

Furnishings: Romance with tradition unwavering

By Helen Diane Vincent
special writer

THERE ARE certain habits of the heart that cannot be broken, and America's love affair with traditional home furnishings is one of them.

Early American colonists rejected rule by Britain, but not its Chippendale and Queen Anne highboys, chintzes and other furnishings that embodied a quiet dignity and gentility.

Also, colonists were no strangers to Continental and more exotic designs from around the world.

Today, those Americans who continue that love affair are able to locate, through decorators or retailers, a wide range of finely executed, historically authentic reproductions and adaptations. And they don't have to rely on antiques and imports since some of the best home furnishings are made in the USA.

Moreover, the push toward high quality and authenticity is advanced by organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation as well as museums with decorative arts collections being offered for licensing to select manufacturers.

The Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn is well on its way to becoming a formidable presence in generating good 18th and 19th century design for the public with its fully coordinated American Life Collection involving 100 pieces made by more than 10 manufacturers.

AT THE International Home Furnishings Market in April, Century Furniture of Hickory, N.C., one of the licensees, first displayed its American Life furniture based on select originals from the Henry Ford Museum.

The line, fully coordinated in a setting with other licensed products, drew an enthusiastic response from press and buyers alike. Locally, Hudson's, Jacobson's and Classic Interiors will carry Century's American Life furniture.

Henry Ford Museum also will have a permanent exhibit of the entire collection opening in November. If public response to the total line is anything like the buyers' and the press', we should expect to see more pieces of the collection at local retail stores in time.

As the American Life Collection is launched, it joins the distinguished ranks of a number of licensed furnishings already on the market.

Among the oldest furniture companies engaged in several authentic and licensed reproductions is Baker Furniture Co. of Grand Rapids, represented locally at the Michigan Design Center, Hudson's and Jacobson's.

Colonial Williamsburg, the oldest and largest museum reproductions program in the USA, has asked Baker to join its successful and respected program, which now has 53 licensees with 3,000 products.

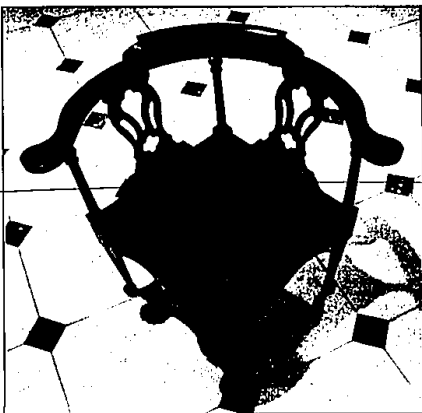
The first Baker collection with Colonial Williamsburg will include 35 pieces of furniture from late baroque, rococo and neoclassical periods dating from 1710 to 1810. Expect to see special design detailing, such as exquisite inlays and hundreds of new upholstery patterns in subtle colors.

F. SCHUMACHER & Co. stands tall among the many fine textile companies that have successfully interpreted historic fabrics.

Perhaps it's their scholarship. 11,000 document archives or 102-year history that has made this possible. Whatever the explanation, Schumacher is again making a significant contribution as a 50-year textile licensee of the National Trust with the introduction of wallpapers from Colonial Williamsburg. These additions strengthen the line and provides clients with a more coordinated look.

Historic Charleston Foundation is yet another source for maintaining and licensing regional treasures. This time, John Jacoby, designer for Brunswick & Fils, has collaborated with the Foundation and created a beautiful Charleston Collection of five designs inspired by the magnificent architectural detail and sumptuous floral gardens of Charleston.

Meanwhile, Bernhardt Furniture



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

A roundabout, or corner, chair from Harden Furniture. Retail price range: \$818 with customer's own fabric to \$908. From the Marie-Howard Showrooms in the Michigan Design Center and Stewart-Glenn Furniture, Bloomfield Hills.

of High Point, N.C., is bringing out a special quality of the deep South with licensed adaptations from the Louisiana State Museum Foundation.

