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INSIDE SAM MALOOF'S HOME

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NOVEMBER 1997

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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1997 NO.13

On the cover: *In Sam Maloof's house, built in stages over the decades, Maloof's own furniture is blended with a rich collection of craft and fine art by other hands. See p. 66. Photo by Jonathan Binzen.*

Nature's Imperfections Fit a Bed Perfectly, p. 38

DEPARTMENTS

Tables and Chairs with a Split Personality, p. 51

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letters

I DROP WHAT I'M DOING WHEN *HF* ARRIVES

I have been following the published letters on the format of *Home Furniture* and wish to lend my support for you to keep the format as you are doing. As a charter subscriber and woodworker, *Home Furniture* is exactly what I have been looking for in a magazine. *Fine Woodworking* is also in my magazine rack and I gleaned all I could from the articles on furniture design in it. Now I stop almost everything when *Home Furniture* arrives and I continually refer back to past issues for ideas.

It would be great if you could expand to once a month, but I have a feeling that articles are not coming in ready to print to fulfill that publication rate.

For those who are asking for more about techniques and methods, they are way off the mark. These are the property of the craftsman making the piece. You do provide a way to contact the craftsman, so those really interested in technique or methods can find them.

—Walt Turpening, Houston, Texas

INSPIRATION CAN REPLACE TOO LITTLE INFORMATION

This is in response to Arnold Nelson's letter "Too Much Information Left to the Imagination" in the July issue (*HF* #11). I subscribe to *Home Furniture* for the pleasure of viewing finely crafted pieces that are for the most part well beyond my skill level, but I am well aware that it is not a project magazine. However, I was so taken by the Pennsylvania-German dower chest by Harry L. Smith in the Winter 1994 issue (*HF* #1, p. 54) that I put it aside for further study as a possible project.

I consider myself an intermediate level woodworker and had never attempted a project like this involving considerable hand-cut dovetailing and "too much left to the imagination." Remembering a comment made by one of the contributors explaining that he never considers the entire project but examines the individual pieces of details which simplifies what would otherwise be an overwhelming project, I decided to try my hand.

I examined and measured other dower chests in museums and copies in museum gift shops, including Winterthur and Williamsburg. This produced my own detail plans with little difficulty. The woodwork was straightforward construction and the dovetailing proved to be an easily conquered challenge. I called on the talents of a niece for the extraordinary iconographic painting, and we now have a treasured heirloom in the family, thanks to the inspiration provided by Mr. Smith and *Home Furniture*.

—Paul L. Stotler, Leonardtown, Md.

YOU CAN ALSO LEARN FROM WHAT YOU DON'T SEE

I have just read the letter from Arnold Nelson in the July 1997 issue. After reading this and several other disparaging letters over several issues concerning lack of "detailed design information," I absolutely must respond to Mr. Nelson's and others' complaints about what they do not

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receive from their subscription.

From the first time I cracked open *Home Furniture*, I saw the contents as a challenge to be met, designs to be studied and generally an inspiration to build the same quality furniture you feature there. I was very much a rookie furniture builder at the time, but within that time I took the challenge, studied and was inspired enough to start my own business. I built a table for an advertisement photo, and placed that ad in your magazine. The ad has been running for several issues now.

I see *Home Furniture* as a magazine about design and inspiration—a showcase for guys like me who work a piece of wood from start to finish, figuring out the details in the middle, making a piece to demonstrate the talents God has lent us. Mr. Nelson gets to "design things for a living, deal with drawings every day, and ... enjoy woodworking." So do I. I was an aircraft mechanic before I became an aircraft design engineer, and a carpenter before a furniture maker. Therefore, I feel that if you can't build it, you can't design it properly, and if you didn't design it, it isn't yours.

Mr. Nelson also mentions the amount of information left to the imagination. Thank you. I have a philosophy that anyone can "learn" what is obvious, but you must also learn from information that is not presented. Anybody can copy and build someone else's piece, but the entire process of design and construction is what makes the final product satisfying.

—Dave Gaddis, Fort Worth, Texas

CATALYZED FINISHES: SOME WORK, SOME DON'T

Thanks to Taunton Press for another great magazine. I also subscribe to *Fine Woodworking* and *Fine Homebuilding* and love every issue. I may be building a home in the next two years and will find all of the information useful.

I just had to write about your article on catalyzed finishes in the April 1997 (*HF* #10) issue ("The Finish Line," p. 80). I am a guitar repairman and builder with over 20 years experience in finishing. Nitrocellulose lacquer is my finish of choice but lately I have been doing some experimenting. I have had great luck with Sherwin-Williams high-gloss Kemvar catalyzed varnish. It sprays like lacquer, but hardens better and rubs out the same without clogging the paper when sanding with 600 grit. It has a very clear look as opposed to some that have a greenish or bluish cast. I have mixed colors into it and had great results. I will be using it more and more as I get used to it.

I have also used the water-based Sherwin-Williams catalyzed varnish, but with terrible results. It has an odd bluish cast, especially on dark woods, it sags terribly and it completely dripped off a guitar body sealed with their vinyl sealer even though the directions said it was usable that way. I also had it not harden over a paste wood filler it was supposed to be ideal for. I am still experimenting but have little hope it will work for me.

—Ron Lira, Oklahoma City, Okla.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR A BOOK ON BEDS

The Taunton Press is looking for photos of well-designed and well-crafted beds for an upcoming book on bed making. We're especially interested in innovative approaches to classic designs, but we'd like to see unique and traditional designs as well. We'll acknowledge all submissions and return all material we can't use. Please send photos (35mm slides or larger format transparencies) along with a description of your work to: Joanne Renna, The Taunton Press, 63 South Main Street, P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470. All materials must be received by February 1, 1998.

Submitting an article. *If you have an interesting story about how you designed a piece of furniture, we'd like to hear about it. Send a letter with photos to* Home Furniture *Editorial, 63 S. Main St., P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. We pay for articles we publish and return materials we can't use.*

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on display

BY JONATHAN BINZEN

A Very Fine Woodworking Store

Windows on the world of Northwest furniture making. In one store in downtown Seattle you can find work by many of the best craft furniture makers in the region—the cooperatively run Northwest Fine Woodworking.

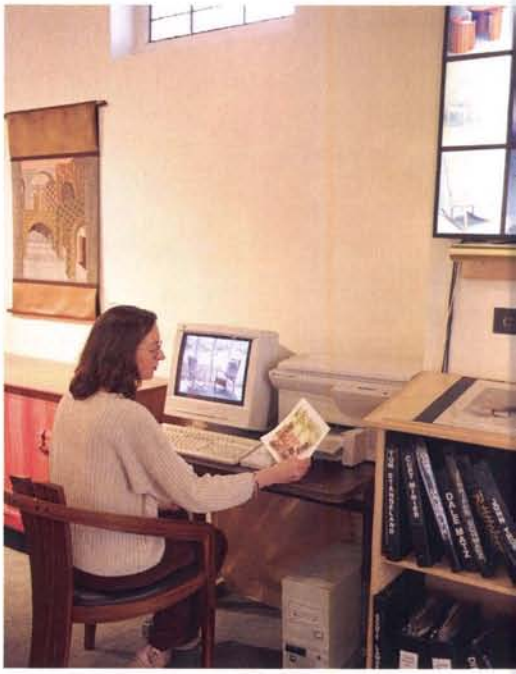
Good handmade furniture is hard to find. Much of the best work is done on commission, with many of the best makers only occasionally selling through retail outlets. Even if you find yourself in a state or a city where plenty of top-notch craft furniture is being made, actually laying your eyes on some can be a real test of your bushwhacking skills. Seattle is a significant exception. Here there's a store where you can quickly get a fix on much of the best craft furniture being made in the region. And it is quite a region. In recent years, the Seattle area has emerged as one of the preeminent places in the country to find fresh furniture.

Get off the airplane and in half an hour you can be downtown in Pioneer Square. Your literary antennae will bend toward the superb Elliott Bay Bookstore, and your mind's lazy eye will loll out toward the sunny San Juan Islands. But if you are a real lover of furniture your heart will lead you through the drizzle to the bright, inviting store on the corner of South Jackson Street and First Avenue South: Northwest Fine Woodworking.

The store is that rarity, a long-lived co-op. Founded in 1980 by 20 woodworkers who put up $50 apiece and took turns minding the store, it now has 28 members, scores of non-members who also show their work, nine full-time employees, a spiffy 4,000-square-foot space, a smaller satellite store in suburban Kirkland (cannily close to Microsoft) and expected gross sales this year of just less than $2 million.

The level of work is quite high and the range is wide. Almost all the best furniture makers in the area show their work here, including Curtis Erpelding, Robert Spangler, Judith Ames, Thomas Stangeland, Ross Day,

Functional diversity. The stylistic range of work is broad, but nearly all the furniture in the gallery emphasizes function.



Accessible artisans. To see work not on display, customers can browse designers' portfolios or search an electronic image bank, printing out objects that interest them.

Photos: Jonathan Binzen

Furniture Buyers:

When you call *craftman's corner* advertisers, please tell them you saw their ad in *Home Furniture*.

Showtime. The main store mounts six to eight shows per year, some of them themed group shows, others featuring one or two makers. In June, Robert Spangler showed bedroom furniture in bubinga.

Hank Holzer, Stewart Wurtz and Spencer Horn. The stylistic parameters are wide enough to include Erpelding's updated barrister's bookcases and Aalto-like stacking chairs, Stangeland's scrupulous paeans to Greene and Greene, Holzer's expressively painted cabinets and Evert Sodergren's Japanese tansu chests. Tying it all together is a shared functionalism, a determination among members to make a living and not just a statement with their furniture.

You'll find turnings here in addition to furniture, and a range of smaller, less expensive works in wood, from notepads and pencil holders to cheese boards and jewelry boxes. These smaller items are targeting a different clientele, in an attempt to provide financial ballast to the slower-selling, bigger-ticket items. As the store's director, Christopher Brookes, says, "We position ourselves in the tourist stream." But don't let that frighten you. The kind of tourists he has in mind are not just looking for trinkets. Forty percent of the furniture sold through the store last year went out of state, and much of that out of the country.

Although its members continue to refer to it as "the gallery," Northwest Fine Woodworking recently dropped "Gallery" from its name. This reflects the thinking of Brookes, who prefers to avoid the precious, standoffish connotations of the word. Those connotations are dispelled anyway by walking into the store, where the work is displayed casually and the staff is unfailingly friendly.

In some galleries the designers are referred to as artists and kept at a reverential distance. Here, they are artisans, and every effort is made to open the lines of communication. Staff members emphasize that what is on display is only the beginning and you are encouraged to contact the makers (which is only natural, because they own the place).

There is always a major show of work by one or several designers underway. When I last visited, impressive new work in bubinga by Robert Spangler filled both large display windows: bedroom furniture in one window, dining room furniture in the other. Members not having a larger show will normally keep at most a handful of pieces on the floor. But if you want to see more by any particular maker, you can browse their portfolio. On a bookshelf along one wall there are dozens of them.

You can also browse by keyboard. The store has installed a computer beside the portfolio shelves and is in the process of creating electronic portfolios. You can go to an individual maker's page and flip through a number of their pieces and then print out a piece you particularly like on the color printer. If you have a specific need to fill, you can search across the whole bank of makers, coming up with dining tables, say, by 28 different designers.

If you fall in love with a piece on the floor but want photos to take home while you mull the purchase, they've got a solution for that. Using a digital camera, they'll shoot any piece from any angle a customer requests, plug the camera into the computer terminal and print out the image.

Fittingly, for a store located smack in the on-ramp of the information superhighway, the gallery has also recently developed a Web site, where you can page through several dozen images and get a taste of what the store has to offer. All of this technological forward-thinking is just to let you know that in Seattle, they still make furniture the way they used to. And you can actually find it.

Jonathan Binzen is an associate editor at Home Furniture. *Northwest Fine Woodworking's main store: 101 South Jackson St., Seattle, WA 98104; (206) 625-0542. Second store: 122 Central Way, Kirkland, WA 98033; (206) 889-1513. Web site: www.nwfinewoodworking.com.*

Fine dining is the norm. Like much of the work on display at Northwest Fine Woodworking, Robert Spangler's dining table and chairs exhibit careful craftsmanship and functional but zesty design.

CALIFORNIA

American Decorative Arts Forum
October 14. De Young Museum, San Francisco
Donald A. Davidoff lectures on the work of L. and J.G. Stickley. Call (415) 499-0701.

CONNECTICUT

Woodworkers Guild 10th Annual Fall Members Show
October 24-November 30. Wethersfield Historical Society, Wethersfield
Furniture and other work from craftsmen throughout Connecticut. Call (860) 653-0316.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

American Case Furniture
Through October 31. DAR Museum, Washington
A selection that illustrates changes in furniture construction and design from the 17th to 19th centuries. Call (202) 879-3241.

Washington Home Design and Furniture Show
October 3-5. Washington, D.C. Convention Center, Washington
A new show of handcrafted furniture and home furnishings, both one-of-a-kind and limited production. Call (301) 261-2180.

ILLINOIS

The Woods at Hand
Through November 8. Southern Illinois Art Gallery, Whittington
An exhibit of Kyle Kinser's furniture, 1982-1997. Call (618) 629-2220.

MARYLAND

Meredith Gallery
Baltimore
"Made in Maryland 6," a show of art furniture by regional artists, runs through October 31. "Tables and Chairs" will run November 1-December 20. Call (410) 837-3575.

MASSACHUSETTS

Beyond the Screen: Chinese Furniture of the 16th and 17th Century
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
An ongoing display, accompanied until October 26 by "Chinoiserie: The Lure of the East," a look at how European decorative arts took on Asian influences. Call (617) 267-9300.

North Bennet Street School Open House
November 7-8. North Bennet Street School, Boston
Learn about the training available at the school's traditional furniture-making program. Call (617) 227-0155.

MICHIGAN

Leelanau Furniture Show
October 10-12. Old Art Building, Leland
A second annual show of innovative

furniture and furnishings by regional artists. Call (616) 228-6633.

MINNESOTA

Northern Woods: An Exhibition of Fine Woodworking
October 16-19. Southdale Center, Edina
An annual group show sponsored by the Minnesota Woodworker's Guild. Call (612) 544-7278.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Shakers as Furniture Designers
October 25. Canterbury Shaker Village, Canterbury
Furniture maker David Lamb gives a seminar on the historical sources and evolution of Shaker design. Call (603) 783-9511.

NEW MEXICO

Home Interior and Furniture Show
October 24-26. Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque
Over 150 craftsmen, many working in Southwestern styles, exhibit work in a show presented by Santa Fe Furniture Expo. Call (800) 823-0163.

NEW YORK

The Furniture of George Hunzinger: Invention & Innovation in 19th-Century America
November 21, 1997-February 15, 1998. The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn
The work of a chairmaker who was one of the leading creators of patent furniture. Call (718) 638-5000.

Making His Mark: The Work of Shaker Craftsman Orren Haskins
Through November 2. Shaker Museum and Library, Old Chatham
The life of a Shaker master cabinetmaker, seen through more than 30 objects he made between 1833 and 1890. Call (518) 794-9100.

NORTH CAROLINA

The Chair Show II
October 4, 1997-January 4, 1998. Folk Art Center, Asheville
This biannual show (photo of previous show at left), juried by Sam Maloof, Wendy Maruyama and Michael Monroe, features recent chairs from throughout the country. Call (704) 298-7928.

PENNSYLVANIA

Scandinavian Design 1930-1980
Through October 1. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
A small show that includes furniture by Alvar Aalto and Hans Wegner. Call (215) 684-7860.

QUEBEC, CANADA

The Painted Furniture of French Canada 1700-1840
Through March 15, 1998. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull
Over 80 pieces, in styles from Louis XIV to Chippendale. Call (819) 776-7000.

RHODE ISLAND

Fine Furnishings
November 14-16. Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence
A show of New England craftsmen presenting custom and production furniture and furnishings. The first day, November 14th, is for the trade only. Call (401) 846-1115.

TENNESSEE

12th Annual Master Woodworking Show
October 24-26. Candy Factory, Knoxville
A regional show of furniture and other work sponsored by the East Tennessee Woodworkers Guild. Call (423) 687-7474.

VIRGINIA

Furniture of the American South
November 8, 1997-December 31, 1998. DeWitt Wallace Gallery, Williamsburg
120 examples of Southern furniture. A preview of 36 pieces will be at New York City's Equitable Gallery September 11-October 31. Call (757) 220-7554.

WASHINGTON

Northwest Fine Woodworking
Seattle
Work by furniture maker Paul Schürch is on display September 18-November 6; a box and container exhibition follows and runs until December 31. Call (206) 625-0542.

Listings in this calendar are free. Send complete materials, including a phone number to call for more information, to ***Calendar,*** Home Furniture, *63 S. Main St., P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. The deadline for the February/March issue is November 20.*

Photo: Courtesy of Southern Highland Craft Guild, Asheville, N.C.

craftsman's corner

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Attention Gallery Owners:
See page 19 for a new section just for you. Please call 800-926-8776, ext. 829 for more details.

the drawing board

BY SILAS KOPF

Pouncing Makes a Mark in Marquetry

In centuries past, when an artist or craftsman needed to produce identical line drawings, pouncing was often employed. First used in the 18th century, the technique is claimed to give a greater fidelity of line than today's photocopy machines. I took an interest in it because of its application to the production of marquetry panels.

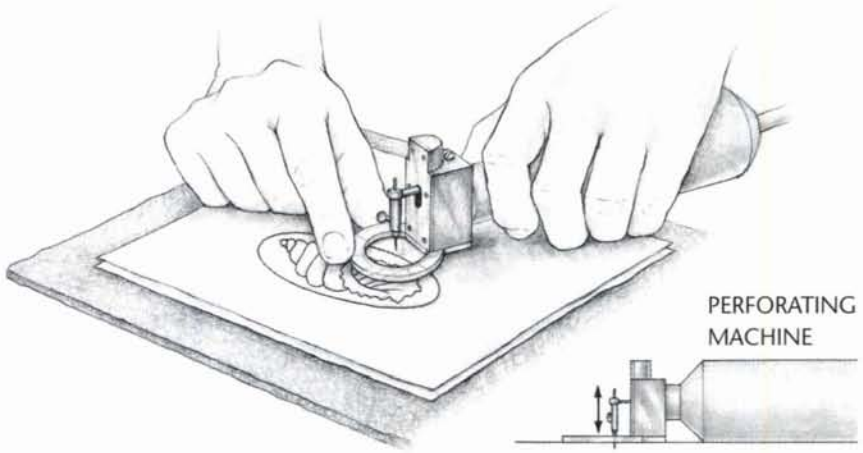
Traditional marquetry required that the cutter had at least two perfect copies of the original drawing. Complicated marquetry motifs needed many copies, at least one for each species used in the panel. But the simplest marquetry only required two. One copy was needed to glue onto the dark wood and one the light wood. So pouncing was used to keep the original motif intact and yet allow the craftsman to reproduce the motif again and again.

To make copies of the design, the master drawing was placed over a sheet of paper. Both were then placed on a soft surface such as felt. A fine needle was used to poke small holes through the master drawing and the second sheet of paper below. Spaced closely together, the holes essentially created a "dot-to-dot" line drawing that resembled the original. The closer the dots, the more accurate the duplication of the original line. Care was taken to allow enough space between the holes so the paper didn't become totally perforated and fall apart.

In the 20th century a tool was developed for this purpose. The perforating machine has a motor and a rheostat to control the up and down action of the needle. The size of each hole is exactly the same because the needle goes through the paper at the same depth each time. For marquetry, it is desirable to have a hole about $\frac{1}{10}$ of a millimeter in diameter. This line of .1 mm holes is the margin for error that the marqueteur shoots for.

After the pricking is complete, the paper should be flipped over and lightly sanded with a 1200 grit sandpaper. This will remove the burr that is created by the needle

POUNCING MAKES PERFECT



To make copies of a motif, a fine needle pokes small holes along the lines of the master drawing and through a sheet of paper below.

The lower sheet is then placed over a clean sheet. Bituminous powder is lightly rubbed over the holes, and falls through to the sheet below.

When heated, the dots of powder on the clean sheet melt to form a solid line.

Drawings: Kathy Bray; photo: Jonathan Binzen

Motifs multiplied. Pouncing enables a marqueteur to reproduce favorite motifs again and again. Here, original designs are kept safe in a binder.

pushing through the paper and make for a hole with greater clarity and a consistent diameter.

Traditionally, once a copy had been made, the pricked paper was placed directly over the wood to be cut. Powder, such as chalk, was then wiped on top with a piece of cloth. The powder would fall through the pattern of holes to the wood below. But because the powdered dots didn't permanently fix to the wood, a better solution was needed.

Today, instead of being placed directly on the wood, the pricked paper is placed on another sheet of paper. An applicator or "rubber" made of a piece of felt rolled in a short, tight cylinder is dipped into bituminous powder. The rubber is then lightly passed over the paper and the powder falls through the holes to the second sheet below. Once you blow away any excess powder, only a series of dots should be left. The paper is then held above a source of heat (in my case, a hot plate) until it slightly yellows. At this point, the powder melts and becomes fixed to the paper.

