

Room for Design

Recycled designs enjoy popularity

by
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Last week's topic concentrated on furniture restoration and reproduction to we shall continue and discuss how history is reborn in a modern factory.

Methods of manufacturing have changed drastically in the past 200 years. While it is true that machine-cut parts are used to speed up furniture production, the final carving and finishing is done by hand, very much as it was in the past.

The scarcity of skilled workers constantly worries manufacturers. It is with optimism tempered with down-to-earth realism that manufacturers look to the future with regard to apprenticeship in training. Hopefully, the

interest in their craft will be sustained in a world that offers many alternatives.

Style preferences seem to appear in cycles. Country French, important for the past decade, still sells although the market for it isn't as active now as it was a few years ago.

There is a new group of Queen Annes, Chippendales, and Hepplewhites that the company is importing from England. Some new Chinese pieces reproduce the simple, very contemporary feeling of elegant household furniture made for several centuries in that inscrutable country.

Traditional furnishings have a subtle psychological effect on the buyer — an element of permanence in a changing world.

Did you know that you can buy historic fabrics and wallpapers that are original but not antique? Several manufacturers have the original wood-blocks that were cut more than a century ago. Kept in good condition, these blocks are used to

print some very beautiful designs that have survived the years and waves of style preferences.

There is a series of scenic designs that are hand printed with the original blocks. These romantic scenes of woodland idylls can be distinguished from their latter-day counterparts (screenprints) by their fine detail. These are the last of a dying breed. In 10 years there will be no hand printing.

Most woodblock patterns have been transferred to screens. A specialist in historic reproductions, Sciamandre reports that its U.S. mills are capable of weaving certain damasks and brocades. But fabrics with a taffeta ground or hand cut velvets can only be made in Italy where there is still a small group of craftsmen who work in the manner of 18th century weavers.

Such skills are hard to come by. It takes over six years to train a good weaver.

Restorers of historic houses are often in trouble when it comes to carpets. The further they reach into the past, the sicker the evidence gets. Whether designers want authentic reproductions or adaptations, they can find several well-known carpet manufacturers who have developed reputations for covering some very famous floors from the White House to Lolani Palace.

Those interested in historic carpets need to memorize such names as Jack Suskin, V'Soke, Treganowan, Sciamandre and Patterson, Flynn & Martin. These firms have the production expertise and the qualified personnel required for such specialized and sensitive work. In all cases, the carpet patterns can be produced in several qualities.

Electrified ginger jars and colonial sconces programmed to simulate flickering candlelight, don't constitute historic reproductions in the strict sense of the word.

Like Chippendale television cabinets with false drawer fronts and coffee tables, such products are

in great demand by those who wish to live with up-to-date conveniences, but are not pleased by modern designs.

At a time when outer space colonies and interplanetary travel is a real possibility, many of us find ourselves leafing through pages of history books.

Perhaps this reassessment of our position is necessary. One thing is certain — recycled design is big business today. At best, such products recreate the pleasing proportions, the hand crafted details, the natural materials of the original pieces.

At their worst, they can misinterpret the original intent and bastardize the materials. Only by demanding the best can we hope to get the best and an awareness of historical accuracy can help us create environments that are beautiful as well as honest.

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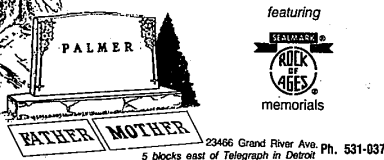
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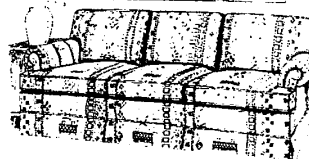
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