DESIGN NOTEBOOK

At Furniture Fair, Vanity Takes A Back Seat



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motions, will anyone ever feel nostalgic about them? If the house caught fire, would you grab Gibe, or your childhood blanker? There's a lot fogging design's pristine mirror right now—an iffy economy, unease about security. In the world of design, where cooks can be everything, vanity seems uncomfortably self-conscious this year. Though there were more exhibitors than sat year, including an increase in newcomers, the fair was perceived by participants as a modest statement, with an apprehensive emphasis on biz, not buzz.

Jerry Epperson, an industry analyst with Mann, Armisteed & Epperson in Richmond, Va., said that the businesses at the fair, Jerry Epperson, an industry analyst with Mann, Armisteed & Epperson in Richmond, Va., said that the businesses at the fair, generally smaller manufacturers, represented 10 percent of the furniture industry in the United States. The wider "contemporary" market is defined by anything that is not historically derivative (including recliners and home theater seating) and is strong in sales—roughly 50 percent of the apholstered furniture sold.

But Mr. Experson added that "nostalgia is the hottest category in the business right tow." He characterized it as "your grandmother's furniture."

On a sleek island of black at the convention center, Bernhardt Design (www.bernhardddesign.com) showed a vampirish convertion center, Bernhardt Design (www.bernhardddesign.com) showed a vampirish convertion center, Bernhardt Design (www.bernhardddesign.com) showed a vampirish convertion center, Bernhardt proup were reminiscent of another Christian Bale movie, "American Psycho," based on Bret Easton Ellis's novel of 1991. Patrick Bateman, the protagonist, also believed in life as a perfect surface.

But many exhibitors were trying to make concessions to the comfort of the consumer—if not physically, then emotionally or financially. That, and not form, function or finish; seemed to be what was newest and most hopful, And meaning, a favorite conceit for designers, especially young ones, took as

Offering comfort to the consumer in stressful times.

Joth on it. The "cloth" edge has a datyjower cutout in it too. The table, \$1,350,
joks like the product of a happy childhood,
jot a design degree or a jigsaw.

Denyse Schmidt (www.dsquilts.com), a
well-known contemporary quilt maker who
sae schibited hand-sewn quilts for eight
years, showed Denyse Schmidt Works, machine-sewn quilts that cut the price to \$80
— roughly a quarter of the cost of her handsewn quilts. See is also in licensing negotiations with Terence Conran Sheps and Design Within Reach, which is developing a
line of bedding.

Snowlab (www.snowlabdesign.com), a
Canadian company that exhibited for the
first time last year, returned with a much
cheaper version of its well-received, flatpanel wall lighting and introduced blownfirst time last year, returned with a much
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what we were fall as to wellcheaper version of its well-received, flatpanel wall is to what would sell—and
it wasn't phosphorous ideas alone.

Even at the "off-sile" or "alternative"
events staged in galleries and showrooms
throughout New York City during the fair,
which are typically more radical in concept,
there were indications that design's unbroachable barriers — the "you're either into it
or out of it" thinking — were being cracked
by anxiety.

At Core?7's "Canary in a Coalmine" presentation at Gallery 91, Todd Falkowsky, a
Toronto-based designer (www.coroflot.com
//talkowsky), showed his Toy chair, pshostered with staffed animals. As comfort, it's
proactive — a chair that wants to give you
a hug.

sproactive—a chair that wants to give you a hug.

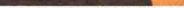
And at the convention center, student work, represented in booths set up by schools like Pratt Institute with large design programs, and a preview of problems to be solved by the next class of professional designers, was an uncharacteristically pacific mixture of acknowledging the present and appeasing the past.

Day Off by Kanjana Chaiwatanachai (at Pukan, 076 hotmail.com) is a futonlike floor cushion with flexible extensions that relieve the stresses of a workweek by accommodating anything you might care to do on your day off — read, eat, watch television. Past Lite by Geoffrey Young is a translucent resin table illuminated by neon (gyoungdesign@aol.com). An ornamental cast in the resin appears when the mantelike table is lighted — classical inspiration as a kind of night vision, like dreams.

The fair's 2003 Editors Awards were tell-











bar stool by Pure d's Truck; above, brass Schulz (info@flor



ON THE HORIZON Pulse Requisite; left lighting by Afroditi (www.afroditi.com) lacquered chair from



a play on playful design plush toys with rings sewn into the backs were strung

ing too. Blu Dot, the seven-year-old Minnesota company (www.bludot.com) that
staked its success on practicalities like utility, attractive pricing and dependable shipping dates, not daring design, took the prize
in the furniture category. Its new shelving,
which sells for \$279 for a 36-inch-wide unit,
is raw particle board — design has literally
dropped Its veneer. Anne Kyyro Quinn,
(www.annekyyroquinn.com), based in London, was named best new designer. Ms.
Quinn creates pillows and throws.
"I'm much more cautious about my buying this year," said Douglas Burton, an
owner of Apartment Zero, a design store in
Washington, who was walking the fair.
As an independent retailer, Mr. Burton
has recently felt the pressure of staying in
business. Several exhibitors, including Blu

Dot, reported losing accounts from design stores, once a measure of metropolitan sophistication and a staple of cities big and small, which are closing — in part because of competition from design "chains" like Design Within Reach, a catalog and Internet company now also opening showrooms.

"I'm not writing as many orders," Mr. Burton said. "I'm getting all the materials, going back to the store and talking with my employees about what customers really want. There might be an amazing piece, but it might be a \$8,000 chair. People aren't spending money on those pieces now. We need that great chair that's \$500." Mr. Burton concluded, "They're coming to us for pread design, but they're coming to us for pread measure, but they're coming to us for pread measure that they're coming to us for pread measure. They were they are coming to us for pread measure that they're coming to us for pread measure.

grounded in serviceable home furnishings. At the fair, there were pieces to admire with ambitions no greater than to be chests of drawers. like e15's mahogany model (www.e15.com), or stylish side chairs. like fussil's ST6 (www.hassl.at), which is available in a variety of colored lacquers. Pure Design (www.puredesignonline.com) showed a bar stool (8305) that was as long as a love seat, for those who don't like to drink alone.

Cocktalls were on people's minds, as were children, some indication that many younger designers at the fair, like Mr. Deam, are now older and beginning to act, if not like

Lite, above, a resin by neon, by Geoffr Parsons School of ornamental cast in appears when the

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their parents, well Deam, 41, had twin contemporary child at Truck (www.th Carpenter, one of the ners and its manage year. David nettocollection.com ners and its manage year. David nettocollection com, designer in New Ye ture, including a cri Down the aisle for changing table, Borr ing martinis — the has served cocktail day, the impromptu. Generation X, it a the business lunch.