For marquetry, the patterns are cut out and glued onto the wood with hot hide glue. It's important to have the whole pattern visible so that when it is cut, a border is left around it. This way, when you cut through the paper and into the wood you will just "erase" the dotted line. The tolerance of the cut will then be no more than .1 mm, the width of the line of dots.

Silas Kopf makes furniture in Northampton, Mass., with a specialty in marquetry.

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The Two Faces of an American Masterpiece

Colonial cabinetmakers didn't waste time on hidden details. Is there a lesson here?

BY MARK GALLINI

The magnificent Boston desk-and-bookcase stands alone on a platform in the center of an exhibition room at Winterthur Museum, its serpentine mahogany surfaces bathed in carefully placed light. "This piece is arguably the highest level of Boston cabinetmaking and carving in the middle of the 18th century," says Mike Podmaniczky, the museum's furniture conservator. "It doesn't get any racier than this in Boston in this period."

"And yet," he says, walking around to the rear of the piece, where the original wooden back has been replaced with a sheet of clear plastic, "this thing was just slapped together."

Podmaniczky isn't joking. The ends of the drawers are stacked crookedly, like apple crates in an orchard. Unsupported drawer dividers sag, the horizontals peppered with scraps used for drawer stops. What is most jarring is the dead brown color of the unfinished wood. Even to the noncuratorial eye, it's apparent that the "out of sight, out of mind" attitude is not a new one.

Yet this desk-and-bookcase, or secretary, is not the furniture equivalent of a Hollywood set. It really is a masterpiece. The front—with graduated drawer fronts, mirrored doors and carved Corinthian pilasters—is beautifully proportioned. As Podmaniczky demonstrates, drawers and doors fit and fit well. "When they chose to dovetail together 10 drawers, every dovetail is done perfectly," Podmaniczky says. "They

The best of Beantown, circa 1770

Boston produced spectacular examples of craftsmanship in the 18th century, and none better than this desk-and-bookcase built in the decade before the Revolutionary War. Peek behind the scenes and the roughness of the back tells a different story, one about economy and efficiency.

Time was money, even in colonial days. Mismatched scraps used for the drawer guides and stops clearly show that the cabinetmakers were adept at furniture-making triage, putting in the time only where it counted.

Inside the case is the handwritten name of its owner in 1778, Josiah Quincy of Braintree, Massachusetts. Scholars do not know if Quincy commissioned the piece or bought it after it was built.

Secret compartments were only semi-finished, like these four drawers in the center of the case. The box of drawers can be removed, which accounts for its neater construction and finish.

Photos: Bill Deering, unless otherwise noted; photo facing page and middle right photo this page: Courtesy of Winterthur Museum

How faithful should a reproduction be?

How closely can, or should, a piece like the Boston desk-and-bookcase be copied today? Should a reproduction furniture maker improve on it, and, if so, where does one draw the line? We asked five furniture makers to give us their views on their craft in an era of power tools and plywood.

Steve Lash, Detroit, Mich.

STAY CLOSE TO HOW THEY DID IT

"I probably would approach a piece the same way the original builder did," even if there are better ways to make it today, says Lash, who has tackled such challenging projects as a Goddard desk, a pair of Queen Anne armchairs and the Seymour tall-case clock he is now working on in his basement shop. The original builders, he says, "worked fast, and in an environment that doesn't exist today." Like most other reproduction furniture makers, Lash does use power tools, but he does so sparingly. "I'm going to get as close to how they did it or would have done it—or as close as I can."

Where the sun shines, so does the workmanship. The rococo carving of the shells, broken-arch pediment and flame finials represent the highest level of cabinetmaking that survives from mid-18th-century Boston.

are not sloppy." What goes unseen, however, was clearly not worth the cabinetmakers' effort or time to make perfect.

"There was a different aesthetic of perfection in the 18th century," says Allan Breed, an acclaimed reproduction furniture maker in Berwick, Maine. "There wasn't any such thing as machine perfect back then. The most perfect thing was handmade, no matter what it was—silver, glass, whatever. It wasn't expected that the insides and back were slick like people expect now."

Objects like the Boston desk-and-bookcase have become almost sacred. They fetch stratospheric prices and become the subjects of academic study. They represent the golden age of the woodworkers' craft, and practically beg to be reproduced. But place the originals back-to-back with some of those reproductions and you find that, in some cases, the new pieces are better—more sensibly engineered, built of higher quality materials, and often to more exacting standards. So how faithful can, or should, a reproduction be?

CONNOISSEURS DIDN'T MIND A KNOT OR TWO

If the Boston desk-and-bookcase represents the upper reaches of American 18th-century cabinetmaking, then expectations certainly have changed. Even on the outside

Left photo this page: Glenn Triest

its grandeur is marred by what would be called defects today. One of the sides was glued—now split—and has a knot amid grain running diagonally toward the back. The inside of the writing surface contains a large knot as well, a common blemish for the time because it often allowed the cabinetmakers to display wild figure on the most important side—the outside.

Today such flaws—if they can be called flaws—would have kept this piece from ever leaving the shop floor. But they seemed not to have bothered Josiah Quincy of Braintree, Massachusetts, who bought the piece in 1778. (Scholars are not sure whether Quincy commissioned the secretary himself.) Nor did such blemishes prevent the curators at Winterthur from putting this secretary in their pantheon of American masterpieces.

This is because furniture of the 18th century was commissioned with different expectations and made under different circumstances. In today's shop you might find college-educated craftsmen with a craving for hand tools, but it is pretty safe to say that cabinetmakers with graduate degrees were as rare as biscuit joiners in an 18th-century furniture shop. Young men started in the business through indenture or family tradition and spent their first years doing the sweaty, monotonous tasks relegated to power tools today, such as sawing lumber into dimensioned planks and planing boards flat.

In a sophisticated city like Boston in the 1750s, craftsmen were highly specialized. Although the identity of the maker of this desk-and-bookcase remains a mystery, an expensive secretary like this probably would have been passed from hand to hand or farmed out to other shops for joinery, carving, turning and finishing. "You see a very unselfconscious product in the 18th century," says Podmaniczky. "There was nothing beyond putting something together that pleased the client, looked good, and got them paid."

What there was not, back then, was a manufactured alternative. Every piece of furniture—high-style or low, expensive or cheap—was produced in the same manner and with the same methods and tools. The only differences were in the choice of materials or the amount of ornamentation. "They were trying to do the work as economically as possible, and up against people wanting stuff quickly, just like today," says Breed, who has spent much of his life peeking under the hoods of American antiques. "There was a lot of crummy work and some great work, just like today."

How furniture was perceived in a social context was much different in the 18th century as well. "People today buy furniture to produce settings in their homes," Podmaniczky says. "A room is something that you enter and take in. In the 18th century, furniture was movable and dragged out for different uses. You projected your station in life by calling attention not to a whole setting but to certain features of

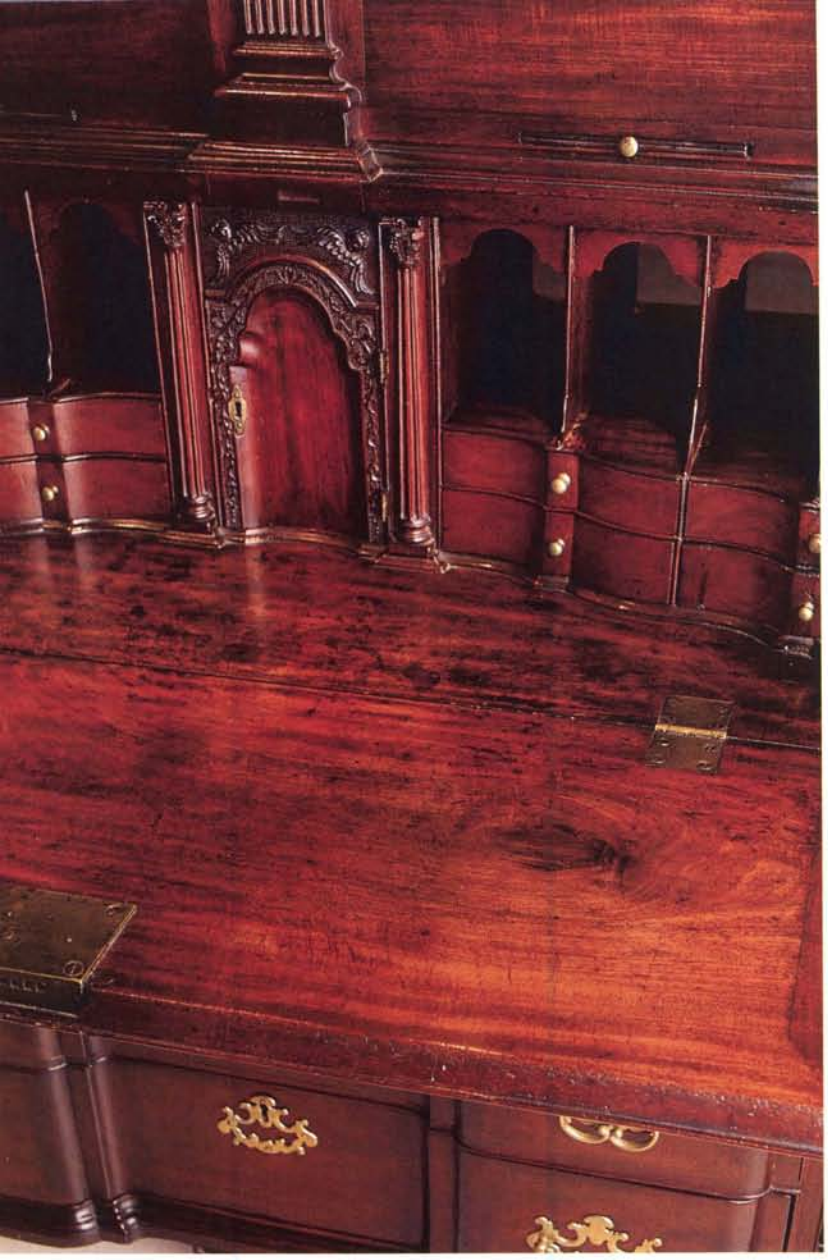
Allan Breed, Berwick, Maine

BUILDERS WERE FASTER THEN

"There are some ways to get around those technical things that made pieces crack, but then, on the other hand, some of the things I make are going to crack," Breed says. He might consider a different construction method to improve on a failed original "when it won't affect the look of a piece. But I don't do a lot of high-tech stuff." The one thing contemporary cabinetmakers may never be able to reproduce, he says, is speed. "I think you would be amazed at how fast they could do stuff—something they were familiar with making. The level of skill was higher, as far as using hand tools."

No sidesplitting matter. The joiner who assembled the carcase of this piece glued it to the molding above the bracket feet, a costly mistake. As the wood lost moisture, it split.

Top photo this page: Timothy D. Schreiner



Knot a problem. To display figured grain on the outside, 18th-century cabinetmakers often sacrificed the looks of the inside by using boards with knots or other defects, as in the slant-top of the Boston desk.

Lance Patterson, Boston, Mass.

WE DON'T COPY MISTAKES

"It's difficult to copy something if you know it's not a good idea," says Lance Patterson, a cabinetmaking instructor and furniture maker at the North Bennet Street School in Boston. "The guy who made (the original) probably would do it differently a second time." Students at North Bennet Street often borrow improvements from other pieces when making reproductions, and instructors teach students how to use modern methods and tools. In some cases, students will use methods popular in other countries—England, for example—that did not reach America until after the original was built. "We don't reproduce flaws," Patterson says.

a given object. When you're sitting down to play cards you are showing off a fine piece of wood or an intricate carving." The Boston desk-and-bookcase would have proudly proclaimed its owner as a learned man of means, with correspondence to attend to.

IF WE IMPROVE ON THE ORIGINALS, HOW FAITHFUL IS THE REPRODUCTION?

Reproducing a piece of furniture which was designed and built for a different era, then, raises a question. How faithful should the builder be? The answers cover the spectrum, from hobbyists who will replicate a piece as closely as possible—faults and all—to perfectly machined, flawlessly finished pieces that bear a photographic resemblance to the original but underneath are thoroughly modern animals.

Winterthur itself licenses manufacturers to reproduce pieces in its collection, but these companies make no pretense of reproducing the methods and joinery used to construct the originals. "Even if we could hire cabinetmakers to make exact reproductions, virtually all the people who buy museum reproductions would not be interested," Podmaniczky says. Economics aside, such pieces would contain imperfections and "people in the age of Formica and veneered plywood do not accept that sort of thing. There will be no sort of movement in these pieces, no organic response to

Top right photo this page: Timothy D. Schreiner

the environment around it that causes it to take on its own personality through age and patination. They are captured in amber and perfectly preserved for certainly a couple of generations."

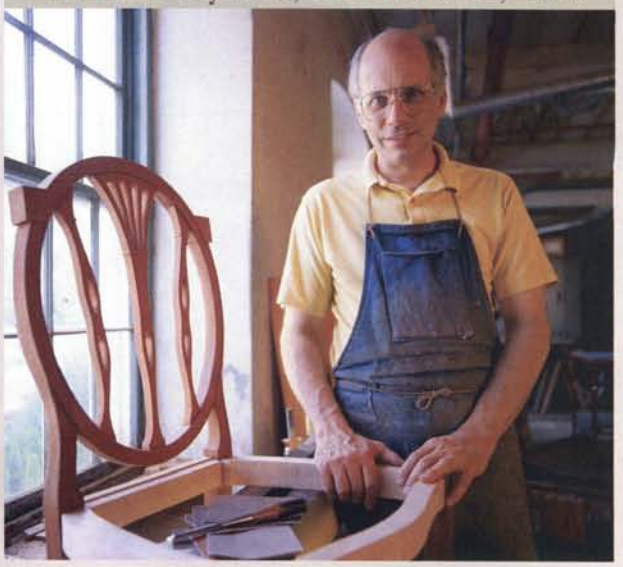
Among one-of-a-kind furniture makers, there is a range of opinion. Most agree that, at least in terms of engineering and durability, today's craftsmen might have the edge. "People expect integrity throughout the piece," says Lance Patterson, who teaches traditional furniture making at the North Bennet Street School in Boston. "We don't teach methods that don't last or are shoddy-looking. In that way we're better."

One advantage today's cabinetmakers may have is time. The marketplace for reproductions of 18th-century classics allows for—and because of the cost, insists on—more time to be lavished on the finish of these pieces than was on the originals. "Nowadays people have the luxury of sometimes being able to spend more time than they should on something," says Breed.

In a way, some reproductions almost become exercises in process as much as object, the hand-scraping of a surface a conscious act with the goal of replicating a lost feel. On the other hand, a piece can be constructed today with all the techniques learned over the past 200 years. In either case, are they being made in the same spirit as the original? Walter Raynes, a Baltimore furniture maker and antiques restorer, doesn't think so. "Most of the newer stuff is grossly overdone, hand-licked to perfection," he says. "It's trying to create something that never was."

Should we try, then, or is it even possible to make a reproduction convey the freshness of the original: an exuberance of design developed as much out of economic competition as pure aesthetics? ■

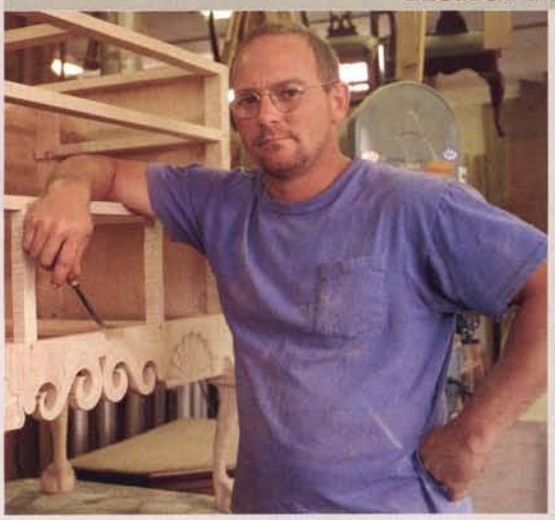
Walter Raynes, Baltimore, Md.



'LET THE CUSTOMER CHOOSE'

"Somebody I knew, who just passed away, said: 'If those guys had ready-mixed glue and plywood they would have gone to bed happy men,'" says Raynes. Today's technology can produce a better piece of furniture, he says, if the goal is technical improvement. "Their work was beautifully done with the best technology available to them. But we could build a better piece than they could if we chose to. I can use modern joinery. I can cut mortises with a 20th-century mortising machine. Choices in construction methods are dollar options. Let the customer choose."

Kendl Monn, Christiana, Pa.



'WE STRIVE TO BE AS GOOD'

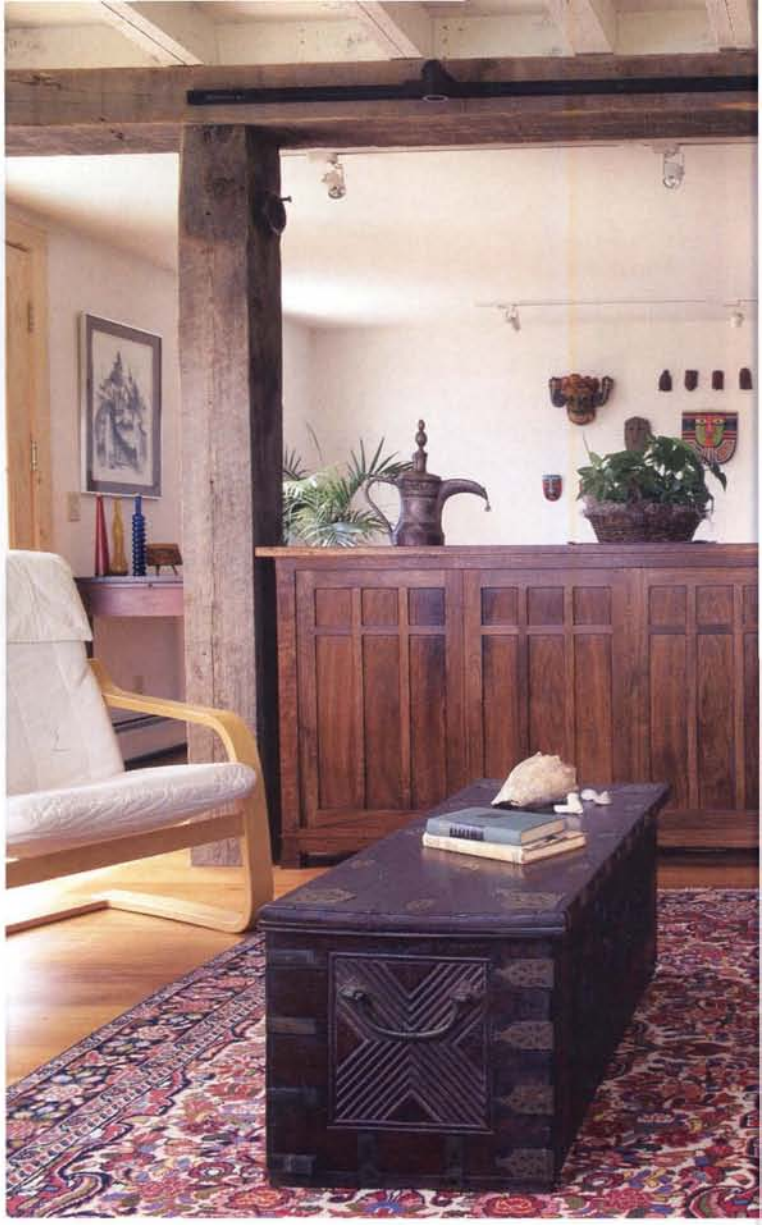
"Back in [the 18th century] each cabinetmaker kind of scratched his head and did it the best way he knew how," says Kendl Monn of Irion Company, which operates much as a small 18th-century shop would have if it had electricity. "If we built a Newport secretary, you might find some joinery that was used in Philadelphia—if it worked better than the original joinery." Cabinetmakers at Irion use power tools, but only up to a point. "We go in and handplane and scrape all the cases so the last 1/32 of an inch is completely done by hand." Are today's craftsmen better? "We might improve on what they did because we have the luxury of seeing how things went wrong. Perhaps when it comes to the quality of the wood we've got them beat. But better? No. We strive to be as good."

Bottom photo this page: Gerald Martin

An Architectural Cabinet

An entertainment center doubles as a room divider

BY MARC LANGHAMMER



A freestanding built-in. That is how the author describes this walnut entertainment center, seen here from the back, which was designed to function as a room divider and to be seen from all four sides.

Habits, more than rules, dictate that case pieces must hug the walls. Why should chairs and tables be the only furniture to enjoy the freedom of interior space? This entertainment center sits in the middle of the room, like a freestanding built-in.