As Ken Pomville, Bernhardt vice president of castgoods, said: "Craftsmen from Brittany ports in Northwest France often immigrated to New Orleans. Using native woods, they fashioned simple and sturdy versions of furniture they remembered from the Old World, England as well as France."

The result of this collaboration is the Bellwood Collection, which can be seen along with other Bernhardt lines at Norman Lackoff's showroom in the Michigan Design Center.

NOT TO be outdone, Harden Furniture Co., whose manufacturing facilities are in New York State, has been pursuing creation of historically authentic furniture through five generations of Harden family craftsmen.

Today, its collection has grown to 750 pieces, including the roundabout, or corner, chair — a unique style evolved from the 15th century and primarily used by men. The Harden line is available to the decorative trade at the Marie-Howard Interiors showroom in the Michigan Design Center and at Stewart-Glenn's in Bloomfield Hills and Classic Interiors in Livonia.

Undoubtedly, the consumer is well-served by the upper echelon of the American furniture industry in its effort to bring it high quality, historically accurate lines, whether through the licensing or in-depth respect for historical tradition.

An upsurge of hand-tufting is also occurring in the decorative rug business, increasing the array of traditional patterns previously seen only in 17th and 18th century French Aubusson flat weaves and English needlepoint rugs.

Lacey-Champion Rug Co., from Fairmount, Ga., a recent addition to the Michigan Design Center, joins the other sophisticated resources, such as Ghiorde Knot and Stark, which have held a nearly exclusive position with the local decorating profession. Each of Lacey-Champion's hand-tufted rugs is made to design specifications by one artisan who signs the rug upon completion.

WHEN TRADITIONAL furnishings are viewed not so much for their authenticity, but for the power to evoke nostalgic feelings, you enter the world of lifestyle merchandising, itself a growing trend.

One of the first to get the idea of lifestyle merchandising off the ground was Nathan Ancell, founder of Ethan Allen. That was in 1932. Today, there are 350 Ethan Allen stores in the United States, Japan, England, Saudi Arabia and Australia. There are four of these stores in the immediate area, each designed

around themes using 18th century furniture as well as the more casually styled Country look.

Also going along with lifestyle flow is Gorman's Dressel-Heritage store in Troy. This fall, it will feature The Estates Collection by Lynn Hollyn. The real impetus to the line, even though it uses various traditional European furniture and accessory styles, is a "warm sense of intimacy and graciousness," said Jeff Roberts, Gorman's manager.

But it is Ralph Lauren who generally is regarded as one of the most successful masters of lifestyle merchandising, both in apparel and home furnishings. He recreates a romanticized version of past eras for today's consumer by artful

Please turn to Page 10



A mad-18th-century rococo open-arm chair from Williamsburg by Baker. It's distinguished by extensive nail trim and the fretwork detail of the leg. Approximate retail price, starting at \$3,125. From Baker, Knapp & Tubbs in the Michigan Design Center, Hudson's, Jacobson's.



A sideboard from the Bellwood Collection, Bernhardt Furniture. It comes in two sections: a 51-inch baker's rack top with glass shelves and a 33-inch base in cherry veneer with round wood pulls and antique brass fittings. About \$2,000 retail. Norman Lackoff, distributor.



The Dartmoor Tartan pattern from the Ralph Lauren Home Collection at the Polo/Ralph Lauren Shop, Birmingham. The unexpected combination of the classic patterns, the paisley and the tartan, create an elegant and urbane look for the bedroom. Approximate price of complete ensemble for a standard-size bed, \$536.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Perfect match

Barbara Lucking's elegant bedroom in West Bloomfield designed by Richard Daniels of Brian Killian & Co., Birmingham. A perfect counterpart for her mathematics and engineering background, floral-design fabric by Mario Buatta, French lace for the canopy and a special place for a family-heirloom, velvet upholstered chair.

Section of a Lacey-Champion, hand-tufted rug using motifs from a French Aubusson. 100-percent New Zealand wool. Prices vary according to number of colors and size, from \$47 up to \$100 per square foot.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer