

New furniture styles: pale and conservative

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH
Any resemblance the Chicago International Home Furnishings Market showed to this year's political climate is pure coincidence, but it looks like the same ball game — pale and conservative.

The most delightful aspect of the show was the total lack of biennial hype that had showed in the previous two years. The red, white and blue was gone — replaced by a raft of poudried pale — colors that look dusted and subtle.

The furniture shapes are taking a decidedly conservative, yet contemporary look, with the accent on elegance and form rather than applied decoration.

The change, though slow in coming, is a welcome one. One of the most interesting things one notices in Chicago is the closer relationship between home furnishings and those designed for the contract market (those furnishings specifically geared to commercial interiors like offices and public buildings).

The contract market is where design trends begin and from which home furnishings companies seem to take their cues. The form-follows-function dictates are ever present in this contract market as the attitudes of the architects and contract designers become more and more sophisticated.

A very sculptural appearance is what many of the manufacturers have achieved in the past few years and especially at this market. While it seems unbelievable, you'd never guess there's a recession in this country when you walk the floors in the display spaces in the Merchandise Mart or the American Furniture Mart.

The world of the contract furniture manufacturer — and his buyers — is a rarified one. Desks sell for \$1,000 or more and price appears to be no object. The tax-write off afforded the commercial interior is one of the major reasons why this is possible.

Textures are very important, along with the shapes they cover. Whether it's a wall or floor covering or upholstery fabric the look is natural. The colors match this attitude.

The most important remain sand, grey, oatmeal, and all hues of whites. These basics are augmented by smatterings of Chinese blues and oxblood, in particular.

The Oriental influence is still a factor with slick lacquer colors in abundance. On the other side of the coin are matte finishes on everything from wall systems to tables and plinths for sofas and cabinets.

Channel quilting is another big trend in the interior furnishings field. It is applied to seating pieces wall and floor coverings.

Warmer metals — brasses and bronzes — are found in every aspect of the industry from lamp bases to tables and accessories. Brasses — antique statues and reproductions of same — were also in evidence.

The fibers used in upholstery fabrics as well as wall coverings and woven flooring included raw silk, linen, cotton and combinations of all these.

It is interesting to find art influencing the furnishings designers. The trend toward the more romantic attitudes is apparent in the luxury of the fabrics and the arrangements of furniture one sees in the showrooms.

It is a real trip to visit the various showrooms, which number in the thousands. One of the most attractive is always the Interior Crafts space. Chicago designer Richard Himmel (his name means "heaven" and he designs like it) does the showroom for each market.

This year's was as spectacular as ever, but was quietly uncolorful with the main event being a grey velvet sofa in a grey and white room of spectacular proportions. Each of this manufacturer's new introductions gets its own special display room and the effect is exquisite.

The Turner showroom, with its only blantly colored items shown at the show, was subtly spectacular also. The company manufactures — in Europe — handsome sculptural furniture designed for the contract market specifically, but which could fit into a contemporary home with no problem.

International influences, especially those from what one might call the

more primitive countries, are still an important factor. Haitian cotton got its start when the Japanese started to hoard the cotton market and make domestic and Egyptian cotton too expensive to use a few years back.

Now the buyers who went there for the cotton have also discovered the romance of other Haitian creations — their steel sculptures depicting voodoo happenings and the fabric designs that are traditional in that country in particular.

Likewise, some more ancient looks from Guatemala and the East Indies are apparent. Hester introduced an elegant new fabric into its already attractive line. It looks like a classic IKAT weave in cotton — in simple black and white.

Chapman was showing plenty of the no-color looks in their accessories. Terra cotta was a feature, made up into bombe chests, if you can believe it, and cocktail tables. Tyndale was showing a whole collection of the pretty pales in colors they called "desert sand," "sea-dust beige" and they also included a few accent colors like Delft-like lamps and those in "sang du bouff" (oxblood).

The Oriental influence continues in the furniture constructed of rattan and bamboo. Natural wood colors and grains were especially in evidence. More oak than ever was being shown and pine in its natural state was also important in this market.

No one, in other words, is trying to fool anyone anymore. With the cost of furnishings increasing by leaps and bounds, materials that may not have been thought of as attractive before are being given a go of it.

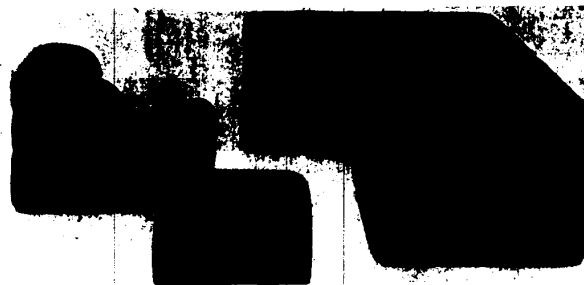
The oil embargo and the price of petroleum-based products thereafter, took the wind out of the sails (and sales) of those who saw plastics as the saving grace of the industry.

Now the return is to real things because they are, all of a sudden, less expensive than the "real" plastics.

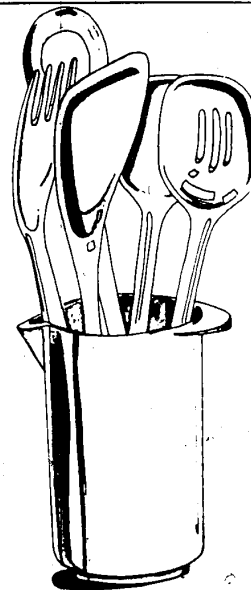
Among the most surprising introductions was the Baker Furniture Company's venture into the contemporary vein. Their new system, which characteristically conservatively they called "Modern" is among the most expensive "systems" out.

One room setting, which included two sofas, wall cabinetry and tables will retail for about \$15,000 — for instance.

The entire wood collection in this line is made of bird's eye maple. The wood comes from Michigan, is milled here then sold to a European firm, and bought back by Holland, Mich.-based Baker.



Turner's elegantly sculptured sofa group with ottoman and side chair



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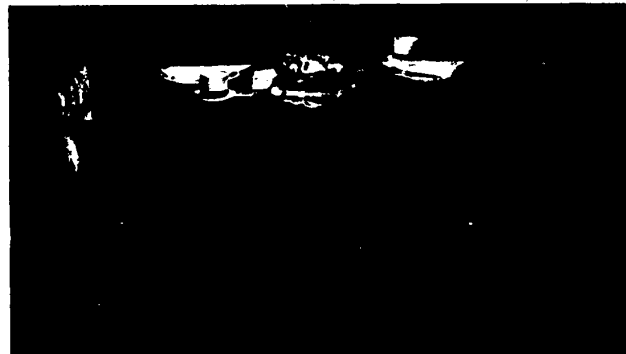
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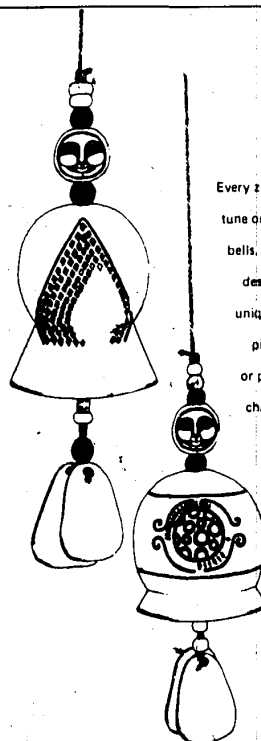
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