The idea was to create a piece of furniture that would fit between two structural posts in a Maine coast home, which at the time was undergoing a major renovation. The architects doing the renovation enlarged the floor plan, eliminated interior walls, added a second story and lots of windows. These alterations made a small house seem much larger, but the elimination of partition walls meant that it was up to the furniture to define the interior space.

The customer wanted a low cabinet to separate a living room from a more intimate space used for reading or watching television. It had to be adaptable to future uses that might not include a television and CD player, and it would need to feel at home among eclectic furniture and fixtures.

The idea of a cabinet that would be seen from all four *sides* appealed to me. I visited the house myself and used the architects' drawings to take visual cues from the exterior—particularly the pattern of some of the windows on the south-facing side of the house, which is the most charismatic (and visible). This would tie the piece to the house, though just loosely, in case the customer ever moved.

The walnut came from a single tree which, because of its size, allowed me to book-match all the doors that make up the four sides of the case. Each door is composed of six panels (three small, three large) floating in a mortised-and-tenoned frame. The true doors on the front—the only ones that open—hang from offset knife hinges so there is no need for vertical stiles. These hinges are nearly invisible, minimizing distracting elements.

The doors are identical inside and out and the two center doors (where the television sits) open directly over the adjacent doors, making them virtually invisible when open (see top photo facing page). The four false doors that make up the back interlock with tongue-and-grooves and *float* as a unit inside the case framework.

The top overhangs the ends somewhat, in part because I did not want to push the panels against the house's struc-

Photos: Jonathan Binzen

Disappearing act. The author designed the frame-and-panel doors in the center of the cabinet to lay flat on the adjacent doors, making them disappear visually when open.

tural posts. I also felt that the overhang balances the wide stance, particularly in conjunction with the curves below which lighten the visual load of a rather massive unit. I didn't have enough material to simply cut out the curves on the legs, so I applied offcuts at the feet, which I had set aside. The joints are "erased" by the molding that runs around the perimeter of the base.

All the interior surfaces are oak and oak veneer. Adjustable shelves on brass pins create current and future flexibility, including uses having nothing to do with "entertainment." After all, this piece may lose its freedom someday and be resigned to live against a wall. ■

The cabinet is 80 in. wide, 23 in. deep and 34½ in. high.

Windows tie the furniture to the house. The author echoed the window pattern of the remodeled house (below) in the design of the six-panel doors (above photo).

A Sofa for Somebody Else

Collaboration can be one of the furniture maker's most vital skills

BY ROSS DAY

Good custom-made furniture is a double portrait. It reflects the image of its maker, but it just as clearly reflects the person it was made for. To some furniture makers, it might seem compromising to design and build something with someone else's needs in mind. But I think that is the wrong way to look at it. To me, commission work is simply doing what someone else wants in my own way. In the 12 years I've been making custom furniture I've discovered that the relationship with the person for whom a piece is made—whether that person is your spouse or a stranger—is where much of the fun is. I find pleasure in the personal interaction, and a challenge in stretching to design something that I wouldn't otherwise have made. When the combination is right, I've found, the process sometimes produces work better than I would have done on my own.

But it takes effort and experience to develop the skills that enable you to work with someone well enough to make the act of collaboration a boon to you both. I recently completed a commission (for the sofa in the photos

on these pages) that was a real pleasure. I thought looking at the way that commission unfolded might provide some insight into the process of building something for somebody else.

TWO SIDES OF A FIRST MEETING

I drove an hour and a half to see Norma Shainin and her husband, Peter, at their house north of Seattle for our first meeting. I would have driven farther. To me, seeing someone in their own environment is invaluable. A person's house often tells me more than they do, offering a wealth of information about their taste and the way they use their furniture. I take in the furniture but also the architecture, the art work, the other things they may collect.

Norma's house, with its clean, simple lines and understated accessories, helped to determine the simple, sleek look of the sofa. The fine craftsmanship and detailing of the many baskets and carvings she collects convinced me that a sofa with similarly fine detailing would be appropriate.

I am also alert to the way someone uses their furniture. At Norma's house, it was obvious that everything was well-cared for and kept in its place. I would have designed something quite different for a family that was more informal and obviously used their furniture hard. To record my impressions, I always pack a note pad for making quick sketches and jotting down information, and I always take a tape measure. An easy-to-use camera for some snapshots can also be helpful.

Getting a sense of the setting and the people you are working with is half the equation. The other half is presenting your work in the best possible light. This means bringing along a well-organized, professional-looking portfolio with good photography. Good photos can be expensive, but I don't think they are optional; your portfolio is really all you have as a record of your work. I bring a resume, a short biography and a business card to help give a picture of my approach to furniture making. Wood samples and sketches or drawings from a previous job would also be helpful to illustrate how your design process works. You might even consider bringing along an easily portable sample of your work—a side chair, say, or a small box—so your customer can see and feel the quality of your work first hand.

ESTABLISHING A RAPPORT

Furniture design is a social skill as much as an aesthetic one. One customer will be very clear about what they want and don't want and full of pertinent information and useful suggestions—Norma was like this—while another will have to have things

My Side of the Sofa

BY NORMA SHAININ

Commissioning a sofa is a fair investment, and not one we made lightly. But we had already commissioned several smaller pieces from Ross and I was totally confident that he could do what I wanted. He always listened to me carefully—which was important, because I'm not always so clear. And he made the commission an open process that offered more than I thought possible. Instead of "No, we can't do that," he would say "Sure, we'll make it work." And he did. I'm very pleased with the way the sofa came out, and I feel that there's a part of me in it, somehow. The ultimate stamp of approval, though, comes from my kids, who are already eyeing it. It's obvious that Ross's pieces will be in the family for a long time.

Temporary partnership. Ross Day views each commission as a design collaboration and a chance "to make what someone else wants in my own way." The photo above left shows Day with Norma Shainin and the pear sofa he recently built for her. At right, they confer at his shop in mid-construction.

Photos: Jonathan Binzen, except where noted

dragged out of them. One key part of my role is to get a good exchange of ideas going.

If a customer is having trouble conveying what they want, I start probing: Do they like light- or dark-colored woods? How many people should this sofa seat? Would they like something on the smaller or larger end of the scale? Heavy or light? Do they like clean lines or something more embellished and ornamental?

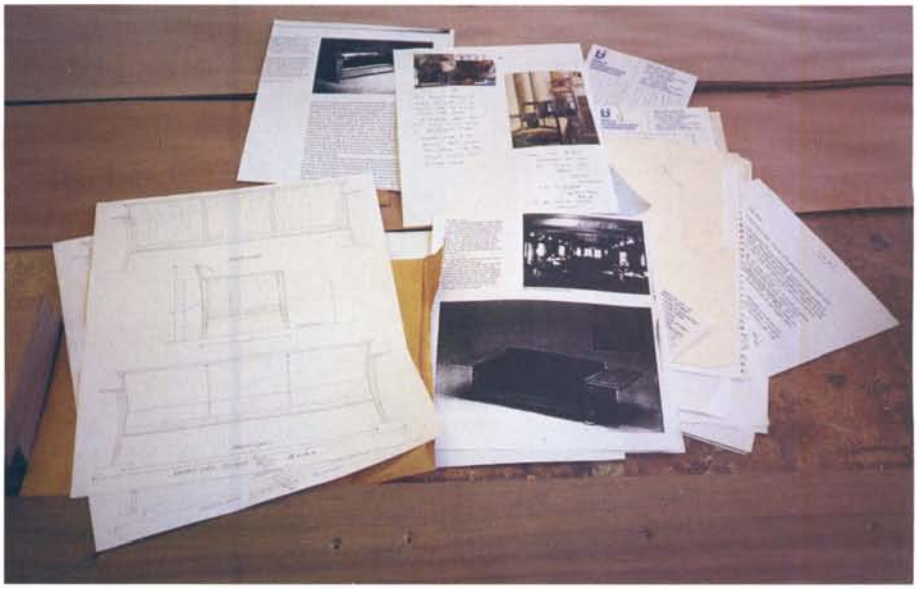
It didn't take much to establish a rapport with Norma, who has a design background herself. But I still learned something valuable from the process. After the initial meeting she began sending me photos clipped from design magazines to illustrate her likes and dislikes, to make suggestions about what sort of feeling, form and detailing she might like on her sofa. She would clip a photo, tape it to a sheet of paper and write a few comments below: "Too ornate and complicated, but I like the flare of the arm." "Like side detail, although too open." This helped me enormously and seems to me a technique that could be very useful for drawing out someone who is not sure of their ideas or has trouble conceptualizing.

JUGGLING ALL THE INPUT

Once I've done my field work for a commission, I spread all the input and influences out in my mind's eye. For Norma's job, I started with the requirements we had discussed: a sofa to seat three, built with Norma's favorite wood (and one of mine) European pear, and upholstered with loose

Reality check. Shainin and Day confer on the full-scale drawing of the front of the couch, done on ¼-inch medium-density fiberboard.

Robbing the memory bank. Day's lounge chair below, designed several years ago, has shaping in its arms and at the ends of its crest rail that influenced the detailing in the new sofa, above.



The ideas are in the envelope. Day and his customer traded ideas by mail as the design developed. Shainin mailed Day magazine clippings which she annotated.

Lower left photo: Terry Reed

Settling on a format. With their paneled sides, loose cushions and wide, wing-like arms, Leopold Stickley's Prairie Settle (above) and Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House sofa (at right) influenced Day's thinking about the overall format of his sofa.

Arms talks. Day invites his customers to his shop to see their furniture in progress. Above, he and Norma confer about the width and the curve of the arms on her sofa. He cuts down these dummy arms until they are both satisfied; later, he duplicates the agreed-upon shape in pear (below).

cushions in an off-white sail cloth. Then there were the clippings Norma had sent. They made it clear she wanted a sofa with arms that curved outward slightly as they rose. I thought back on her living room and remembered a couple of things particularly: the Frank Lloyd Wright barrel chairs with their beautifully rolled backs, and the planked ceiling, which was coved at the perimeter to meet the walls. Two sofas I had always admired were also blended into the mix. One was Leopold Stickley's Prairie Settle and the other was Frank Lloyd Wright's extremely wide-armed sofa for the Robie House. Both these sofas had upholstered cushions in a framework of wood panels and both had wide arms. I found the format interesting visually and also appealing for the comfort and enclosure it seemed to offer. I decided to adapt that format for Norma's sofa.

The Stickley and Wright sofas are both entirely rectilinear, however, as well as heavy and blunt. I wanted some curves to play off the barrel chairs and the ceiling and I wanted more delicate detailing. Overall, I wanted the new sofa to look contemporary and fairly sleek, but not flashy. I decided to blend into the new sofa some of the curved elements and refined details from a lounge chair I had built previously. I decided on frame-and-panel construction for the tactile quality it would bring and because it seemed the most manageable way to build.

For Norma's sofa, as with most all my designs, I came up with quite a few options as I worked my way toward the new piece. It would have been tempting to present her with a dozen alternatives to choose from. I resisted the temptation. Presenting too many options can make it harder for your customer to choose. Either that, or they'll immediately pick the one design you really didn't want to build. I usually show just two concepts for a given project. It forces me to edit myself and decide which designs are the strongest. Of course, if neither of the

Top left photo this page: Courtesy of L. and J.G. Stickley, Inc.; lower left photo: Courtesy of Cassina USA Inc.

options meets with approval, I will go back to the drawing board. I sent Norma one sketch of a frame-and-panel sofa with legs and another, quite similar, but with side and back panels that supported the sofa, sweeping right down to the floor. Norma picked the one with legs.

GETTING THE GO-AHEAD

Even someone like Norma, with an eye for art, is taking a lot on faith when she OKs a small sketch. It's important not to abuse that faith. I've heard more than one story about people watching agape as a custom piece arrives that bears little relation to the image they had in their mind. I try to be certain all the way through the commissioning process that my customer and I are on the same page. To provide a close look at the details of the piece I'm designing as well as some sense of its size and the way it will fit in to their house, I generally present full-scale front, back and side view drawings. Instead of wrestling with wrinkly rolled drawings, I do the drawings on sheets of ¼-inch MDF, which are easy to set up and view. Then I take them out to the customer's house and place them right where the furniture will stand. I accompany them with samples of the solid wood and veneer for the job.

I sometimes also rely on full-scale mock-ups to help me work through the design of a piece. In the case of Norma's sofa I did not make one, as I was convinced by the full-scale drawings that the joinery (a lot like a frame-and-panel cabinet, really) and the proportions would work fine. But when I do make mock-ups, I find them to be as helpful to the customer as the maker.

Norma and I reviewed the full-scale layout, compared it against the concept drawing, and looked at the wood samples. I also explained how I intended to orient the grain on the pear-veneered panels. She agreed we were going in the right direction, and gave me the go-ahead to begin building.

WE MEET HALFWAY

Several months later, Norma came by my shop when the sofa was half-finished. Her sofa's frame (minus its panels, which were veneered but not yet trimmed) stood there dry-assembled, held together with a half-dozen quick-release clamps. It might seem risky to have a customer see their piece while it is still in raw form, but I think bringing the customer into the shop is just as important to the commission process as going out to visit them in their house. In addition to being helpful in the development of the design, these visits provide the customer with a unique view into the craft. Curiosity about the way things are made and the work lives of the people who make them is an important part of what makes people commission furniture rather than buying it in a department store or off the gallery floor.

Norma and I had deliberately deferred decisions on several issues until we could see the sofa taking shape. The main one was the width and shape of the arms. This was a real concern for Norma—she was worried that they would end up too wide. I thought that a fairly wide arm was important to the success of the design. So that we could work out the arm in 3-D, I had made some dummy arms of alder and fitted them onto the otherwise real sofa frame. As we talked, I could slip an arm off and shave it down a bit on the jointer, then put it back on the sofa. Over the course of 20 minutes or so we reached a width and shape that we both liked. To me, interactions like that go to the core of working with someone: give-and-take that rewards you both; in addition to solving design problems and fulfilling desires, they bring the customer into collaboration with the furniture maker in an intimate way that really makes them an integral part of the project.

Wright angles. Day had the rolled back of the Frank Lloyd Wright barrel chairs in mind when he gave his sofa its curves.

THE SOFA AT HOME

Some weeks later, I delivered the finished sofa. I had it photographed in a studio first, and during the shoot I looked at it critically from all angles and thought it worked pretty well. But when we put it in place in Norma's living room, with its rugged stone fireplace and warm plank ceiling, its beautiful rugs and its Wright barrel chairs, its antique tansu and finely woven baskets, the new sofa suddenly looked much richer than it had before. Later, as we sat eating dinner, I looked across the room at the sofa and it seemed perfectly at home. It occurred to me that it probably wouldn't look as good anywhere else. And that, I thought, must mean the collaboration had worked. ■

The sofa is 78 in. long, 31 in. high and 25 in. deep.

Comfort in conformity. Day's sofa reflects the living room it was designed for, from the curves of the coved ceiling to the fine handwork of the carpets and baskets.

Good Design Should Be Everywhere

BY PATRICIA HARRISON

Low cost, high style. Why shouldn't well-designed furniture be found in low-income homes? The author designed this dining table for migrant-labor homes in California's Central Valley.

Fine furniture design need not imply costly materials and difficult joinery. Designs developed with attention to form, color, contrast and social context can also communicate pleasing aesthetic qualities even if the materials are inexpensive and the craftsmanship is simple. I accepted the challenge of creating just this type of furniture in a recent project to develop household furnishings for a migrant farmworker center in California.

How could small, barracks-style apartments be minimally furnished at low cost and at the same time provide migrant families with a friendly,

Photos: Timothy D. Schreiner, unless otherwise noted; location courtesy of Santiago Naranjo family and J. Pilar Diaz, director of Artesi #3 Migrant Center, French Camp, Calif.

attractive residential setting? This question was posed by Antonio Pizano, Executive Director of the San Joaquin County Housing Authority, who is responsible for 300 seasonal farmworker dwelling units in the Central Valley county. Each year families return to the migrant centers for six months while they work in regional fields, orchards and produce-processing operations. Highly prized for their affordable rents, the centers are clean and safe, and they offer recreational activities and health and educational services for adults and children. Director Pizano asked me to create prototype furnishings that would be affordable, could be varied, would express Hispanic cultural preferences and would look like they belonged in a home, not an institution.

After a few migrant families were interviewed about their furnishing needs, seven storage closets, four tables, and three bed prototypes were designed and put into apartments at the migrant center. Flat panel construction and simple assembly procedures were employed using medium-density fiberboard finished with plastic laminate and paint. My research associate, Bob Morgan, and I sought a provincial, playful character for the designs. Simple shapes and cutouts lighten the appearance of the heavy material, and colorful paint and laminate combinations attempt to capture the vibrancy of Hispanic culture. A few of our students helped us with construction of the prototypes.

After a season of use, comments were generally favorable on the prototype designs, except about the color of the bedroom furnishings. Many liked the bold colors, but an almost equal number wanted a wood-looking finish or more neutral colors that would not contrast with their own furnishings. As the project goes ahead, community meetings to discuss color options will help refine the designs.

Costs for the materials used in the furniture were low. Individual pieces typically used two sheets of MDF in 1-inch or ¾-inch thickness. Experimentation with strong hues of paint from a catalyzed lacquer coating designed for MDF to typical semigloss latex enamel added some cost to the project. We are looking for a way to tie production to a training program for low-income individuals, and are considering providing opportunities for migrant center residents to plan color schemes and decorative additions to the pieces. But whatever minor refinements are worked out, this project has demonstrated that good design can be created at an affordable price. I believe the designs are inventive and use elements of low-tech woodworking to achieve a "high-style" look. ■

Filling a need. Migrant-worker families always brought their own furnishings to this housing near the San Joaquin County fields. But their beds and dining tables often were inadequate or dreary, so the housing director asked the author to design some affordable yet welcoming furniture.

The dining table on the facing page is 60 in. long, 29 in. wide and 29 in. high. The round table on this page is 36 in. in diameter.

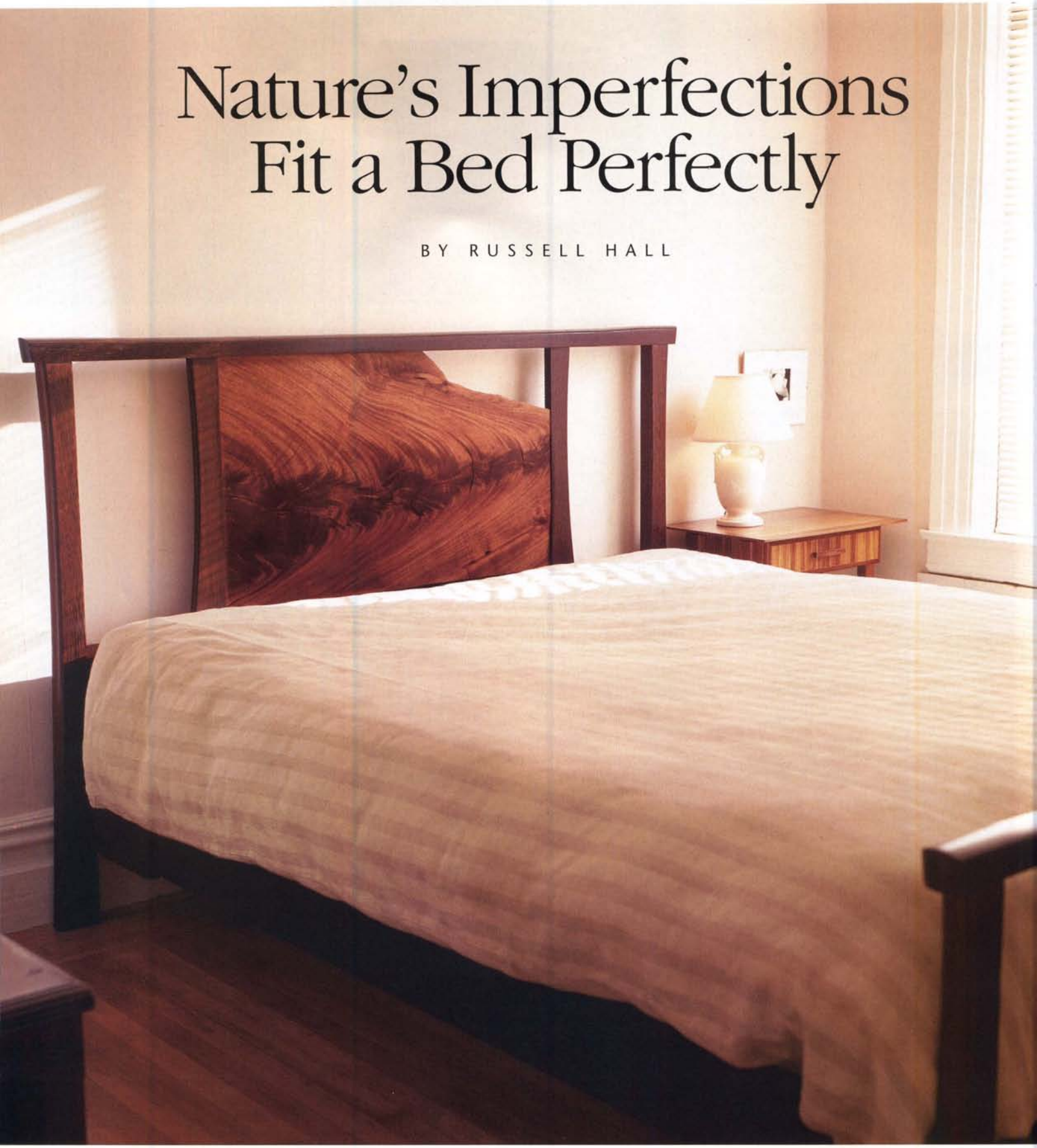
Home is where the art is. The author, a professor of environmental design, devised four different dining tables in several colors as prototypes for migrant-center housing.

