday, Oct 8th at [La Luz de Jesus Gallery](http://www.laluzdejesus.com)(<http://www.laluzdejesus.com>) in Los Angeles. For more information, please visit [garytaxali.com](http://www.garytaxali.com)(<http://www.garytaxali.com>) and [taxalionline.com/blog](http://www.taxalionline.com/blog)(<http://www.taxalionline.com/blog>).

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