

The Columbus Dispatch

EVENTS

Ohio craftsmen display modern designs with polish

Melissa Starker, For The Columbus Dispatch

Published 11:01 p.m. ET Nov. 14, 2013 | Updated 9:19 a.m. ET Nov. 17, 2013

Modern furniture is anything but new.

The style arrived in the mid-1920s through designers such as Bauhaus cabinetmaker Marcel Breuer, whose iconic Wassily chair is still produced today.

The popularity of modern furniture has ebbed and flowed, spiking in the 1950s and '60s with the rise of midcentury modern design. But, consistently, the combination of smart function and the use of innovative materials has guaranteed a following for modern design, and the influence has grown in recent years as big-box retailers have made it more widely accessible.

For Tim Friar, director of business development for the Columbus industrial-design firm Design Central and owner of Grid Furnishings in the Short North, *modern* is defined as “the elimination of ornamentation and the exposure of materials.”

Those were the qualities he sought when curating “The Modern Table: Ohio Furniture Designers” for the Ohio Arts Council’s Riffe Gallery. A showcase for 26 furniture-makers, the exhibition bridges the art/design divide and confirms that modern is still vibrant.

For proof, there is the expectation-defying dresser *Facecord* by Cleveland’s Mark Moskovitz. Thick and chunky, it is a nifty work of camouflage — a pile of firewood by all appearances, until one opens its drawers — but it also fills Friar’s design criteria as well as his requirement that selected pieces must be in some level of production.

Virginia Birchfield of Mount Vernon works her own type of optical illusion with *Sculpture End Table*. She combines the hard, solid form of a stainless-steel cube with the rawness of slices of tulipwood with the bark intact, wrapping them around the cube to stunning effect.

The Maverick Coffee Table by Jacob Dehus of Worthington recalls the dorm-room decorating solution of placing a tabletop on wooden crates. It also reflects the rise of concrete as a home-interior material.

Elsewhere, the show abounds in clean, unbroken lines and materials used to their best advantage. Illustrating both qualities is *Echo Rock*, a streamlined rocking chair by Cleveland furniture-maker John Arthur that brings out the beauty in plywood.

Over a sturdy, neutral base of enameled plywood, the luscious color of purpleheart wood gives a distinctive personality to *Curly Purpleheart Table* by another Worthington designer, Jeffrey Alexander.

Highlighting the consumer side to the display is *Fold* by Michael Ina of Lyndhurst. It is a circular glass table with a clever base of white-oak rods, plus the option of switching it out for a darker wood.

With his two contributions, Perrysburg designer Shawn Sowers embodies the democratization of modern design in the marketplace.

His *Block Desk*, crafted of rich walnut and painted maple, represents a new vision of the power desk — angular, highly functional and slightly imposing. Next to it, *Sauder Soft Modern Desk* offers a funkier, colorful form of the functional piece. It was created for Archbold's Sauder Woodworking, the inventor of ready-to-assemble furniture, as part of a new line of products designed to be affordable.