MDF to the rescue. To keep the cost of the project low, the furniture was built with medium-density fiberboard, paint, plastic laminate and simple hardware.

Lower left photo this page: Barbara Molloy

Nature's Imperfections Fit a Bed Perfectly

BY RUSSELL HALL



One of my best friends is also one of my best customers, and whenever Jon passes through on business he stays with our family. On one of these visits he brought me a book on wabi-sabi, a Japanese school of thought based on the beauty and appreciation of imperfection, impermanence and incompleteness. With my work showing the beginnings of Asian design influences, Jon thought it might be of interest. On this same visit, he also asked me to build a bed, and I knew wabi-sabi had to be a part of it.

On the morning Jon was to leave, we began brainstorming and sketching ideas for the bed. The form was to be Asian but only in a general way, with elements such as the cloud rise and subtle tapers and curves.

We quickly arrived at a rough design: a strong, weighted foot to ground the bed; tapered legs to move the eye upward to a light top rail, reminiscent of an Oriental gate; a headboard that would feature a large panel of an exceptionally figured wood. The idea was to make the structure act as a frame to display a natural object in all its imperfect and transitory beauty.

With several hours before Jon's flight, the two of us decided to visit my hardwood supplier and have a look around. We decided on wenge for the main structure because its dark color and straight grain would distill the visual elements down to space and line. The color and texture vaguely alluded to the weathered timbers of Oriental gates and it also looked great with the figured bubinga that Jon was certain he wanted for the headboard panel.

We were about to head to the airport when I remembered some unusual mahogany I had seen at CDS Wood Products, a recycled-wood supplier in the Columbia River Gorge near Portland, Oregon. With Jon's departure looming and him secure in his decision to use bubinga, I had to do some arm-twisting to convince him to look at what I was talking about. He finally agreed and we set off on our second side trip of the day.

When we arrived at CDS, we entered the wood shed and stood before a stack of 30 or more mahogany crotch "backer boards," the inch-thick scrap that remained after a board was sliced into veneer. CDS had acquired the boards from a retired cabinetmaker in his 90s. This cabinetmaker apparently had gotten the mahogany in the 1920s from a Baltimore cabinet shop, which had salvaged them from the burn pile of a veneer manufacturer. The blanks have no chain-saw marks, just the telltale signs of a hatchet or ax along its edges, suggesting that the harvest date may go back to the 19th century.

These unstable boards, with their flaming grain patterns, were twisted,

A different tree but similar roots. The author designed the bed after making these zebrawood side tables. Both pieces share Asian influences, such as tapered legs and the cloud rise pattern, seen in the table's lower stretchers.

Nature harnessed. The wenge headboard becomes a humble frame for a stunning slab of solid crotch mahogany, left pretty much as it was found.

Photos: Jon Jensen

A second version, with tansu on the side. In this bed, the headboard proportions were altered slightly for a different mahogany panel. The author also made the stylized tansu side tables.

Making it personal. Carved by Tom Allen of Silverton, Oregon, these ebony rosettes (left)—a Japanese family crest—were inlaid into the headboard. The bedside table's drawers were sized for CDs (right).

A long, strange trip for this plank. A retired cabinetmaker salvaged these mahogany crotches (below) from a Baltimore veneer mill in the 1920s and brought them to Oregon. Hatchet marks suggest that the trees may have been cut in the 1800s.

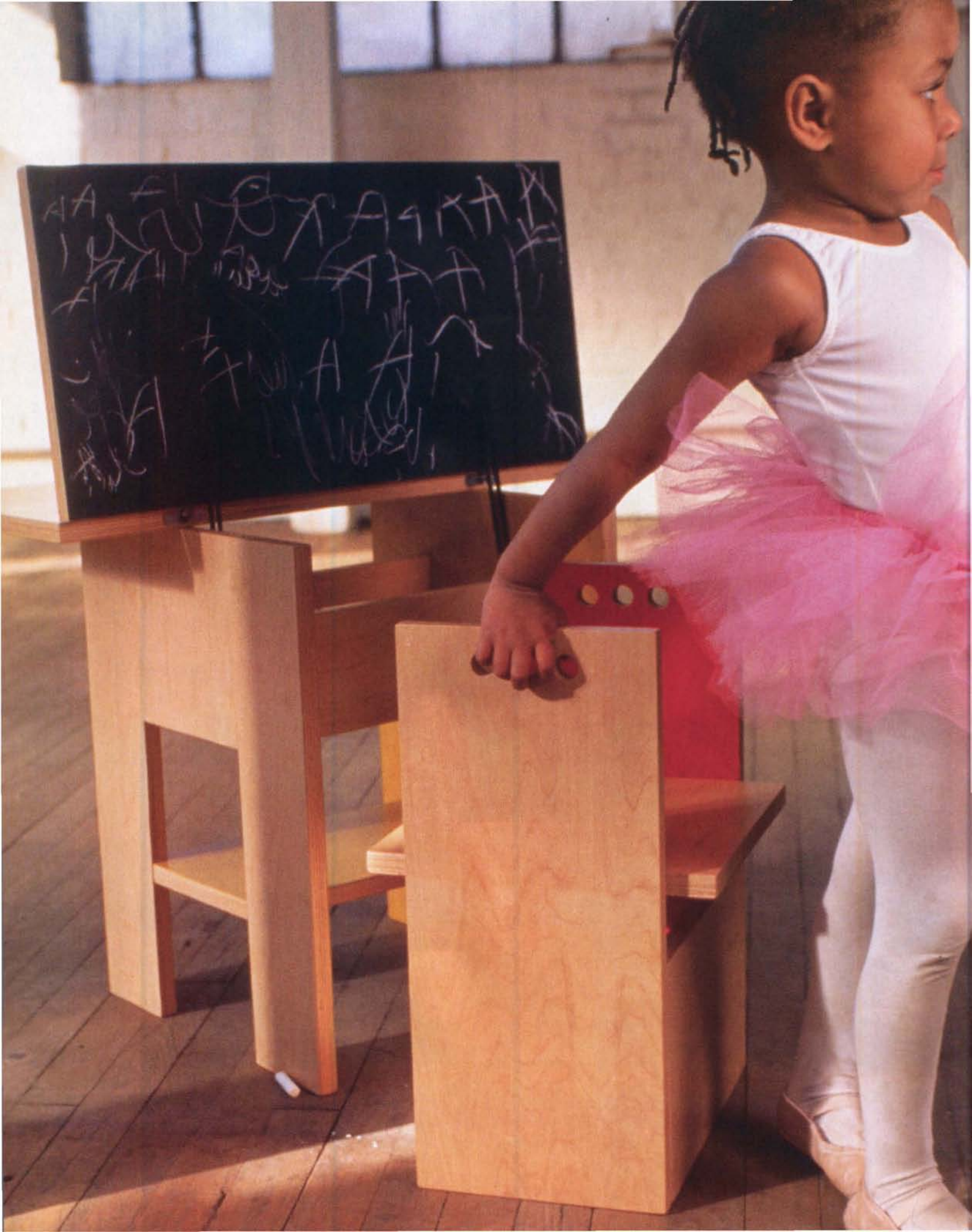
bent, cracked, split, checked and warped. Some were missing chunks of wood and looked as if the pieces had just snapped off. They were totally unusable. Jon turned to me with a smile: "Perfect," he said. Soon we had a dozen boards lying on the shed floor, discussing the possibilities. We settled on two candidates, loaded them into my truck and bolted for the airport.

It seemed to me that a certain reverence for the history of this mahogany was important to the finished product, and I approached this challenge in a couple of ways. First, I sanded the blank by hand rather than using a thickness sander. This brought out the grain while preserving a century worth of warp. I also ignored the flaws and imperfections instead of trying to mask them. The voids became as important as the structure and the lack of manipulation seemed as necessary as the many hours that went into the rest of the bed.

This mahogany was both a joy and a challenge, presenting interesting construction problems for mounting it in the wenge frame. I used full tenons in the top and sides, individually cut to follow the warp of the blank's surface. The top was pinned and glued while the sides were pinned but left free-sliding. A small gap at the bottom allows for seasonal movement.

Before delivery, I brought the finished bed to the annual show of the Guild of Oregon Woodworkers, which led to another commission. The second bed was similar, except for the size of the mahogany panel and the addition of carved ebony rosettes, a Japanese family crest (see photo above left). This new commission also included side tables, made to hold CDs. A contemporary, stylized version of tansu seemed the obvious choice to complement the bed. ■

Both beds are 66 in. wide, 84 in. long and 46 in. high. The book Hall refers to is Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers *by Leonard Koren (Stonebridge Press, 1994).*



The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings

Children get the most out of life, so why shouldn't they get the most out of their furniture?

BY JENNIFER MATLACK

Remember the last time you turned a table upside down, tied a white pillowcase to one of the legs and set sail through the shark-infested waters in your bedroom? When a chair enabled you to speed away from a band of pastel-colored monsters—all of which had an uncanny resemblance to your stuffed animals? Well, if either scenario brings back memories, they probably happened sometime ago, when you were a child. At least, let's hope that's when.

It is imagination that allows children to temporarily exit reality and enter fantasy. In their eyes, furniture can be just about anything other than what it actually is. Tables become boats. Chairs, cars. And beds make ideal magic carpets. Truly, kids live in, on and through their furniture. As a result, the furniture takes a beating—especially when tables capsize and chairs crash.

However, there are those times when kids dock their tables, park their chairs and simply eat or work at and sit in them. Yes, there are times when even children's furniture is simply just furniture.

Indeed, kids live in dual realms. It's important to keep this in mind when designing furniture for them. Not only does their furniture need to be fun and well-made, but it also needs to be functional and safe. Designing good kids'

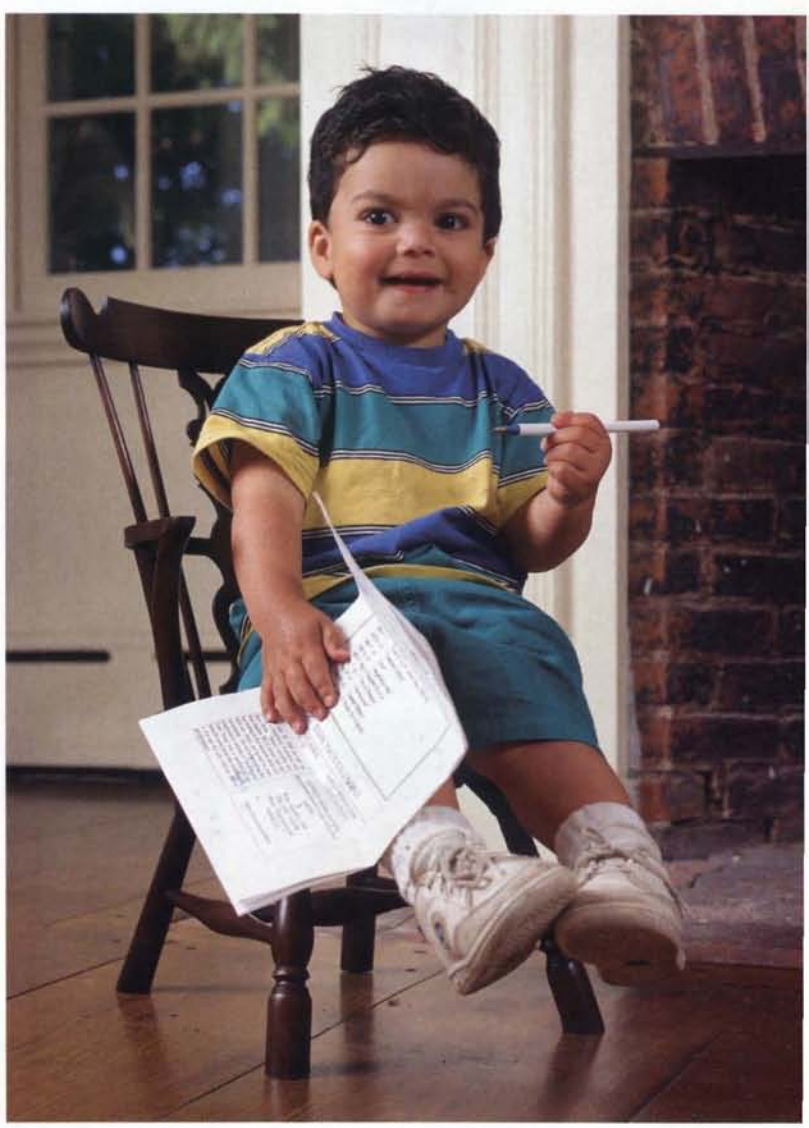
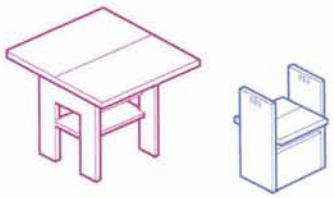


Table with a twist. Because kids like to explore, Leap Frog designed its table (left) with a hidden chalkboard and with storage under its top. The chair seat also lifts to reveal a secret storage compartment.

Little chair for a big boy. When Mario Rodriguez made this Windsor chair for his son (right), he knew that kids don't baby their furniture. If his son's hands are full, he'll often maneuver the chair with his feet.

Photo facing page: Leap Frog, Fairfield, Conn.; photo this page: Roe A. Osborn; drawings: Scott Bricher






furniture requires that you have one foot planted in the practical world of adults and the other in the magical world of children.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF GOOD DESIGN

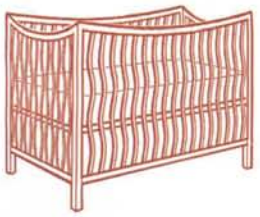
The kids' furniture found in stores today seems to be more about color and the element of whimsy than thoughtful design. The idea is that if you slap some bright paint on a child's table and chairs, add a few moons and stars, then *voilà*: kids' furniture. Well, this isn't entirely true. Sure, it's kids' furniture but is it good furniture?

Husband and wife designers, Warda Geismar and Ken Kane, say no. When they went shopping for their daughter's nursery, they ended up disappointed. "The furniture we saw,"



Top left photo this page: Leap Frog, Fairfield, Conn.; lower left photo: Dennis Griggs; middle photo: Jennifer Matlack; right photo: E.E. "Skip" Benson; sources for drawings on top of this page from left: Stephen Adams Fine Furniture; Loren Jay Vincent; Leap Frog; Leap Frog; Steven Thomas Bunn





Geismar says, "wasn't attractive or functional. And it was clear that people weren't putting any thought into it." So they decided to start Leap Frog, a children's furniture design company, and immediately went to work.

Being a new mother, Geismar decided their first piece would be a cradle. It was important to her to share her daughter's perspective so she decided on a design that would allow her that. Resembling two large half-slices of watermelon, the cradle, which also functions as a teeter-totter, rests directly on the floor (see top photo facing page). Geismar sits on a pillow beside her daughter. "The design," she says, "provides intimacy for the baby and whoever is sitting next to him or her."

Thought was also given to the cradle's rock. Instead of a traditional side-to-side rock, Leap Frog's cradle rocks head to toe, imitating the motion of rocking a baby in your arms.

FUNCTIONAL FUN

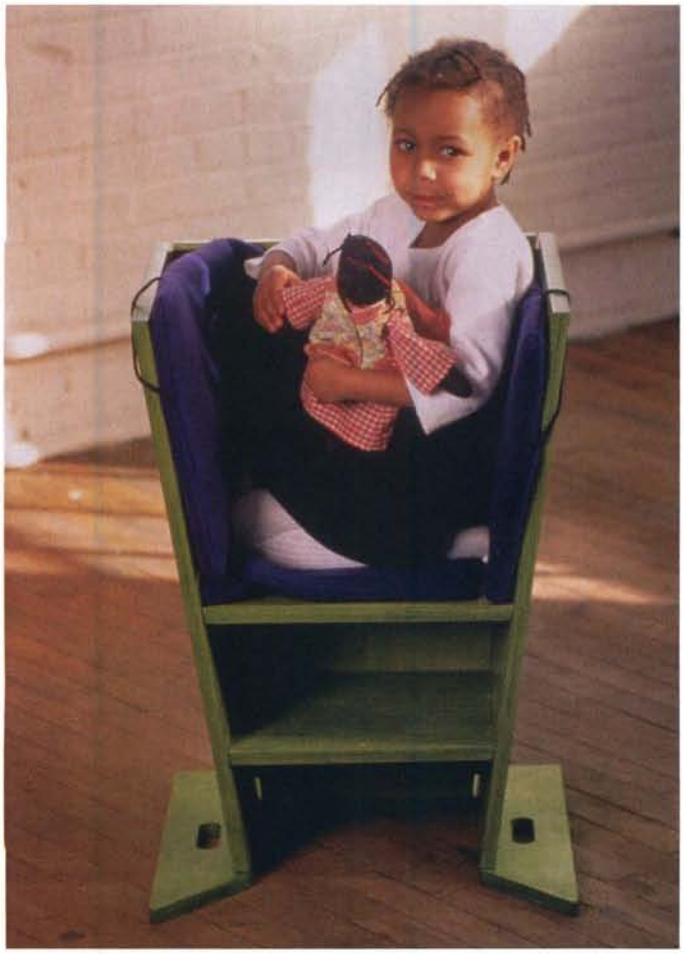
What do kids do? How do they live, work and play? Eric Pfeiffer, a San Francisco furniture designer, asked himself these questions when he was commissioned to make a children's table (see bottom photo on p. 47). "I thought about what I did around the table when I was a child," he says. "I remembered eating, playing games, painting and drawing. So I decided to design a table kids could draw on." In doing so, Pfeiffer tweaked the taboo against kids writing on furniture. His table has a chalkboard top and in the center he designed a bowl to hold chalk and art materials.

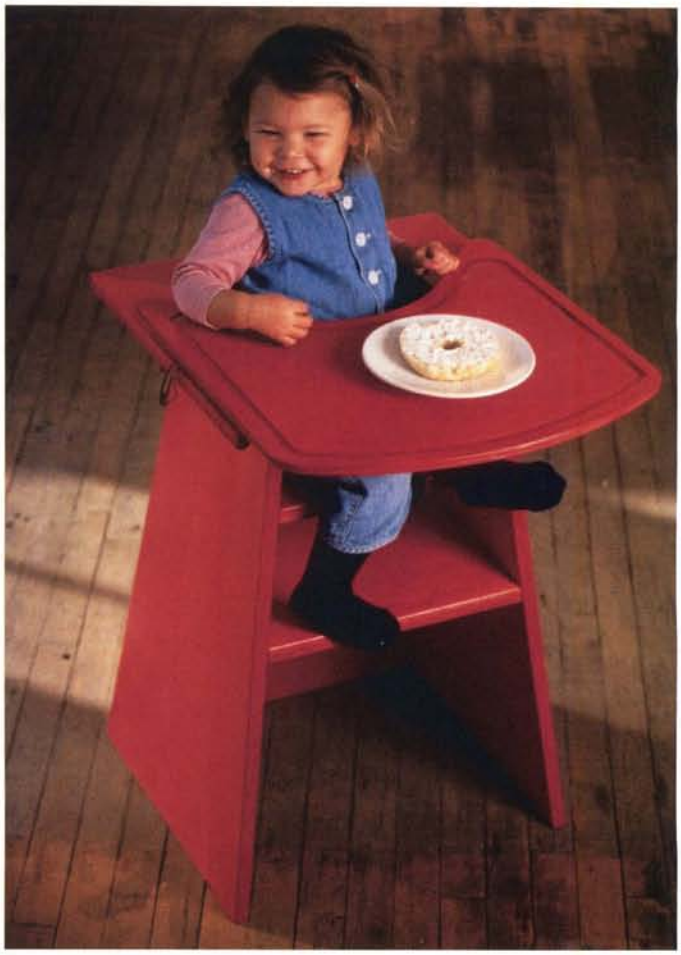
Pfeiffer's table has several functions. "It's low-tech," he says. "It takes kids away from the computer and allows them to be creative, to draw." The message is "chalk is hip." The table and bowl also encourage group interaction. Children have to share both space and materials.

Function was also foremost in the minds of Leap Frog's Geismar and Kane when they designed their highchair (see top photos on p. 46). "It's important," says Geismar, "to keep the whole experience in mind." Children eat in highchairs. And things can get messy. For simple, easy cleanup, the chair was designed with flat planes and no decorations or details. Geismar and Kane also thought storage was important. "A lot of parents were saying they needed storage space," says Geismar,


Who's been sitting in my chair? At top left, Leap Frog's cradle can be used either for rocking a baby to sleep or as a seesaw for rocking kids silly. *Bottom row from far left:* Not made for rough play, Steven Thomas Bunn's child's Windsor settee requires some adult supervision; Michael Pekovich's papa ladderback chair inspired his son's baby chair; E.E. "Skip" and Barbara Benson's colorful sling chair has a cherry frame and canvas seat; for safety's sake, Mario Rodriguez splayed the legs of his son's Windsor; and the children's Shaker chairs at Brian Braskie's and Lenore Howe's North Woods Chair Shop are not meant for a Chairs 'R' Us market.

Left photo this page: Roe A. Osborn; right photo: Bruce Alexander Studio; sources for drawings on top of this page from left: Chérif Medjeber; M.T. Maxwell Furniture; Community Playthings; Hiccup





Highchairs with bright futures. Leap Frog's highchair is high in adaptability. Remove its tray and flip it over for an older child's chair (above). Garrett Hack's slat-back highchair (far right) has a Danish woven seat. Hack explains that because he's a father of four, a lot of the children's furniture he makes never makes it out his door. At near right, Chérif Medjeber designed this sculptural highchair for his daughter. She liked it so much that she used it for four years.

Top photos this page: Leap Frog, Fairfield, Conn.; lower left photo: Pierre Verrier; lower right photo: Garrett Hack

Bam bam-bino. Images of inflated baseball bats and crayons inspired Hiccup's Christopher Ross to design the cartoon-like legs of his Bam-Bam table and chairs (above). Eric Pfeiffer of Bravo 20 thought about his hours of childhood drawing when he designed his artist-friendly table (left) with its chalkboard top.

"so, we decided to add compartments to our designs." The chair can store bibs, spoons, bowls or even books.

Perhaps the greatest function of kids' furniture is furniture that stays functional. When turned upside down, the highchair becomes an older child's chair. The result is furniture that can be used and reused for years.

PROPORTIONAL GROWING PAINS

Proportioning kids' furniture isn't a piece of cake. You'd think you could take an adult chair, for example, and reduce it by a third for a good-looking child's chair. But you can't. Well, you can—if you want a chair that's awkward looking.

After making his Appalachian ladderback chair, furniture maker Michael Pekovich decided to make one for his son (see middle bottom photo on p. 44). He knew the critical dimension in any chair is the distance from the floor to the seat. So it was his son's size that dictated the measurement. If you don't have kids around, however, arm yourself with a tape measure and find a child's chair that appeals to you. Once you determine this particular measurement, the basic rules of proportion will dictate the remaining dimensions.

Pekovich rough-cut everything to approximate size, laid it out and then made adjustments by sight. Because he wanted the chair to have a "fairy tale" look, he designed it to be chunkier than the adult version. The lower rungs were reduced from two to one, as were the back slats. "The result," Pekovich says, "is a chair that has a completely different personality from its full-sized counterpart."

"S" IS FOR SAFETY

Kids are fearless. They jump, climb and leap. So when it comes to their furniture, it's got to be safe. Mario Rodriguez, contributing editor to *Fine Woodworking*, advises employing common sense and "what if" when designing kids' furniture. "Kids," he says, "will not only sit on a chair but they'll stand on it as well." He thought about this when he made a chair for his son (see left photo on p. 45). So for safety's sake, he decided to splay the chair's legs. Rodriguez also adds that "kids will abuse furniture so you have to consider accidents. If a piece breaks or comes apart, will anything be exposed that may injure the child?"

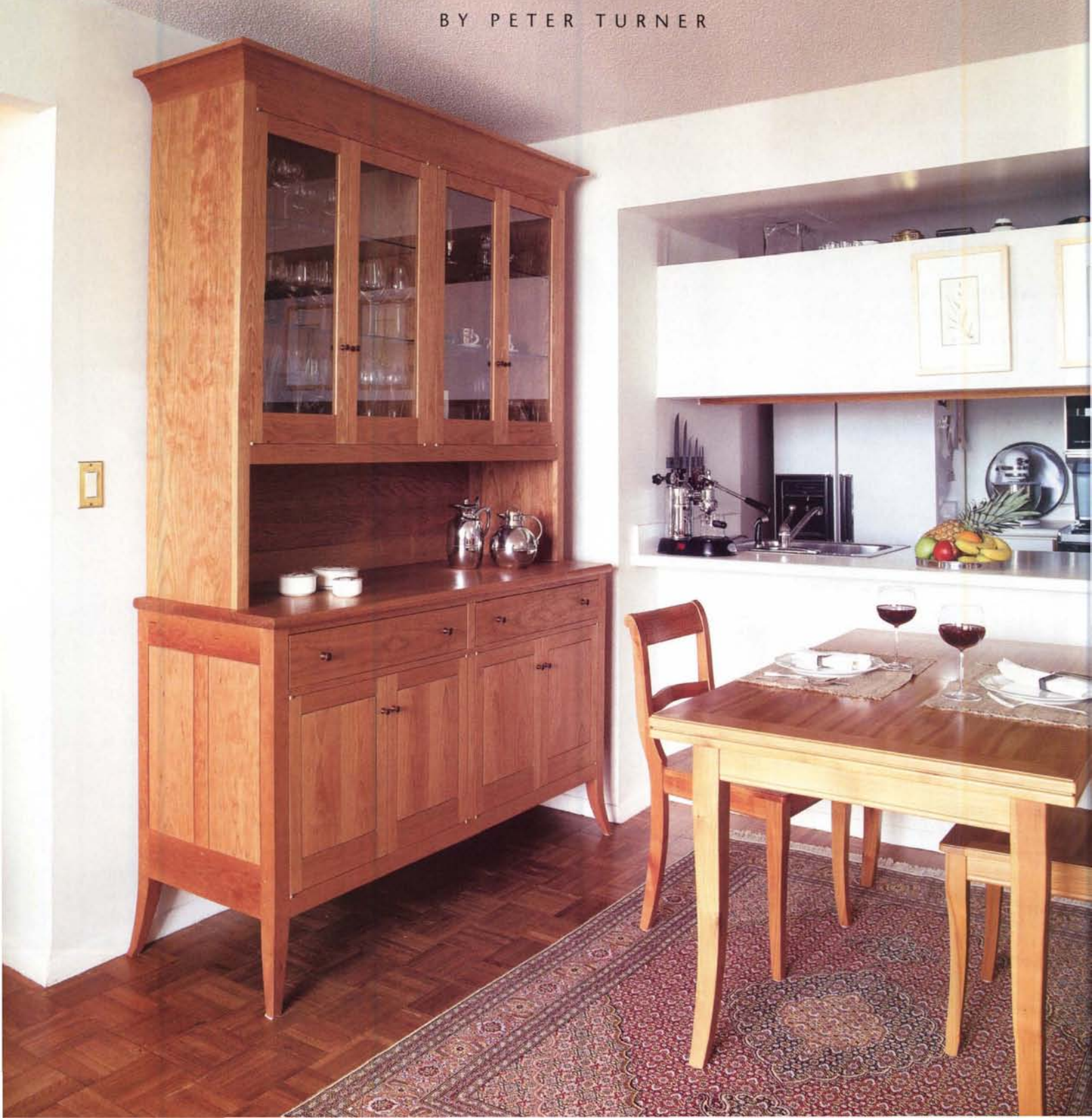
The thing to remember is kids treat furniture like it's anything but furniture. So keep in mind that designs which are suitable for adults may be harmful to children—especially when narrow tables become surfboards and pointy bedposts become goalposts. ■

Jennifer Matlack is the editorial assistant at Home Furniture.

Top photo this page: Antoine Bootz; middle photo: Jeanne Stack

A Modern Makeover for a Shaker Linen Press

BY PETER TURNER



The flush panels, flared legs and seamless cove of the crown molding give this traditional hutch a somewhat contemporary look, but it is clearly rooted in mid-19th century Shaker design, more specifically the casework of the western Shaker communities. In this piece, I drew on two linen presses built by Shaker furniture makers from Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. The combination of the frame-and-panel construction of the lower case and the dovetailed upper cabinet grew out of these examples.

Reworking the form for a modern setting—a small New York City apartment—was a true collaboration. My customers made a detailed sketch—right down to the knife hinges—loosely based on Shaker forms. Within their guidelines, I put together some sketches of my own.

A wall in their small dining room established the maximum width of the hutch—64 inches—and gave me a place to start, at least for the dimensions. I decided to add a coved crown molding and turned legs, a detail that I found in a book by Ejner Handberg called *Shop Drawings of Shaker Furniture and Woodenware* (Berkshire Traveller Press, 1975). The turned legs would replace the bracket feet in the

Well-suited for serving. The customers outfitted one of the drawers with a removable silver tray and used less obtrusive glass shelves, rather than solid wood, in the upper cabinet.

New use for an old form. Linen presses were used for storing clothing or valuable linen. In this modern adaptation, the form was pressed into service as a dining room hutch.

For more on Shaker design and construction

I leaned heavily on a few helpful references while designing this hutch: *The Complete Book of Shaker Furniture*, by Timothy D. Rieman and Jean M. Burks (Harry Abrams, Inc., 1993) has photographs of two "presses" (pp. 326-327) from Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. For construction details, such as attaching the top case to the bottom (I chose simple cleats), I turned to an article by Ronald Layport in *Fine Woodworking* ("Building an Open Hutch," No. 89, July/August 1991). To cut the cove shape for the crown molding, I used a skewed fence on my tablesaw, a method described by Frank Klausz III in his *Fine Woodworking* article ("Coves Cut on the Tablesaw," No. 102, Sept./Oct. 1993).

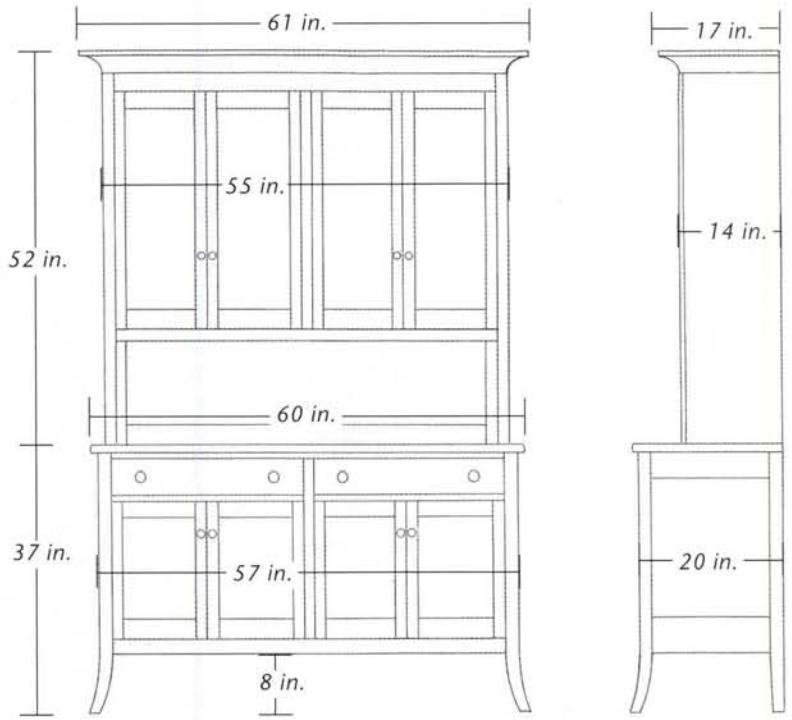
—Peter Turner

Photos: Scott Phillips; drawing: Author

How to make the hardware disappear. Discreet hardware, like these bullet catches and knife hinges, keep the focus on the wood.

ADDING FLARE TO THE FEET

The curved, tapered legs balance the deep cove of the crown molding. The rear legs only curve to the side so that the back of the hutch can be placed against a wall, while the front legs flare to the side and front.



customers' original drawing.

We exchanged drawings by mail, but it wasn't until later that we settled on the details. Motorcycling through Maine on vacation, the customers decided to stop by my shop to discuss revisions. Because the hutch was to share the room with a dining set they had made for them in Germany, we revisited the leg design. We replaced the turned legs I had suggested with curved, tapered ones that relate to the dining table and chairs.

The flared legs seem to balance the shape of the crown molding, which I had left flush with the side of the top to create an uninterrupted line. The flat, flush panels—both inside the cabinet and out, front and back—are a personal preference. To me, the panels and the unobtrusive hardware contribute to the cleanliness and simplicity of the facade. ■

The cherry hutch has maple drawers and wedged-and-tenoned pulls of sustainably harvested granadillo from Mexico.

Economy of line. Building on the orderliness of Shaker design, the author added inset doors and flush panels, giving the design a more contemporary facade.

Table and Chairs with a Split Personality

Strict Modernism softened by craft sensuality

BY E.E. "SKIP" BENSON

I like things that reveal themselves slowly. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction when someone says that they have just discovered a shape or curve in a piece of my furniture after they have lived with it for several months or even years. These chairs and their table are full of details that speak in lowered tones. But they also raise a different, louder voice. I think they reflect a conversation between two sides of my design aesthetic and two sides of the material they're made from.

As I see it, furniture design is always a tussle over the fact that wood comes in straight, flat planks and yet is an organic and sensuous material. Similarly, my taste in furniture is two-sided. I'm interested in hard-edged, abstract furniture like Gerrit

Style and structure. Chairs and table both reveal everything about the way they are put together and use their structure as ornament.

Photos: Jonathan Binzen

Rietveld's Zigzag chair, but I'm also drawn to furniture with softer, sinuous shapes. In these dining chairs and their table the rectilinear side is speaking louder, but the sinuous side is just as insistent. The chairs are four-square, comprised of major lines that are at first glance basically straight and perpendicular; yet there is not a completely straight line to be found.

LIGHTENING UP THE CUBE

Some years ago I made a set of a dozen chairs in acacia, big and squared off. At the time, I liked their heft. They were part of a group of dining room pieces that I designed in a Modernist mode, primarily composed of intersecting planes. As I looked back at my acacia chairs, however, they seemed to grow heavier by the month. And their unrelenting rectilinearity began to seem inhospitable. When I got a new commission for a set of dining chairs, I decided to revisit the four-square format, but to explore ways of softening the lines and edges and ways of attaining the same ruggedness, and the same strength, but without the leaden feeling.

Not long before this new commission came along I had made a side table with long legs and a thin top. I had one-inch thick stock, and instead of gluing up thick blanks to make the legs, I made the legs a sandwich separated by a reveal. This gave me rigidity with a light appearance. I used the same split-leg approach for these chairs, clamping the tenons of the arm rails and the side seat rails between the inner and outer halves of the legs.

Instead of dropping the slip seat directly into the frame of seat rails in the usual way, I elevated it an inch on three mid-rails whose ends I cut away at the top. By floating the seat this way I hoped to increase the sense of the chair's lightness.

SOFTENING THE SQUARE FORM

The treatment that I designed for the back slats was intended both to lighten and to soften the chair's appearance. I used curves on the top and the bottom of each back slat to make the chair seem airy and to play off its harder edges. I also relieved the front faces of the slats to accept a sitter's back; the scooped section is widest on the top slat and narrowest on the bottom slat, forming a section of a cone that unifies the back.

To keep the legs from seeming post-like, I introduced, along with the split down the middle, a taper from top to bottom on the inside and outside faces of the legs. I then added two playful opposing curves at the floor. These little curves led me to think of this as *the walking chair*.

PLAYING GRAIN GAMES

The combination of flat and curved elements in these pieces gave me the opportunity to explore the difference in the appearance of wood when flatsawn and when quartersawn. That contrast can often be dramatic, as in the case of Douglas fir or as here, with white oak.

When cutting out parts I oriented the stock so that the narrow edges would show the linear grain and ray fleck of quartersawn figure and the wider sides would have the coarser, sometimes wilder flatsawn figure. With the flat-cut tops of the back posts and the many through-tenons, there was also plenty of room for displaying oak's attractive end grain, and I burnished those surfaces to highlight it. ■

The unusually low-backed dining chairs are 30 in. high, 18 in. wide and 17 in. deep; the extension dining table is 30 in. high, 42 in. wide and 66 in. long when closed and 102 in. long with both leaves pulled out.

Over the top. Designed for a family whose kitchen looks through the dining room to the outdoors, the chairs were kept low-backed to leave the view unobstructed.

These legs are made for walking. The opposing curves at the bottom of the chair and table legs give them a sense of locomotion. The slip seat, raised on three mid-rails, seems ready to float away, too.

Comfortable cubes. Rigid geometry underlies Benson's chairs and table in white oak, but he softens it with curved and flared elements.

A Democracy of Furniture

Furniture makers should embrace America's unique "low-style," mixed-heritage pieces

BY TIMOTHY SCHREINER

Provenance. Authorship. Patronage. Adherence to historical style details. Those who make and study American furniture have paid a great deal of attention to the masterpieces produced by the best of our early cabinetmakers. The furniture galleries of most large, prestigious museums are full of these spectacular examples of craftsmanship and high style.

But there is another vein of less elegant but equally important American furniture that has often fallen beneath the radar of serious historical study. These sometimes rough pieces, often from the rural areas of America, tell thousands of little community stories of cross-fertilizing waves of immigrants hanging onto the symbols of their heritage, yet assimilating the ideas of their neighbors in a quest to become Americans. These American versions of vernacular furniture might contain French forms, English details, Native American carvings, German proportions or Spanish feet, and be made of a wood native

Illustration: Frank Riccio

A nation of nations. This rustic commode (left) made near the Canada-U.S. border in 1780 is pure American furniture. But it reflects English ancestry in its ball-and-claw feet (above left), country roots in the maker's use of thick, knotty wood and rough dovetails (above center) and French heritage in its rare crossbow-shaped front (above right). The maker crafted his drawer front out of a 3-inch thick piece of butternut, and tried to refine the oversized feet by cutting out a space between the ball and claw.

to the area. The dovetails might have been cut by crude tools; the wood and lines might be too thick. But furniture makers, especially those with an interest in their own heritage or that of their area, can learn from these pieces. They explain and preserve history by showing the interplay of social, economic, geographical and ethnic factors—all in a humble piece of furniture.

AMERICAN FURNITURE AS A MARBLE CAKE

"When it comes to furniture, America was not a melting pot, but a marble cake," says Jonathan Fairbanks, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts expert on American furniture. "It is a marble cake where all the various influences are still apparent." As in the nation itself, rich ethnic and regional diversity is the strength of American furniture. But with a few notable exceptions, these examples of lingering cultural influences are difficult to find. Such furniture often was not of masterpiece

Photos: Timothy Schreiner, unless otherwise noted; bottom photo this page: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Tenacious traditions. This 1790 knockdown cupboard made in the Hudson River valley reflects Dutch forms and culture, yet it was made 120 years after Dutch rulers left the area.

French lines, Canadian training, American wood. French influences followed the waterways of the Midwest, as shown in the non-symmetrical panels of this Indiana buffet.

quality, so it was frequently painted over and over to serve a new fashion, then exiled to the barn, where it served retirement duty as a work table or as a storage chest for paint and nails. The best hope for seeing these tributes to cultural persistence is the small regional museums that celebrate the immigrants and pioneers of that area.

In an effort to draw attention to this furniture—and encourage other major museums to do so—Fairbanks and his colleagues at the Museum of Fine Arts have opened a small exhibit titled "American Traditions: Art of the People." The gallery shows that it is impossible to divorce furniture from social and cultural history. It features furniture made by waves of immigrant craftsmen who wove their native influences together with the styles and traditions of other immigrants and the tribes of American Indians. The one common attribute that most assuredly ties this furniture to America is the use of wood indigenous to the continent, if not the immediate area.

TOOLS, TIME AND NEIGHBORS ALL AFFECTED FURNITURE

In each community, a furniture craftsman was limited not only by the influences he felt but also by his training, his tools and whether or not he had leisure time. While some craftsmen had backsaws, bow saws and ripsaws, many others merely had one saw for all tasks. A subsistence lifestyle with farming as the necessary foundation left little time or possibility for craft shops where masterful furniture could be produced full-time. In the American Traditions exhibit, a 1780 rustic commode probably originating somewhere near the Canada-U.S. border is made with basic house-frame construction, large rough dovetails and 3-inch thick drawer fronts (photos previous page). The woods are butternut and pine, which the unknown maker would have found near his home, and the piece has since been painted and stripped several times. Its huge ball-and-claw feet are more like the hands of a lumberjack than the talons of a bird, but they are cut out between the claw and ball in the style of more elegant New England examples. Reflecting the various nations that ruled the eastern reaches of the "New World," these English feet support a chest so purely French in form that it could have been based on a high-style 1735 Louis XIV commode two floors above it in the museum. Both pieces have three drawers with rare and difficult crossbow-shaped fronts. But the Canadian-English-French-American piece is clearly a product of its North American context.

