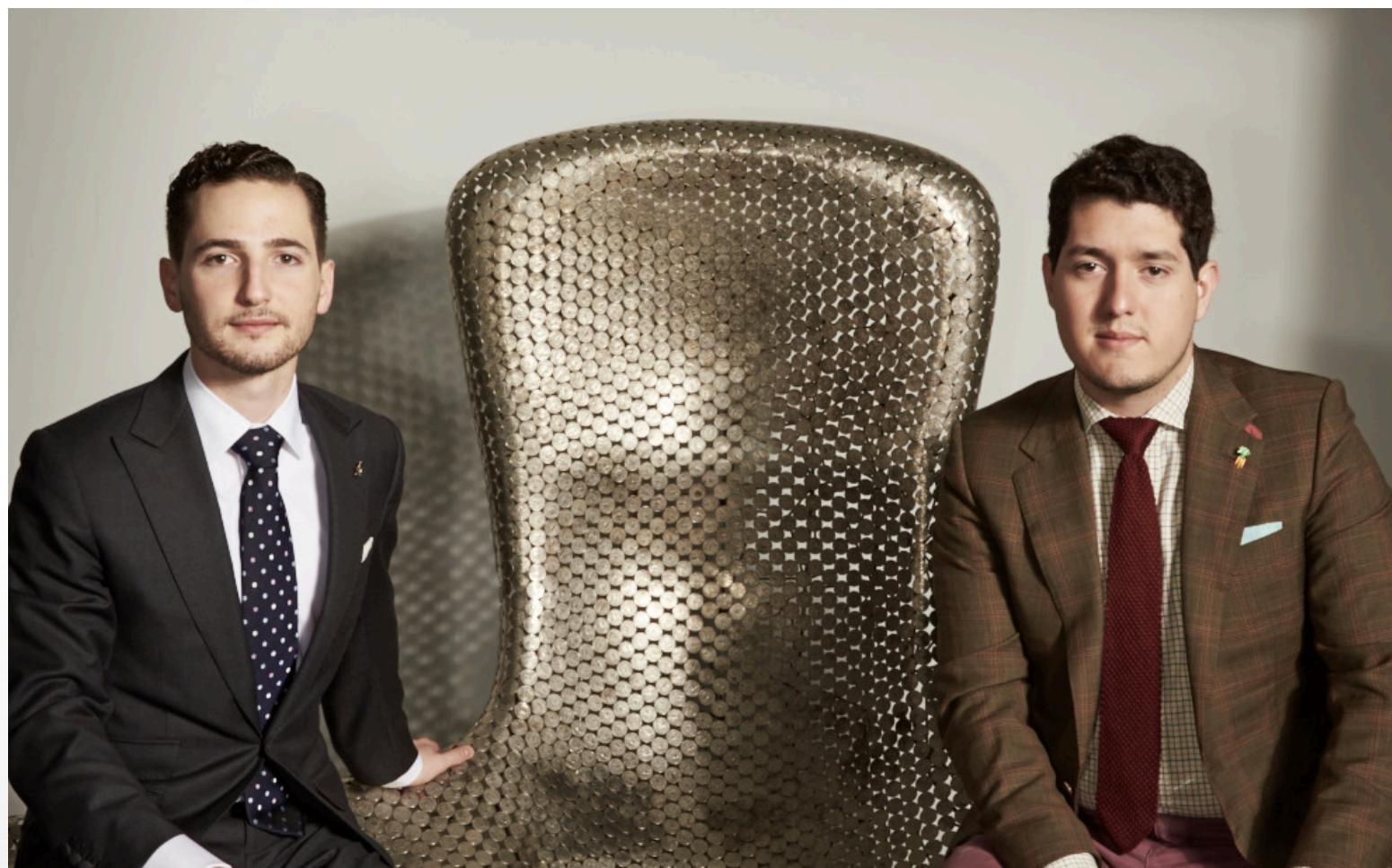


## #seen: gentlemen prefer m. de phocas

OCTOBER 2013 | BY ZACHARY WEISS | IN STYLE



Photography by Ben Kulo

**Jesus Torres** and **Alexis Zambrano** are the creators of the wildly popular men's accessories brand M. de Phocas. Named after the main character in Jean Lorrain's 1901 novel, "Monsieur de Phocas," the collection, mainly cuff links, are elegant and cheeky, like hamsters in a wheel or enamel gummy bears. A tiepin of a banana peel is described as "the remains of Josephine Baker's dress."


The design partners were childhood neighbors in Monterrey, Mexico, and later went to boarding school at age 12 in New Hampshire together. Torres, the rebellious one, confesses, "We were quite different; I was getting into trouble while Alexis enjoyed tea with the dean." What the two had in common was their love for art and design. But following school, Zambrano headed to Paris, where he enrolled in cooking classes at the Ritz Hotel, while Torres entered Pratt Institute's architecture program. By a stroke of luck, they met again in Manhattan where they reunited to apprentice in the Diamond District before launching M. de Phocas.

Today, the guys operate out of a studio in Chelsea. Their design process is organic. "It's always great when we have a new idea that we bounce back and forth, joke around with it and see what the finished product becomes," Zambrano explains. And now they are starting to make pieces for glamorous girls. They crafted custom pansy earrings for the doyenne of good taste, **Carolina Herrera**, and **Indre Rockefeller** bought the banana-peel stickpin. A personal favorite for females is a "Three Little Pigs & Big Bad Wolf" ring made exclusively for a Moda Operandi women's capsule collection. While the women's accessories market is still mostly uncharted territory for them, Zambrano says that's the next step. "We intend to eventually become an accessory-based brand for both gentlemen and ladies that share a similar liking for our curiosity and humor."

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