



Alternative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300

Thursday, November 5, 1987 O&E

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Furniture as art

By Carinne Abatt
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Last week we set out to find examples of a true, equal blend of furniture and art — art complementing function and function complementing art.

There has always been a case for elements of art in furniture. But, first it was functional. Marquetry, ormolu, carving, japanning, painting and stenciling were forms of embellishment that, when well done, made it more attractive and more valuable. Still, function was the important and primary consideration.

Furniture slips totally into the fine arts category in the hands of Michigan artist Gary Kulak, who uses the chair form as a starting point for exciting flights of sculptural fantasy.

Tables by another local creative spirit, Marilyn Scheeter, aren't meant to do anything except reflect her inner feelings and make her personal creative statement. Coffee cups and

books don't belong on hers anymore than they do on Italo Scanga's. The vases he paints, yes, beer bottles, no.

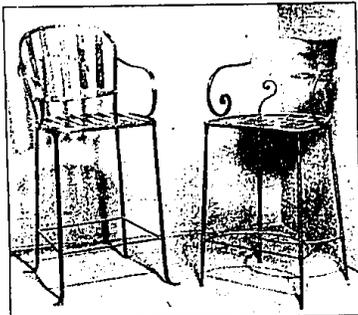
Now comes a delightful integration of art and function. Are they works of art that are functional or furniture that is an work of art? Who knows? But, they signal a trend that puts the free form coffee table in the vintage clothing category.

In our search we found more excitement than we expected.

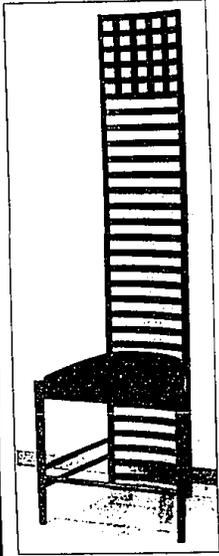
One of the most dramatic examples is the 450 pound solid steel coffee table (on rollers so it moves with a light touch) by Thomas Vanderzyl of Fort Worth, a magnificent piece that has all of the charisma of a fine painting.

The sculptural qualities of the Hill House chair, which architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh designed in 1902 (I never claimed my idea was original) and which is being reproduced under license from his estate, are exquisite in their pristine clarity. The quality folk art furniture being made in Texas and Mexico, has a joyful, humorous feeling to it.

The search turned out to be fun — and enlightening.



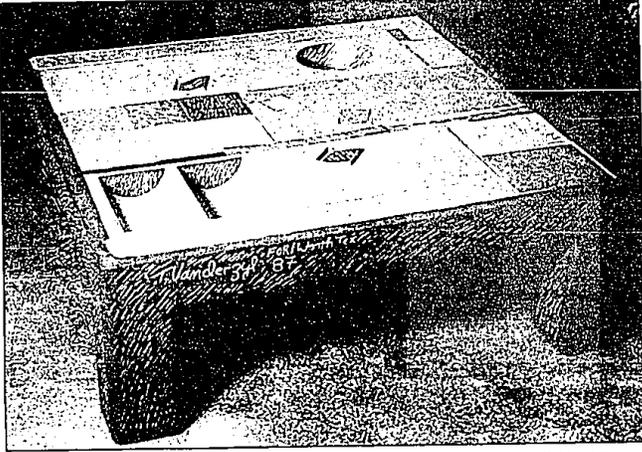
The two sculptural polished iron bar stools by Zimporre are from Design Resources Inc. of the Michigan Design Center, Troy. The same company makes polished iron tables, headboards and regular-sized chairs.



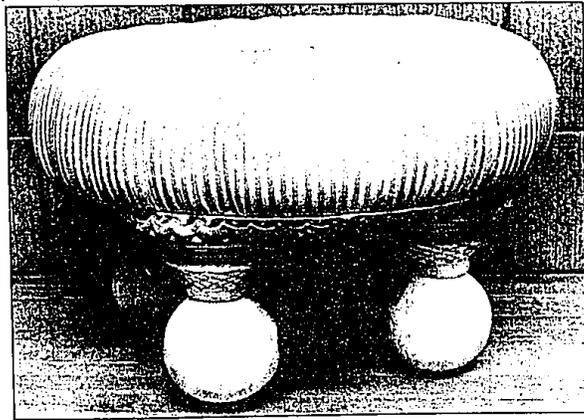
The original of this Hill House chair was designed by architect/designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 1902. It is being reproduced under license from the designer's estate and is available at Arkitektura of Birmingham. It is ebonized wood with green silk upholstery, 55 inches high and 16 inches across at the base of the front legs.



Dalmatian library stairs are shown here with section inserted to become a table. They are by Santa Fe artist David Ross, hand-carved, kiln-dried alder, painted with gesso and tempera in the manner of the 18th-century Venetian craftsmen. Available at Gardner, Powers & Co. of the Michigan Design Center of Troy.



Solid steel coffee table by artist/sculptor Thomas Vanderzyl of Fort Worth weighs 450 pounds and moves easily on roller feet. The sculptural top is welded and painted in orange, gold, blue, gray and white. Available at Claudia F. Brownlie & Co. Inc., Michigan Design Center, Troy.



The tufted, left, has a pink and white striped seat with a large silk covered flat button in center and hand painted ceramic feet. Available at Gardner, Powers & Co., Michigan Design Center, Troy. Below is the Seconda Armchair, designed by Mario Botta, 1982. The frame is tubular steel, coated black or silver. The seat is perforated sheet metal, epoxy coated black or silver. Available at Arkitektura of Birmingham.

Staff photos by Jerry Zolynsky



The chair, above, is part of the La Bamba Island furniture collection. The pieces are designed in Texas and made in Mexico. The seat and back are painted leather (pink) and the wooden slats are green and blue with snake designs. Chairs, tables and accessories in a rainbow of colors and designs are available at Gardner, Powers & Co., Michigan Design Center of Troy. At right is a door chair by Cranbrook designer, Michael McCoy. The frame is ebonized ash with red urethane polish lacquer seat. It is hinged to fold into a sculptural panel, 31 1/2 inches high and 21 1/2 inches wide. There's a corner table to match, Arkitektura of Birmingham.