INFLUENCES OF ANCESTORS, RULERS AND RIVERS

As quick as many American cabinetmakers were to ingest new ideas, the artistic and craft traditions of their

Photos this page and upper right and lower right photos facing page: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

homelands died hard. These lingering influences are exemplified in a large 1790 cupboard made in northern New Jersey by a man named Roelof D. Demarest (photo at far left). His knockdown chest is definitely American. It is made of native woods: red gum, yellow poplar and pine. Its through dovetails are nicely cut, and many details are indigenous to the area. But its form, the large kast, is strictly in the tradition of the Dutch—a group that hadn't governed the Hudson Valley for more than 120 years when Demarest made his piece. The kast not only embodies the Dutch form but also the continental preference for hanging clothes in cupboards rather than the Anglo-American tradition of storing them in drawers.

As with other American commerce, waterways had an impact on furniture design. The French, for example, had a great influence on the vast midsection of the country as traders navigated the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers. An 1800 Indiana dining room buffet in the museum gallery is pure Midwest country style and is made of American curly maple (photo on facing page). But the maker, Pierre Antoine Petit, brought French ideas from his training in Quebec to an area where French Creole tradition persisted. Thus the piece—with its drawers above large doors, non-symmetrical panels, carved decoration and bracket feet—demonstrates close ties to the rustic traditions of Normandy. "When people think of American furniture, they think of (John) Seymour, (Samuel) McIntire and (John) Goddard-(Job) Townsend," says American furniture expert Gerald Ward while inspecting the Petit buffet. "But this also is American furniture."

TWO DISTINCT CULTURES IN PERFECT SYNTHESIS

Sometimes our democratic furniture unites two distinct traditions, as in an 1860 chair made somewhere near the Maine-Nova Scotia border (photo at right). The Victorian hall chair "shows how cultures come together in perfect synthesis," says American decorative

A pointed cross-fertilization. Micmac Indians "upholstered" a porcupine-quill seat and back for this Maine chair.

Native American steam bending. The four sides of this Tsimshian chief's chest (right) are actually one cedar board, steam-bent at three corners and tied at the fourth corner (above) with spruce root.

A seat in America. Chairs, though spare, often show a distinct heritage: a Native American sun carved on a 1760 Spanish-style chair (above); and at right, (top row) a 1720 cedar chair from Bermuda, an 18th-century Delaware Valley ladderback; (bottom row) a classic American Windsor, a 1700 Spanish Colonial side chair made in Peru and a 1700 French-influenced chair made in Montreal.

arts expert Linda Foss Nichols. While its ebonized mahogany and Renaissance Revival lines are fundamentally Anglo, the "upholstery" of exquisite porcupine quillwork on birch bark is a contribution of the Micmacs, an Algonquian-speaking Indian tribe known as the Porcupine People.

Although we do not often associate furniture forms with Native American culture, its symbols are often found on furniture made by craftsmen of other cultures. One bishop's chair in the museum exhibit is Spanish-American in design, but the back of the chair contains a carved sun of Indian origin. Another Native American piece in the gallery is of particular interest to students of furniture making, because of its unique construction. A huge chief's chest is attributed to craftsmen of the Tsimshian tribe on the British Columbia-U.S. border (photos on p. 57). It is made of only three pieces of wood. The cover and bottom are each made of one piece of yellow cedar, carved out to lighten them. The four sides are made of a single, ½-inch thick red cedar plank, steamed with hot seaweed and rocks and then bent at three places to form a four-sided rectangle. The corner where the two ends of the plank meet is sewn together with spruce root.

Some folk art has high value. Pennsylvania German blanket chests increased in value when Henry Francis du Pont included them in his famous collection.

ISOLATED COMMUNITIES, STRONG IDENTITIES

The longer the immigrants lived in their new home, the more likely their

old customs and traditions disappeared. After the mid-1800s when industry and transportation began to homogenize America, most culturally distinguishable furniture was produced in communities that chose to isolate themselves. In the East, the Shaker religious community produced unique furniture in its pursuit of self-sufficiency. The Pennsylvania Germans, although they were a large group and had been in America for a century, carried on a folk tradition of making pine chests decorated with the floral and figural motifs of traditional German manuscripts (see photo below left). These vernacular chests, perhaps more than any other piece of "low-style" American furniture, have been elevated to the level of collectibles worthy of inclusion in a world-class museum, Ward says. The reason, he believes, is that when Henry Francis du Pont assembled the collection of fine furniture that became the highly respected Winterthur Museum, he included the one example of quaint folk furniture that he found prevalent in his local area: Pennsylvania German painted blanket chests. Ward does not question that these chests deserve their status, but he maintains that thousands more examples of America's democracy of furniture should be elevated as well.

Between two worlds. Texan Heinrick Kueneman II captured the size, form and construction of his German heritage in this 1870 wardrobe (left), but he used native curly pine and factory-produced colonettes and escutcheons (below).

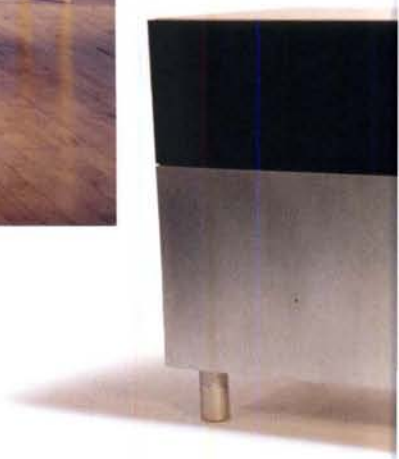
THE MAGNETIC PULL OF ASSIMILATION

As German immigrant craftsmen came to America, some quickly assimilated and worked in the Anglo style, such as Philadelphia's fine German cabinetmakers who built heavily English-influenced highboys for high-style patrons. Others, such as those who built painted blanket chests, worked in the German tradition. Heinrick Kueneman II, who lived in the Texas hill country with many other German immigrants, fell between the two extremes. He sought to preserve his heritage, while at the same time assimilating the tastes of his new home. The size and sturdy construction of his 1870 wardrobe, one of the largest pieces in the American Traditions exhibit, are very much in the German tradition (see photos above). But the curly pine used to make the piece was probably one of the few woods that was available to him in Fredericksburg, Texas. As furniture almost always reflects the time of its creation, Kueneman's details are also a reflection of American furniture making in the late 1800s: the drawer pulls, escutcheons and colonettes are factory-produced.

FACTORIES, CATALOGS, RAILROADS CHANGED TASTES

The introduction of mass production conspired with other factors to spell the end of much of this unique furniture with lingering ethnic and cultural influences. Montgomery Ward, Sears and Roebuck, and Larkin Soap catalogs, introduced around the same time, nationalized tastes for immigrants anxious to shed their accents and become more "American." Lower postal rates made these purchases more affordable, and transcontinental railroads broke down regional barriers and sped the homogenous furnishings to remote areas. To be sure, some culturally distinctive furniture exists today, as evidenced by the popularity of the Southwestern style. But woodworkers and museum curators would do well to rummage through their own area's forgotten furniture for inspiration and an important history lesson. ■

Timothy Schreiner is the editor of Home Furniture.



San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip

The Bay Area is breeding a new kind of furniture maker

BY ZACHARY GAULKIN

The aspiring actor will always find a home in Los Angeles, and New York can comfort the lonely writer. But where do young American furniture designers go to make their mark on the world? Lately, like moths to a distant glow, they've been swarming to the scrappy warehouse districts along San Francisco Bay.

Unlike back-to-the-landers of the 1960s and '70s, who turned to artisanry as an alternative lifestyle, these young furniture makers are blending an artisan sensibility with the start-up spirit of Silicon Valley and taking small-scale production out of the woods. They're using new materials, building prototypes but farming out the fabrication, and then selling (or trying to sell) their furniture in elite showrooms and on the Internet. Their dream, sometimes unspoken, is to create a new niche of contemporary "studio production" loosely modeled on the Italian furniture industry.

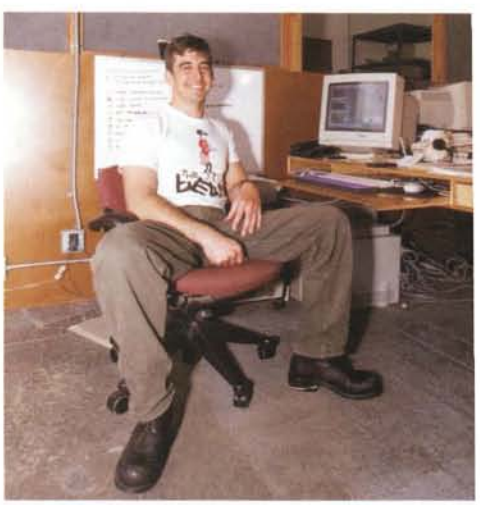
"It seems like everybody you talk to around here wants to be a furniture maker," says Andy Hope, who opened his business, Co-Motion, in a one-story warehouse in SoMa, San Francisco's hip design district south of Market Street. "It's sort of like the film industry in L.A."

FROM SILICON VALLEY TO SOMA

South-of-Market is the heart of the warehouse district and Hope, 30, is SoMa to the core. With degrees in art, engineering and product design from Stanford, he quit a job designing PowerBooks for Apple and started making steel and plywood furniture in a rented garage with little more than a jigsaw. Now sharing a warehouse with software engineers, Web site designers, a graphic artist and a freelance writer, he still makes furniture, but mostly he uses his shop for prototypes. "I'll keep doing custom work for new ideas, but it's hard to survive on that." This is the credo of the new generation: Keep a hand in the shop but focus on design. "I'd like to make my living as a designer rather than as a fabricator, " says Hope.

Hope is part of a phenomenon that reaches beyond the Bay Area, but nowhere, it seems, as rapidly or with a more welcoming spirit of cooperation. Why San Francisco? Some point to the microchip. "There's a big cluster of the design community here," says Dominic Longacre, who owns AD/50, a tony furniture gallery in downtown San Francisco that represents some of the local talent. "A lot of the furniture designers have migrated from Silicon Valley to other careers."

There are other reasons: a surplus of architecture and design graduates, many of whom would rather struggle on their own than toil anonymously in large firms; the proximity of design programs at local powerhouses such as Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley; and a talented and supportive community of artisans: machinists, woodworkers, metalsmiths



Taking technology out of the black box. Andy Hope, 30, (above) left a job designing laptop computers to build furniture like this revolving CD table (below).

Clockwise from top left: **Furniture meets the street** in SoMa, the South-of-Market warehouse neighborhood that has been transformed into a hip design district. **Made for people on the move,** Eric Pfeiffer's "Stacking Perf Boxes" were purchased by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. **Today's lean and clean look,** as reflected in Christopher Deam's plywood and stainless-steel cabinet, has roots in 1950s modernism. **Furniture makers share space with software engineers** in a cooperative warehouse on Howard Street, South of Market. **Designed for production,** plywood and steel chairs by Thomas Jameson, 28, retail for less than $200. *Center:* **The 'San Francisco vernacular,'** as exemplified in Ted Boerner's chairs, consists of blond woods and clean lines.

Photos: Jeanne Stack, unless otherwise noted; top left photo facing page and top right this page: Zachary Gaulkin; bottom left photo facing page: Robert Lee

and upholsterers.

"There's a long tradition in San Francisco of furniture being more than something you sit on," says Aaron Betsky, curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which opened just south of Market in 1995. "It plugs into the hippie tradition in northern California as well as an Arts and Crafts tradition." What the newcomers have grafted onto these traditions is a heightened sense of entrepreneurship, the start-up fever of Silicon Valley.

'SOFT MODERNISM' FOR SMALL SPACES

Yet production and sales are not the only goals, which is a good thing, considering the small size of the market for expensive, contemporary furnishings. "Average America does not want a couch that looks like this," says Eric Pfeiffer of Bravo 20, pointing to his stainless-steel sofa and lounge chair with arms that look like outdoor railings. "What you have here is a group of creative people who want to see their ideas built the way they envision them."

For Pfeiffer, 28, it's a short trip from SoMa to MoMA—the Museum of Modern Art bought four of his pieces almost before he had any paying customers. Like many of his contemporaries, he left a professional design career (landscape architecture) to make furniture. He began by building pieces in his apartment; now all the production is done elsewhere. "There are so many good craftsmen in the Bay Area," he says. "I love building furniture, but you can't do it all. You can't expect to be on top of your design game and be in the shop, too."

His furniture, as with much of the warehouse fare, has a pared down 1950s look, well-made but low on ornamentation. He calls it "the San Francisco vernacular" or "soft modernism," a lean and clean style for small spaces and semi-permanent lifestyles. "It's functional. It comes out of necessity."

Aaron Betsky is more blunt but no less admiring: "It's kind of like the furniture equivalent of the Gap. It's high-style at a lower price point."

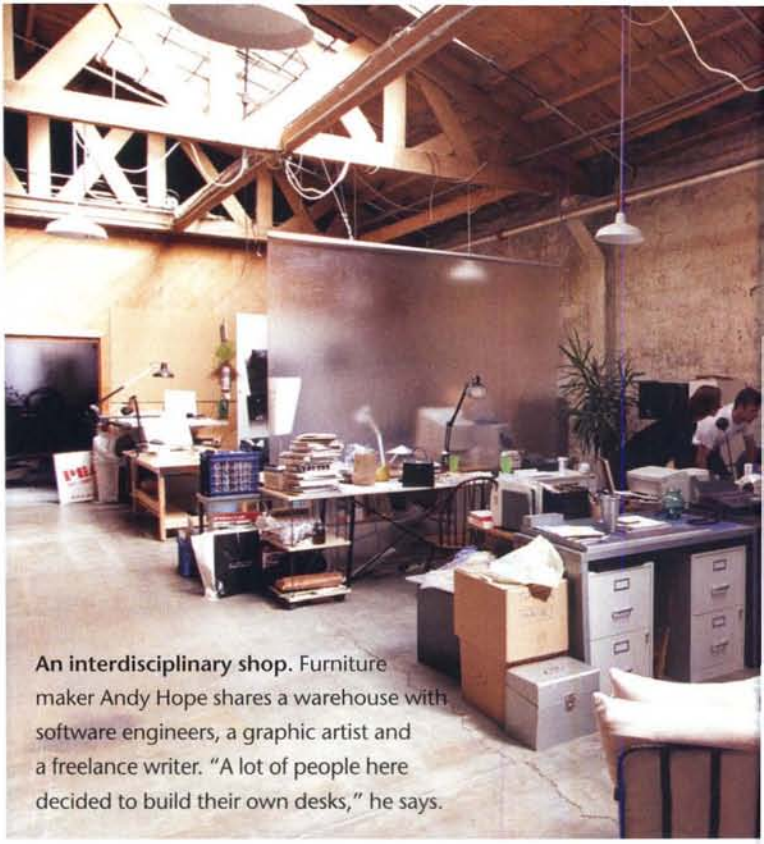
MILAN BY THE BAY

If there are role models for companies like Co-Motion and Bravo 20, they are in Italy, where big manufacturers hire young, independent designers to create their contemporary furniture lines. In the United States, that partnership doesn't exist, so young designers have no choice but to bootstrap from the bottom.

"The industry is not willing to look at us, and there's a lot of talent out there," says Thomas Jameson, the 28-year-old owner of Item, makers of a line of moderately priced plywood and steel furniture based in Berkeley. "I think what you have out here are a lot of architects and design graduates who have enough gumption to say, 'Screw it, I'm going out on my own.'"

That's exactly what Jameson did. He studied architecture and then spent a couple of years at a big firm while making furniture at night and on weekends. He started Item only four years ago and now employs six people, producing between 100 and 200 colorful plywood-and-steel chairs a month.

Furniture makers like Jameson do not inhabit a leafy world of wood shav-



An interdisciplinary shop. Furniture maker Andy Hope shares a warehouse with software engineers, a graphic artist and a freelance writer. "A lot of people here decided to build their own desks," he says.

If there's a slogan, it's simplicity, says Ted Boerner, a former set designer with a line of contemporary furniture (right). "I sometimes attribute it to where we are. There's a comfortable, enjoyable lifestyle here."

Tribute to "the modern masters." Eric Pfeiffer of Bravo 20 (right) credits 1950s designers like Charles and Ray Eames as the inspiration behind his furniture (below right). "We're mostly designers," says Pfeiffer, who makes prototypes but farms out the fabrication to metalsmiths and woodworkers. "But we have a very good understanding of how things come together."

ings and supple, hand-rubbed furniture; their work often veers toward the boxy and modular. But what it lacks in texture it makes up for graphically, with bold color, geometry and materials. For the most part, the furniture is well-made, perhaps because many of the designers have built furniture themselves and bring an affinity for craft to the rigid world of production. "I grew up subscribing to *Fine Woodworking* and doing a lot of woodworking myself," says Derek Dorrestyn, a machinist and the founder of Module, a furniture and metal fabrication company. "I don't do any woodworking now but we all appreciate that kind of craftsmanship."

SPREADING THE WELCOME MAT

As if to deliver a moral message in response to the industry's cold shoulder, these small, independent designers go out of their way to help each other, despite the fact that they are also in competition. "If I'm looking for something, I have no qualms about calling someone up and very rarely am I met with any hesitation about sharing resources," says Andy Hope of Co-Motion. Two separate but overlapping groups—the San Francisco Furniture Forum and the San Francisco Portfolio—keep their members in touch with the world outside their studios.

"It's a real community here," says Ted Boerner, a former set designer who helped to put together the Portfolio, a fluctuating group of designers who exhibit at the annual International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. "I live within blocks of people in the industry and it's easy to get 40 or 50 people together for a meeting."

Boerner has been one of the first of the group to succeed—his designs appear in showrooms in San Francisco and New York, and he has landed big commissions from hotels and restaurants. And at 40, he is one of the group's elder statesmen. "I get calls all the time from people on the East Coast who are moving out here because they think this is where to do furniture." ■

Zachary Gaulkin is an associate editor at Home Furniture.

"People here are looking more at the European model," says Derek Dorrestyn, far right, a machinist and the owner of Module, which produces furniture, hardware (above) and accessories.

Top photo facing page and top right and lower right photos this page: Zachary Gaulkin

Inspiring Lines of a Kwila Desk

BY MYRICK ASHLEY

Floatation device. Leaving space above and below the drawer boxes gives lightness to the eight-legged desk, and provides a place to display items without cluttering the desktop.

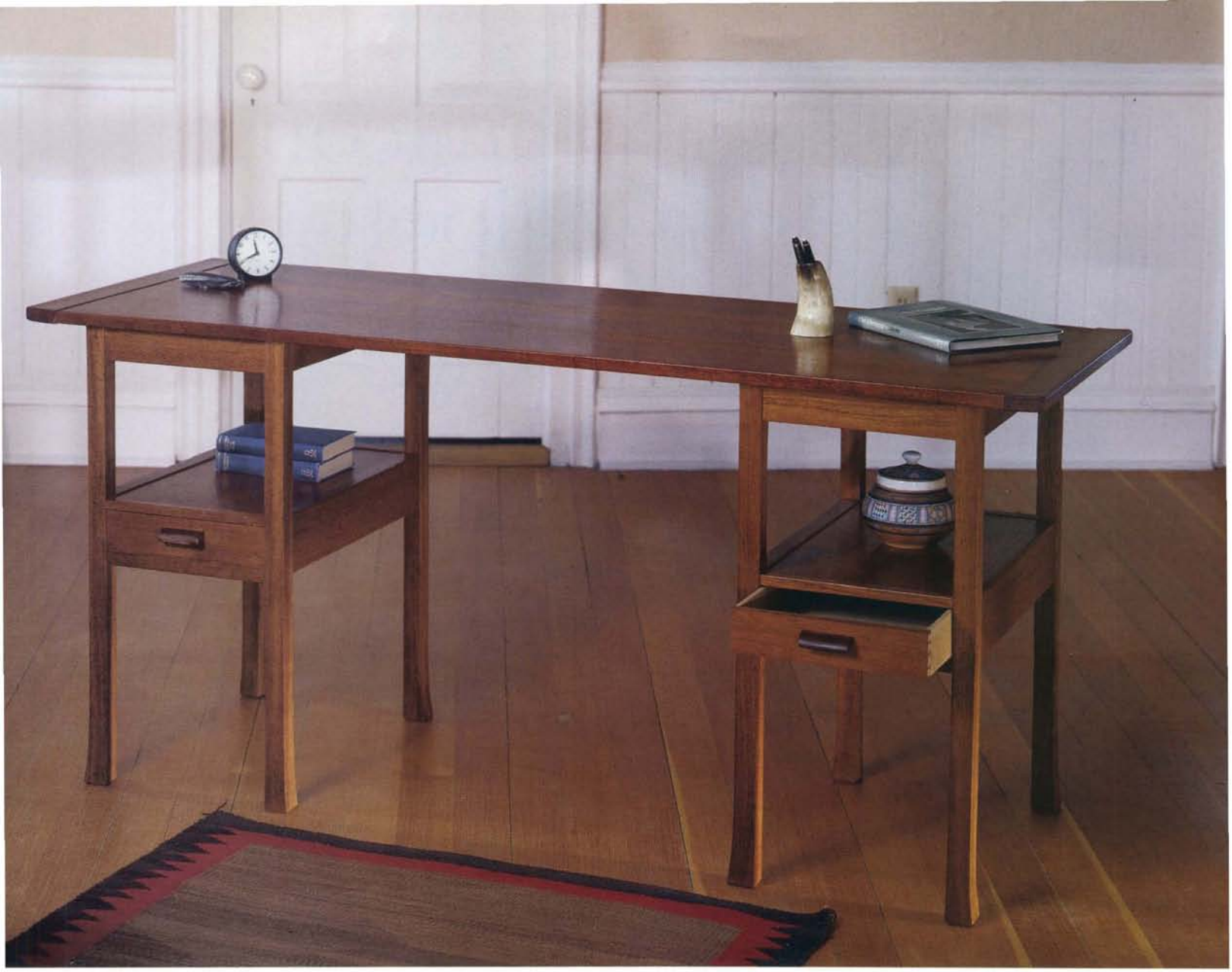
It's quite a vote of confidence when someone asks me to make something for them, gives me some rough dimensions, plus or minus an inch or two, and says "Do your own thing." So I was particularly grateful when my friend Dave Metcalf said he needed a writing desk and left the design completely up to me.

As a student of feng shui—the Chinese philosophy of the relationship of people to their environments—I look to make furniture with graceful lines and defined edges, being careful to avoid creating any sharp corners. Feng shui considers the placement of furniture within a room, and of a room within its environment, but it also concerns the flow of movement within a piece. For a writing desk, where someone will spend hours engaged in creative work, I think this flow of energy is especially important.

While thumbing through *Classic Chinese Furniture* by Wang Shixiang, I was inspired by an artist's painting table from the Ming dynasty period. The idea of its eight legs and "floating" drawers fascinated me. I liked the idea of the Chinese table for a desk, but I did not want to copy it, as it would be in the details where I could express myself. For example, the legs of the Chinese desk had horse-hoof feet, which curl underneath on their two outside faces. For my desk, I made several sketches, then experimented with several scraps of wood on the bandsaw until I found this shape, where the outside faces flow slightly outward to make the legs seem more rooted to the floor.

My next consideration was wood, and kwila's warm tone suited the formal but friendly mood I wanted. Usually I'm cautious about using tropical woods because of environmental con-

Photos: Laurie Lane



Improving your workflow. Inspired by a photo of a Chinese painting table, the author wanted to make a writing desk that was comfortable to use, with graceful lines and no sharp corners.

cerns. This wood was imported by EcoTimber International in Berkeley, California. The company works with a community-based business in Papua New Guinea that is committed to the long-term sustainable use and protection of its surrounding forests. As I was studying at the time with James Krenov at the College of the Redwoods in northern California, I was able to drive down and pick through a stack of kwila in EcoTimber's warehouse for the boards I needed.

The most challenging problem was finding the best way to build the two drawer boxes to ensure stability with a minimum of wood movement. The solution was to laminate together two pieces of ½-inch Baltic-birch plywood for the drawer box sides and then cover them with thick (3/16-inch) kwila veneers. The thicker veneers allowed me to work the surfaces for an attractive reveal where they meet the table legs, and to round off the edges for a friendly feel. Floating tenons of maple joined these pieces to the legs. The top panels of the boxes are also kwila veneer over plywood. The drawer sides are English beech, and the drawer bottoms are of cedar of Lebanon from a tree in England that had been felled by a hurricane.

The breadboard ends have an upward curve shaped with a handplane with a rounded bottom. Keeping these ends extra thick allowed me to work them down to their final shape. ■

The desk is 60⅝ in. long, 22¼ in. wide and 28⅞ in. high. EcoTimber International is located at 1020 Heinz Ave., Berkeley, CA 94110; (510) 549-3000.

Assessing an Icon: Sam Maloof

Home is where his furniture's heart is

BY JONATHAN BINZEN

Sam Maloof has long since crossed over from the land of the humble craftsman into the realm of the furniture-making phenomenon. It is true that today, at 81, he continues to do things much the way he has since the day in 1948 when he quit his graphic design job cold-turkey and began making furniture for a living. He still rises early and spends the best part of the day in his shop designing, cutting out and assembling pieces of furniture—designs very little changed over the decades—before handing them on for shaping, sanding and finishing to his three assistants. With his wife, Alfreda, he still lives in the lemon grove they bought 46 years ago in Rancho Cucamonga, California, just east of Los Angeles, and he still tinkers with the extraordinary house and outbuildings that he designed and built there. But so much around him has changed.

A dining chair he made for $30 in 1952 now fetches $5,000. If you'd like to commission one of his trademark rockers, like the one purchased for the White House collection, for example, you'll need between $12,000 and $18,000 and the patience to wait in line for up to several years. But you shouldn't complain, because like the $30 chair, your rocker will appreciate in the meantime. At a recent auction at Christie's, a dining table and chairs Maloof made for $900 in 1966 brought just over $40,000.

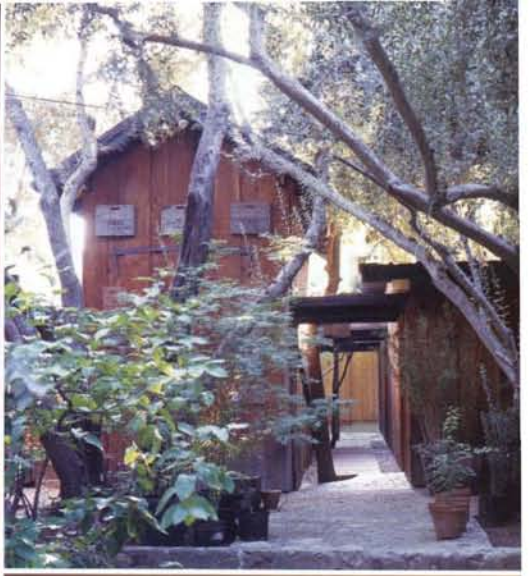
Maloof's furniture is valued as highly in art circles as in financial ones. Pieces have been purchased by major museums across the country, including New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (which snapped up 12 pieces) and the Los Angeles County Art Museum.

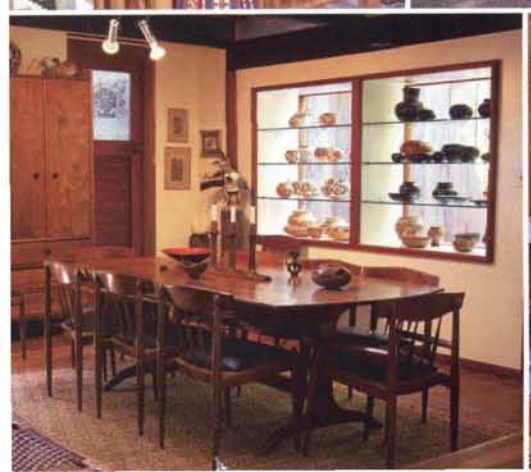
The Maloofs' house, filled with perhaps 125 pieces of his furniture as well as an outstanding (and still growing) collection of other crafts and paintings, was declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. Over the years, Maloof and the house have been the subjects of a constant stream of newspaper and magazine articles, TV spots and videos; in 1983, Kodansha books published a lavish autobiography, *Sam Maloof, Woodworker*.

And there have been other accolades. In 1985, the MacArthur Foundation named Maloof a Fellow, awarding him a five-year, $300,000 "genius" grant, stipulating only that he continue his work—as if he had anything else in mind. The Rhode Island School of Design recently conferred on this high school graduate an honorary doctorate. And the Smithsonian Institution, when it announced awards for lifetime achievement in five craft media earlier this year, named Maloof in wood.

In addition to this embarrassment of high-octane acclaim, Maloof's reputation is also fueled by the appreciation (and imitation) of his peers. Maloof's rockers, particularly, have set a standard by which other attempts are judged. Their influence is obvious in the work of professional as well as amateur designers, and even those who have successfully found their own, quite different voice often mention Maloof's classic

Photos: Jonathan Binzen, unless otherwise noted; bottom right photo facing page: Sam Maloof

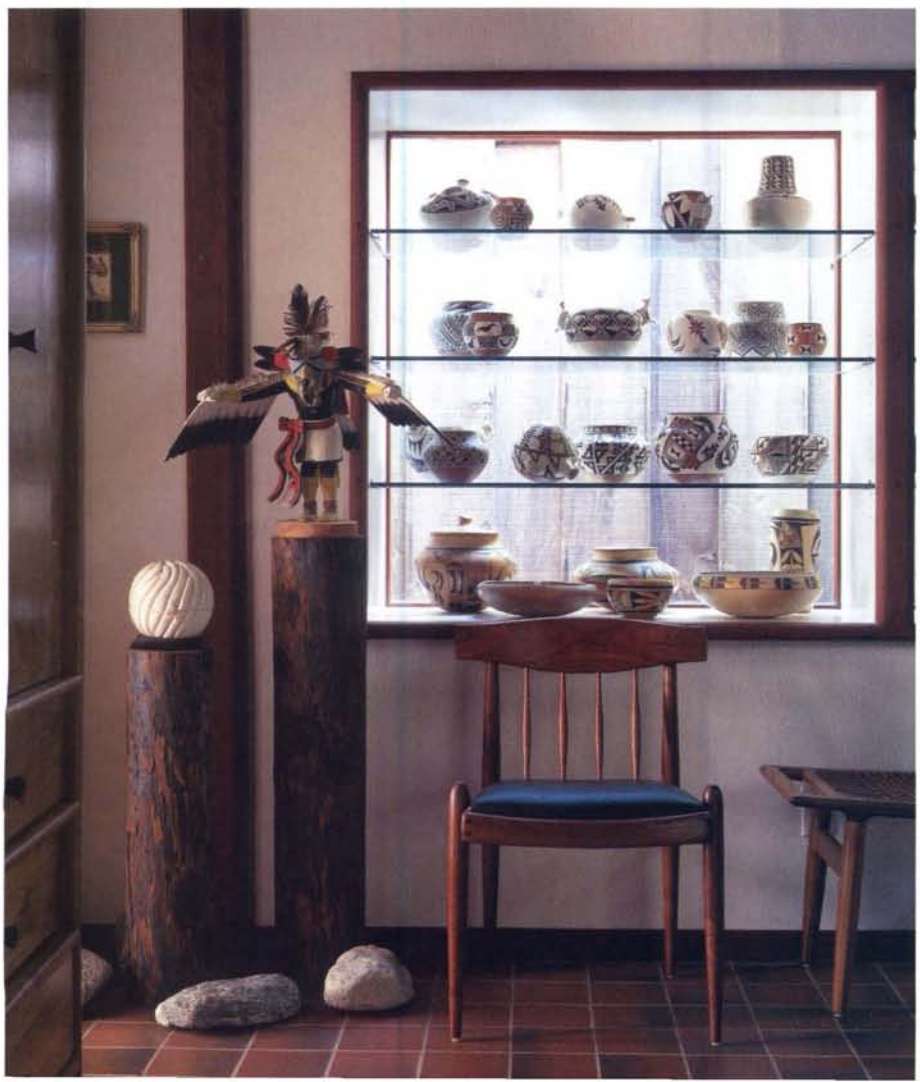




Inventing an environment. The conventional doesn't have a place in Sam Maloof's house. Handmade objects are everywhere—beginning with the house itself, which Maloof designed and built room by room over the years. Photos on this page were taken in and around the Maloof house; the group portrait is of Sam and Alfreda with Sam's assistants, from left, David Wade, Mike Johnson, Larry White, and Larry's wife Katherine. Opposite page: Alfreda and Sam Maloof in early July, not long after their 49th wedding anniversary.

Maloof's magazine rack. He won't be able to market it, but Maloof has come up with a neat system for storing a raft of magazines without taking them out of reach.

Sharpening the furniture maker's eye. Maloof, who began as a graphic artist, believes furniture makers ought to absorb as much other art and craft as they can. Here his chair and bench stand before a window he built to display Native American pots.



rockers as a starting point.

In the fine arts, this kind of success is not such a rarity. But furniture is a medium that, while demanding great dedication and self-sacrifice from its practitioners, rewards very few with even a reasonable living and a little recognition; in such a field, Maloof's immoderate success naturally leads one to wonder: Why has all this acclaim fallen to Sam Maloof?

THE WORK

A good part of the answer is in the work. Like the man himself, Maloof's work seems to appeal in some way to just about everyone who encounters it. Even those with no real knowledge of craft furniture recognize something special in a Maloof piece. Just as important, they instantly understand it. Maloof's furniture is an open book.

As good as a Maloof piece looks in a studio photograph, its appeal is stronger in person. The visual impact may be less dramatic, but the attraction of something useful, begging to be touched and enjoyed takes over. In the guest room where I stayed on a recent visit I filled the drawers of the bedside bureau and the hangers of the nearby wardrobe before I'd really looked at them—the bureau drawers all ran easily, wood on wood, and in the wardrobe the shirts hung unhindered, not bumping against the back or the doors—I'd enjoyed the simple pleasure of something that really works without consciously taking the pieces in.

In Maloof's furniture, neither form nor function follows. Despite his training as an artist, Maloof embraced the functional side of furniture along with the aesthetic side right from the start. His achievement has been to find in piece after piece a seductive blend of form and function in which neither side is permitted to dominate.

Maloof contends that a good piece of furniture must contain something of the eye, the hand and the heart. His pieces have all three. For the eye, fluid lines, rounded forms defined by one hard edge, balanced proportions; for the hand, inviting shapes, solid construction and a truly relaxing comfort; and for the heart, well, this one is in the heart of the beholder, but it seems to me the emotional core of his pieces is an unlikely no-nonsense romanticism.

Maloof's furniture brings art into everyday life; perhaps this accounts for its enduring popularity. Certainly it is not a matter of fashion. Maloof has always flouted fashion, working the same narrow vein over the decades and coming as close as possible to perfecting it. Perhaps it is precisely because he has refused to be deflected from his original path that he and his furniture remain vital.

THE MAN

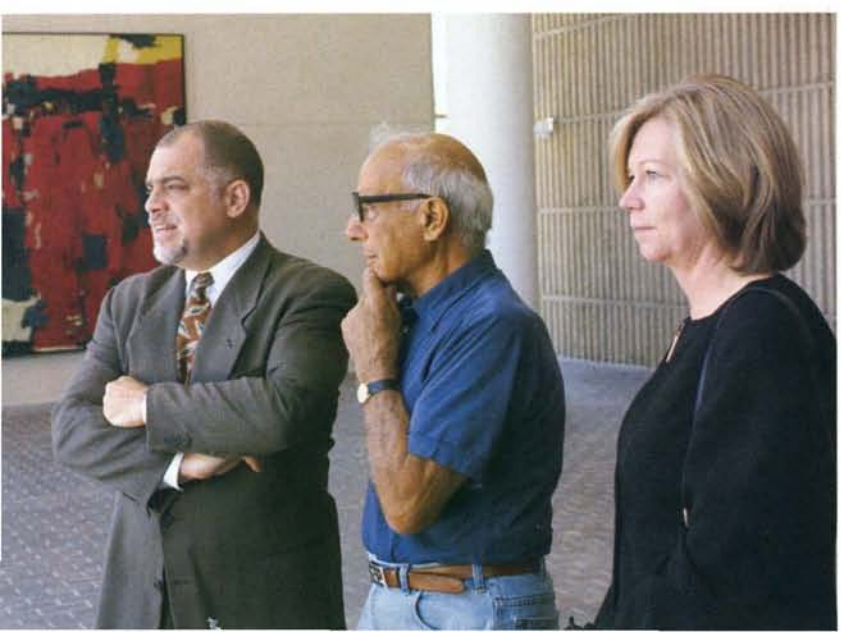
Sam Maloof will tell you that he is very good friends with every customer

he's ever had. Meeting him, you can well believe it. With his open, informal manner he charms just about everyone he meets. You feel in the first minutes the power of his personality as he welcomes you into the warm circle of his family. Even while doing most of the talking, he manages to make you feel essential to the conversation.

It is clear that Maloof's love of contact with people drives his business just as much as his love of the work. Customers provide his living, but also his oxygen. He draws no line between social life and business—his customers are his friends and his friends are often his customers.

Maloof can dial back through the decades and tell you who bought what and for how much; if they resold it, years later, he remembers when, to whom, and how much higher the price was. And he remembers the people as clearly as the furniture. In fact, he's something of a repository of life stories. Spend a few days with him and you can leave your novel at home. You'll hear pungent, vividly told (but discreetly anonymous) stories of births and deaths, marriages and affairs, divorces and remarriages, financial successes and reversals, all threaded together with Maloof furniture.

If Maloof thrives on the connection between customer and maker that defines and elevates the handmade



At home among crafts. Sam and Alfreda Maloof are passionate admirers and collectors of a wide range of crafts, as evidenced in their bedroom, with its Native American baskets and blankets, pre-Columbian sculpture, and contemporary ceramics and paintings.

Furniture as fine art. At the Orange County Museum of Art, chief curator Bruce Guenther and director Naomi Vine, interested in mounting a retrospective of Maloof's furniture, show him their renovated galleries.

transaction, surely the feeling is mutual; surely customers are drawn back again and again for a fix of Maloof as well as for his furniture.

THE HOME

Sun dapples the hood of your car as you glide down the Maloofs' driveway. You pass beneath eucalyptus trees, lemons, an enormous old avocado, and park beneath a broad-leafed English walnut. You've heard about the house, but you can barely see it. It is shrouded in a profusion of trees and flowers and shrubs, most of which the Maloofs have planted over the years. You are not meant to see the house all at once. It is not about elevations but about sheltered coziness. Finding your way inside is like coming across a doorway deep in the woods.

When the Maloofs came here in 1951 their little lemon grove was just one brushstroke on a miles-long canvas of citrus. Today, their 5½-acre property is still covered with lemons, but outside the fence is the malling of America: tract houses of varying degrees line up from here to the hazy horizon. Strip malls wrap around every corner. The disparity makes it doubly sweet to enter this little paradise and triply jarring to leave it.

Built piecemeal and constantly revised, the house is a rambling series of loosely linked one and two-story rooms. Like the furniture that occupies every corner, the house is built for comfort, for relaxing. Books are wedged into every inch of shelf space and overflow into stacks on the floor. Magazines are so plentiful they have one whole stairway for a rack. There are nooks and hideaways for reading and lolling, some best in daylight, oth-

Leaving strong enough alone. On his case pieces, as in this walnut bureau from 1949, Maloof's approach tends to be rectilinear; he leaves the more sculptural lines to his chairs.

Southwest side story. Maloof became interested in the crafts of Native Americans through his wife, Alfreda, who worked as an art teacher in the Indian Service. Here an early painting of Sam's in the palette of the Southwest hangs above one of his settees.

Dislodging a Landmark

Sam Maloof first heard rumors 30 years ago about a proposed freeway that would run right through his property at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains just east of Los Angeles. Those rumblings are now real—ground was broken at both ends of Highway 30 this summer. Unlike most everything else in the highway's path, Maloof's house will not be demolished. Instead, protected by its historic status, it will be moved—main house, guest house, two shop buildings, even many of the trees—to another property several miles away.

The San Bernadino Area Governments (with some federal highway funding) will reportedly spend over $10 million on the project, including $3 million to endow the Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation for Arts and Crafts, which will open the house and grounds to the public in perpetuity in the new location as a museum and educational center called The Maloof House. A new residence for the Maloofs will be built to Sam's design on the new property. The entire process will likely take three years to complete.

Tender retouching. Still at it every day in the shop, Maloof sands out a ding from a wayward vacuum cleaner in a rocker owned by a local customer.

ers better for curling up at night.

While the house generously feeds the craving for comfort, it also attends to the hungry, discerning eye. Sam and Alfreda love ceramics, weaving, baskets, sculpture, carvings, paintings, turnings—just about anything hand made—and the house is filled with beautiful objects inventively displayed. Most all the pieces (except for many of the Native American ones) are the work of people they know. Nothing is behind glass; it is all accessible, part of everyday life, making the house feel less like a showplace than a cross between a kid's treehouse, an artist's studio and a family cabin in the woods. Although entirely personal, the Maloofs' house is also open to others: their guest book on the kitchen counter accumulates entries at an amazing clip.

Here inside the house you can sense that Sam Maloof has become something of an icon not just because he has made excellent furniture, but because he and Alfreda have made an extraordinary life. One that embodies a love of handmade things and a pleasure in shaping one's own environment. Realizing a fantasy that we all indulge as children, the Maloofs have created their own world, self-contained but not cut off, and have invited us to visit. ■

Ever upward. At 81, Maloof continues to crank out the work and develop his designs. A recent chair with a new outward curve to its arm stands beneath his sensuous spiral staircase from 1983.

Jonathan Binzen is an associate editor at Home Furniture.

fine furniture timbers

BY JAMES H. FLYNN, JR.

Treasured Ebony

I do believe that woodworkers are inherent scroungers. Old pieces of wood, antique tools, bits of hardware that may still be useful are all attractive booty to the keen eye. So I could not pass by and let a venerable building in my New England hometown fall to the wrecker's ball without searching for some memorabilia. Flashlight in hand, I clawed my way into the rat-infested building and was soon deep in the cellar poring over heaps of old files, busted furniture and curios galore. On a wooden girder deep in the dust I spotted a veneered box. It contained no gold trinkets, but a treasure nevertheless. The box was filled to the brim with black and white piano keys! The blacks were of the finest ebony and the whites pure ivory.

Family tree. The branch at left from this member of the ebony family, *Diospyros texana*, displays its spring flowers, while the upper branch shows its fall fruit.

Over the years, I saved this ebony for making small pieces in musical instruments and found it far superior in color and grain to any other ebony I have worked.

Ebony was used sparingly in ancient Egypt, and Chinese pieces of art from the Ming Dynasty were embellished with it. Three centuries ago, ebony's prevalence in fine marquetry gave the French their word for a master cabinetmaker—*ébéniste*. It continues to this day to be a prince in the kingdom of wood.

Just what is this exotic wood? The first thing one thinks is that it is black, but not all ebony is black. In the plant family Ebenaceae (ebony) resides the genus *Diospyros* with over 400 species. Only a chosen few produce true black wood. The common persimmon, *D. virginiana*, for example, shows a trace of black in its heartwood only when it reaches a very old age. I like to think that the piano keys I found were *D. ebenum*, the *crème de la crème* of all the ebonies. This species is known as Ceylon ebony, and was as extremely scarce 100 years ago as it is today.

In today's marketplace there are perhaps a half-dozen species of ebony available. Some, like Ceylon ebony or Macassar ebony (*D. celebica*), are from the East Indies; others like Gabon ebony (*D. dendo*) come from Africa. Most are not jet black but range from gray-black to shades of green, often striped with tan, yellow, gold or orange. It is best to consider carefully your supplier's description of the wood's color, stripes and other characteristics. Also, be aware that products are available to effectively stain ebony that is not pure black. There is also high variability in the density of various

Black gold. A block of old-growth Gabon ebony, as well as an ebony piano key the author salvaged from an abandoned building, rest on boards of striped Macassar (front) and black Gabon ebony (rear).

Photo: Scott Phillips; drawings: Michael Rothman

A surprise inside. The color of ebony wood varies among species and even from tree to tree. A harvester can't tell the color of a tree's heartwood until its logs hit the sawdeck.

ebonies, with species ranging from 45 to 60 pounds per cubic foot.

Working with ebony is unlike working with more common woods. Small pieces tend to be very brittle, a problem if you are coaxing a narrow strip of banding around a bend. Carvers develop a knack for carefully controlling the pressure of the chisel to avoid splitting the wood. Ebony will glue and hang in tightly if you wipe its edges with a solvent to remove the surface oil. (I use a solvent made for removing rubber cement.) Finishes can be applied with care, but the wood really does not need it. Polishing with 1200 grit sandpaper produces a bright and lustrous shine needing only a coat of wax.

The trees producing black ebony never reach above 50 feet, with trunk diameters of at most one to two feet, so don't expect to find many large pieces of ebony, except as veneer. Many hardwood suppliers have turning blocks and other small pieces in stock and the prices are what the limited supply dictates. Ebony is best used to highlight some focal point, such as drawer pulls, or to lend contrast to a wood that seems dull by itself, perhaps as banding around table legs. There are all sorts of decorative inlays, marquetry and turnings that use ebony to perfection. It is a real artist's delight. Work a piece into your next project and join the long line of users who know how enchanting this wood can be.

James H. Flynn is an Associate Editor of World of Wood, *the journal of the International Wood Collectors Society.*

BY JENNIFER MATLACK

Cementing a Deal Between Concrete and Wood

A top-heavyweight material. Because concrete's weight makes it a weak contender against gravity, its best application is for tabletops. The bases of Ted Boerner's bookend tables serve as supports for their matte black concrete tops.

"I love it," gushes furniture designer Buddy Rhodes when asked about concrete. Of all the things to love—concrete? Let's face it. It's not a very romantic material. It's gray, weighs a lot and sometimes, it cracks. Still, Rhodes remains enamored. But who can blame him? Concrete is getting around the block, fast becoming a popular material to build furniture with. So, despite all the negatives, there are positives. Concrete is malleable and can be cast into a variety of shapes and sizes and colors. When you work with it, you may be surprised. Rather than break your back, it might just steal your heart.

Several different ingredients comprise concrete. The dense and durable material is made up of fine and coarse aggregates such as sand and gravel, water and cement. All are necessary, but cement is perhaps the most essential ingredient of all. Its role is crucial in that it acts to bind all the materials together. The result is strong, solid concrete.

By definition, cement denotes anything that binds, such as glue or paste. But for concrete to work, the kind of cement needed is Portland. First made in the early 19th century, its name came from its resemblance to a limestone found on the English Isle of Portland. It's this particular cement that makes concrete so durable. "Once it binds with aggregates and hardens," says Bob Shuldes, a technical advisor for the Portland Cement Association, "it's stable." He adds that "even prolonged exposure to moisture won't affect it." Portland along with other kinds of cement can be found in the Yellow Pages.

Besides cement, concrete calls for water. It's this ingredient that makes concrete a temporarily wet, malleable mass, and it's in this state that concrete can be easily manipulated into a variety of shapes and sizes (see photos on p. 78).

When making his all-concrete

A lighter alternative. For the doors on Aaron Haba's console, gypsum cement was used instead of concrete. Gypsum can be colored and shaped like concrete but because it's lighter, it's not limited to tabletops.

Top photo: Jeanne Stack; bottom photo: Aaron Haba

furniture, George Bishop, owner of Get Real Surfaces, constructs a frame out of wood, plastic or fiberglass. A wooden mold is then placed inside the frame and treated with a special form oil to keep the concrete from sticking. In a day or two, the concrete sets. The frame is then disassembled and the concrete is extracted from the mold by hand. So it isn't brittle and doesn't break, it's typically an inch and a half thick. Remember the thicker and bigger the piece of concrete, the heavier it is to move. So, think about how far you'll have to move the slab before you pick a spot to pour.

When you work with concrete, there's more to know than just mixing and pouring ingredients into a mold. Something to consider is that when concrete dries, it contracts. And contracting may mean cracking. To avoid this, Bishop sandwiches wire mesh inside his concrete. But if your concrete does crack due to shrinkage, don't crack up. Lines can be easily filled and repaired.

Another concrete consideration is its weight. It's a heavy material. "But by substituting for the standard heavy stone or sand with a lightweight aggregate such as pumice," explains Bishop, "its weight can be decreased from 140-150 pounds per cubic foot to about half that." He adds that in addition to using pumice, expanded shale can also be added. "The shale is burnt, causing it to pop like popcorn thus decreasing its weight."

Sometimes its weight can limit its applications. Its best use is for tabletops where it can be supported by a base. For doors, however, it isn't the best material. Aware of its limits, Aaron Haba, a West Coast furniture designer, uses a similar material. For the doors on his console (see bottom photo on p. 76), he uses gypsum cement instead of standard concrete. It's not as durable but it is lighter. "In terms of making the doors work," he says "you wouldn't want to do a thin concrete casting." You couldn't go less than an inch thick or the concrete would be too brittle and crack. Still, an inch of concrete would put too much stress on door hinges and inevitably, gravity would win out.

To get away from concrete's flat, gray or white color, powdered pigment can be used. Bishop achieves custom colors by mixing and matching different pigments. Color can be achieved either naturally or synthetically. "Natural minerals can be used or you can use the synthetic pigments that color paint," advises Haba. The choice is yours, really. The best place to find color for your concrete is at an art supply store.

Jennifer Matlack is the editorial assistant at Home Furniture.

A silver tabletop is golden. Concrete can be easily molded to any shape or size. Here, Get Real Surface's concrete tabletop adapts to a curved and straight edge.

Concrete tabletop in the making. In the photos above, concrete is poured and leveled and then left to set for approximately two days. Perhaps the most difficult part is moving the slab once it is dry.

Photos this page: Get Real Surfaces, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

about the authors and furniture makers

Home Furniture *prints the addresses and telephone numbers of the furniture makers featured in each issue, unless the maker requests that they be omitted.*

PATRICIA HARRISON (photo below) is a professor of environmental design at the University of California at Davis. She has degrees in design, history and architecture, and worked for 20 years in private architectural firms. Her work designing for low-income, migrant-worker housing balances her interests in architecture and design with her interest in "giving something back" (Department of Environmental Design, University of California, Davis, CA 95616; 916-752-6411). *"Good Design Should Be Everywhere"* on p. 36.

MYRICK ASHLEY began woodworking 25 years ago as a split-oak basket weaver in Alabama, and later repaired antiques for several years. He studied fine woodworking under Robert Lasso at Santa Fe Community College, and later under James Krenov, who has been a major source of support and guidance. He now works out of his own shop in Santa Fe (608 Alicia St., Santa Fe, NM 87501; 505-986-8495). *"Inspiring Lines of a Kwila Desk"* on p. 64.

E.E. "SKIP" BENSON was in Puerto Rico training Peace Corps volunteers in 1967 when he heard about the woodworking program at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He soon enrolled in the master's program at RIT, and since then he has made custom furniture and sculpture in San Francisco, Oakland and Camden, Maine, where he and his wife, the textile artist Barbara Benson, also ran a crafts gallery. From 1977 to 1985 he taught in the woodworking program he designed for the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland (71 Centre St., Mountain View, CA 94041). *"Table and Chairs with a Split Personality"* on p. 51. A sling chair by Skip and Barbara Benson is also in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

TED BOERNER created a line of furniture after working as a set designer for theater productions (Ted Boerner Furniture Design, 10 Arkansas St., Studio G, San Francisco, CA 94107; 415-487-0110). His furniture is shown in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

BRIAN BRASKIE AND LENORE HOWE are the owners of the North Woods Chair Shop (237 Old Tilton Rd., Canterbury, NH 03224; 603-783-4595). Their Shaker chairs are in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

STEVEN THOMAS BUNN is a period and custom furniture maker (22 Center St., Bowdoinham, ME 04008; 207-666-5586). His Windsor settee is in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

ROSS DAY read a newspaper article in 1980 about Seattle sculptor James Washington, and it fired his imagination to take a sculpture class. That led to a commercially oriented cabinetmaking program in the same school. He then came across two other publications that shifted the course of his life: James Krenov's *A Cabinetmaker's Notebook* and *Fine Woodworking* magazine. He has been making custom furniture ever since. He studied under James Krenov in 1987, and he still occasionally pores over that first copy of *Fine Woodworking*, issue #16, with a cover story on Edward Barnsley (3134 Elliott Ave. *#220, Seattle*, WA 98121; 206-282-8260). *"A Sofa for Somebody Else"* on p. 30.

CHRISTOPHER C. DEAM is an architect who does custom interior and architectural design and has created his own line of furniture. (CCD, 47 Lusk Alley, San Francisco, CA 94107; 415-543-4305). His cabinet is in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

DEREK DORRESTYN is the founder of Module, a metal fabrication company which also manufactures

Photo: Barbara Molloy

furniture (Module, 1450 Bancroft Ave., San Francisco, CA 94124; 415-822-6201). His hardware is in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

MARK GALLINI
is a freelance writer and a partner in Hermann Graphics, a Philadelphia graphics design firm. Gallini is also a contributor to WHYY, Philadelphia's public radio station. *"The Two Faces of an American Masterpiece"* on p. 22.

WARDA GEISMAR AND KEN KANE
are the owners of Leap Frog (57 Alden St., Fairfield, CT 06430; 203-254-7134). Their furniture is shown in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

GARRETT HACK
is a custom furniture maker and frequent contributor to *Fine Woodworking* (Jackson Brook Rd., Thetford Center, VT 05075; 802-785-4329). His slat-back highchair is in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

RUSSELL HALL
grew up in Iowa, studied drawing and sculpture at the University of Northern Iowa, then moved to New York City "to see what the hubbub was all about." He found himself building sets and doing cabinetwork, which gradually led to furniture. Four years ago he moved to Portland, Oregon, where he runs a one-man custom furniture shop and is on the board of directors of the Guild of Oregon Woodworkers (3207 N.E. 71st Ave., Portland, OR 97213; 503-282-5443). *"Nature's Imperfections Fit a Bed Perfectly"* on p. 38.

ANDY HOPE
studied product design at Stanford before starting his own furniture design company (Co-Motion, 960 Howard St., San Francisco, CA 94103; 415-512-1043). His CD table is in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

THOMAS JAMESON
is the founder of Item, a design and fabrication company which produces a line of steel and wood furniture (Item Studio, 2846 Seventh St., Berkeley, CA 94710; 510-486-8788). His chairs are in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

MARC LANGHAMMER
is an Oregon native who studied architecture at the University of Kansas, then worked in Vermont as an architect. He spent four years as a furniture-maker's apprentice, and now builds and designs furniture with Josh Metcalf (First Edition Furniture, 18 Rt. 4 West, Woodstock, VT 05091; 802-457-3933). *"An Architectural Cabinet"* on p. 28.

CHÉRIF MEDJEBER
is the chief designer at Les Migrateurs (Leigh Brigaud, Inc., 41, rue Mazarine, 75006 Paris, France; 212-750-8076). His highchair is in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

MICHAEL PEKOVICH
is an amateur furniture maker and the associate art director at *Fine Woodworking* (58 Yale Ave., Middlebury, CT 06762). His ladderback chairs are in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

ERIC PFEIFFER
is a former landscape architect and founder of Bravo 20, a furniture design company (161 Natoma St., San Francisco, CA 94105; 415-495-3914). His table and chairs are in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42. His furniture is also shown in *"San Francisco, Where Furniture Meets the Microchip"* on p. 60.

MARIO RODRIGUEZ
is a contributing editor at *Fine Woodworking* magazine (1 East Ridge Rd., P.O. Box 665, Warwick, NY 10990; 914-986-6636). His Windsor chair is in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

CHRISTOPHER ROSS
is a furniture designer and the owner of Hiccup (20 Broadway, Brooklyn, NY 11211; 718-599-6016). His table and chairs are in *"The ABC's of Designing Furniture for Little Darlings"* on p. 42.

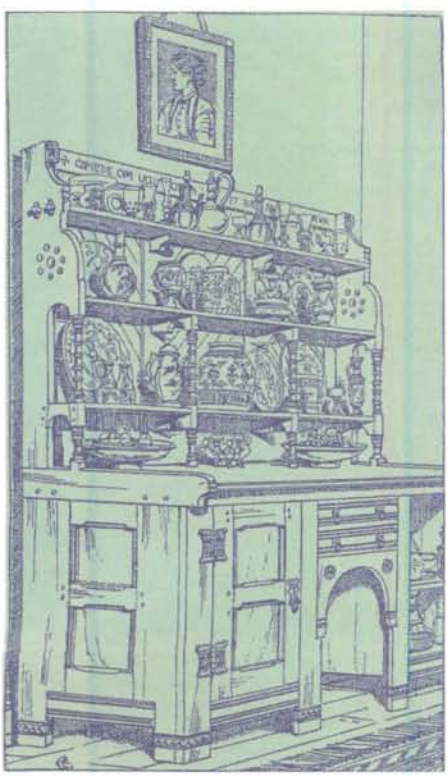
PETER TURNER
worked for Greenpeace before he became a furniture maker and now uses only natural oil finishes and sustainably harvested woods. He now works out of a cooperative shop in southern Maine (P.O. Box 11165, Portland, ME 04104; 207-772-7732). *"A Modern Makeover for a Shaker Linen Press"* on p. 48.

BY MARGARET MINNICK

Nasty Hints on Household Taste

Hurling insults at potential customers is not generally considered sound marketing. Yet it was common practice for one of the most prominent names in 19th-century furniture design, Charles Locke Eastlake. He sputters and rants throughout his influential book, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details*, first published in London in 1868. Eastlake's poison darts skewer public taste in furniture, fabric, flooring, wallpaper and ceramics.

"The British public are, as a body, utterly incapable of distinguishing good from bad design," Eastlake wrote. "As long as gaudy and extravagant trash is displayed in the windows of our West End thoroughfares, so long will it attract ninety-nine people out of every hundred to buy."



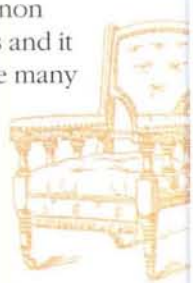
Snobs who expected their schooling would insulate them from his denunciations were in for a surprise. "The faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life ... is commonly deficient, not only among the ignorant, but also among the most educated classes in this country."

Rather than taking offense at Eastlake's ranting, the public embraced it. *Hints* was enormously successful in Britain and ran through six editions in America by 1879, making the author's name synonymous with a modified Gothic style.

Eastlake illustrated *Hints* with historical furniture and works of his own design. These are stout, somewhat ungainly pieces that manifest his tenets of simplicity and utility (see drawings). For Eastlake, the straightforward is locked in mortal combat with the needlessly elaborate; the rectilinear is virtue, the sinuous is vice. "In the present age," Eastlake cries, "chairs are invariably curved in such a manner as to ensure the greatest amount of ugliness with the least possible comfort. The backs of sideboards are curved in the most senseless and extravagant manner; the legs of cabinets are curved, and become ... weak; drawing room tables are curved in every direction ... and are therefore inconvenient to sit at and always rickety."

Eastlake's aversion to the curvilinear extends to carving as well. "It may be laid down as a general rule, that wherever woodcarving is introduced in the design of modern furniture, it is egregiously and utterly bad. ... It is generally spiritless in design, and always worthless in execution." To a 1990s ear, Eastlake is preposterously condescending, but evidently his audience was grateful for a straitjacket guide to improvement.

To be fair, *Hints* is not all negative. After giving a knockout punch to an inferior object, Eastlake explains how to redeem it. His checklist for acceptable design requires the use of solid wood, mortise-and-tenon joinery and simple turnings and it rejects the use of stains. The many readers who could withstand its vitriol found in *Hints* a spirited handbook of design tips, a guide for avoiding the horrors of bad taste.



Like many other influential books on furniture design in the 18th and 19th centuries, *Hints* was penned by a tastemaker, not a craftsman. Eastlake hired out fabrication of his furniture designs. He was trained as an architect, but never practiced. Instead he devoted himself to writing, spent seven years as Secretary of the Institute of British Architects and later served as Keeper of the National Gallery.

It seems a little unfair to those who labor as furniture designers today that a man who never built a stick of furniture or had to nurture a picky client through a custom design has his name attached to a historic furniture style. Perhaps the road to immortality is to be zealously overbearing!

Margaret Minnick teaches courses in the history of furniture, art, architecture and design at the Art Institute of Seattle.

Drawings: reprinted from *Hints on Household Taste* by Charles L. Eastlake (Dover, 1986)

home furniture

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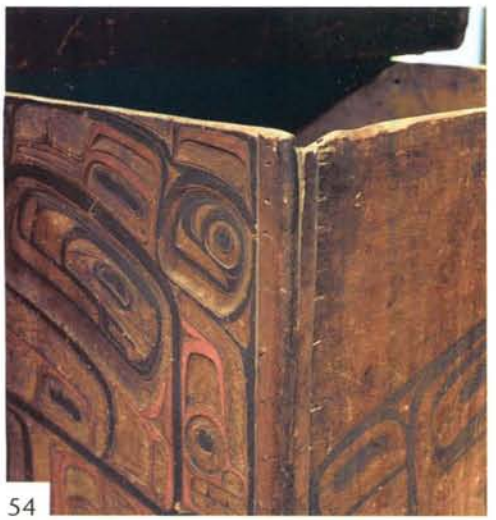

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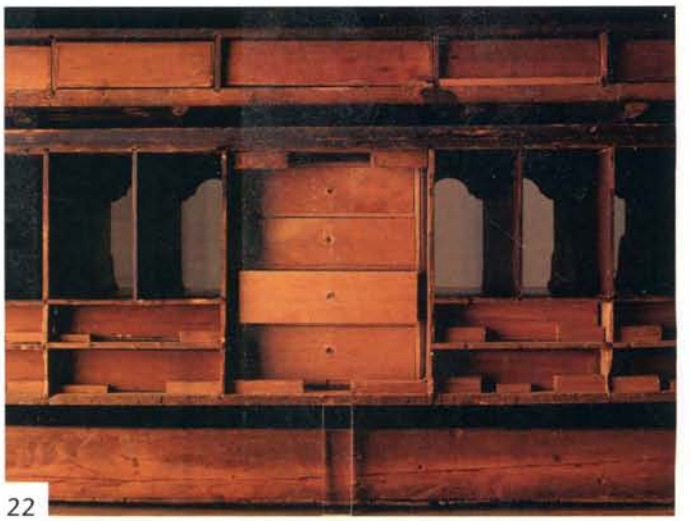

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