

New looks in furnishings

By Sharon Williams
Copley News Service

Move out the Memphis. Nix the New Wave. Put away the postmodern. And prohibit the punk.

In the '80s, the nouveau, flavor-of-the-month approach was for trends upstaged by something bigger and better. Furniture of the '90s is as comfortable and low-key as a big easy chair.

The interior design industry has, for the time being, relegated the dash and flash to the attic. Instead, it is providing consumers with furnishings geared to create a nurturing environment that's more sanctuary than showplace.

Today's offerings in the furniture world are truly pieces one can live with — furnishings that embrace good design while conveying character, protection, warmth, stability and good, down-home values.

And what better way to celebrate the virtues of hearth and home than through American style? Real Americana is the underlying theme behind several major furniture trends as designers and homeowners alike celebrate the craftsmanship and style that for centuries have existed in their own back yards.

Ready to create a comfort zone of your own? Following are some of the hottest trends in furniture for the '90s.

SHAKER DOWN

The clean, simple lines and precision craftsmanship of Shaker furnishings have always had timeless appeal but are all the rage today, thanks to the surge in popularity for everything American.

Today, you can get a close-up look at the tightly fitted dovetail joints and perfectly crafted hardware that are so much a part of Shaker style at museum exhibits and auctions. Television personality Oprah Winfrey made headlines when she plunked down \$220,000 for a three-drawer chest at Willis Henry's Annual Shaker Auction in Mount Lebanon, N.Y.

COWBOY CULTURE

Western style has galloped its way into American homes, bringing with it a warm, rustic feeling that beckons like a well-worn pair of cowboy boots.

In terms of home furnishings, the roundup might include pieces made of rough wood and aged metals and upholstered with weathered blanket-inspired patterns, real or faux skins and rawhides and fabrics brimming with Western motifs.

THE COMFORT FACTOR

Sink into that cushion-strewn couch, pull up that easy chair and make yourself at home.

Comfort is key in the '90s, and kicking back has never been easier. With rounded lines, rolled arms and squashy pillows, sumptuous sofas and oversized chairs are designed as though their creators were bent on constructing the perfect spot to spend a Sunday morning — one that's inviting and yet oh-so attractive, given today's deep, rich palette of striking hues and patterns.

FURNITURE AS ART

Is a whimsical desk shaped like several giant books or a spindly legged table covered with leopard spots furniture — or is it art?

Studio furniture is really both, say the artists and craftspeople who create such furnishings, since each piece is usually as utilitarian as it is unique — as functional as it is fun.

COLLECTION AFFECTION

Light years away from the homogenized look of the living room "sets" of yesteryear, today's furniture collections don't always match.

Instead, they're designed to blend and complement antiques, contemporary furnishings or whatever you have in the house. So a home decorator could, for instance, purchase an ottoman from one collection and easily interface it with upholstered chairs or an armoire from another for an upbeat, eclectic look.

'90S STYLE REVISITED

It's back to the '50s as the exaggerated curves and oversize quality of art deco furniture resurfaces again.

UPHOLSTERY UPDATE

The haute couture of the furniture world, the hottest upholstery trends are anything but subtle.

For the almost Victorian ambience so popular today, go with tapestry prints, combined with deep rich colorations, decorative trims and fringes. Or create a still-English country charm with rich-English florals.

One can even update the Santa Fe look with rich Oriental rug colors, such as garnet, forest green or royal blue.

Upholstery has become so important that many furniture retailers are finding innovative ways to help customers get everything just right.

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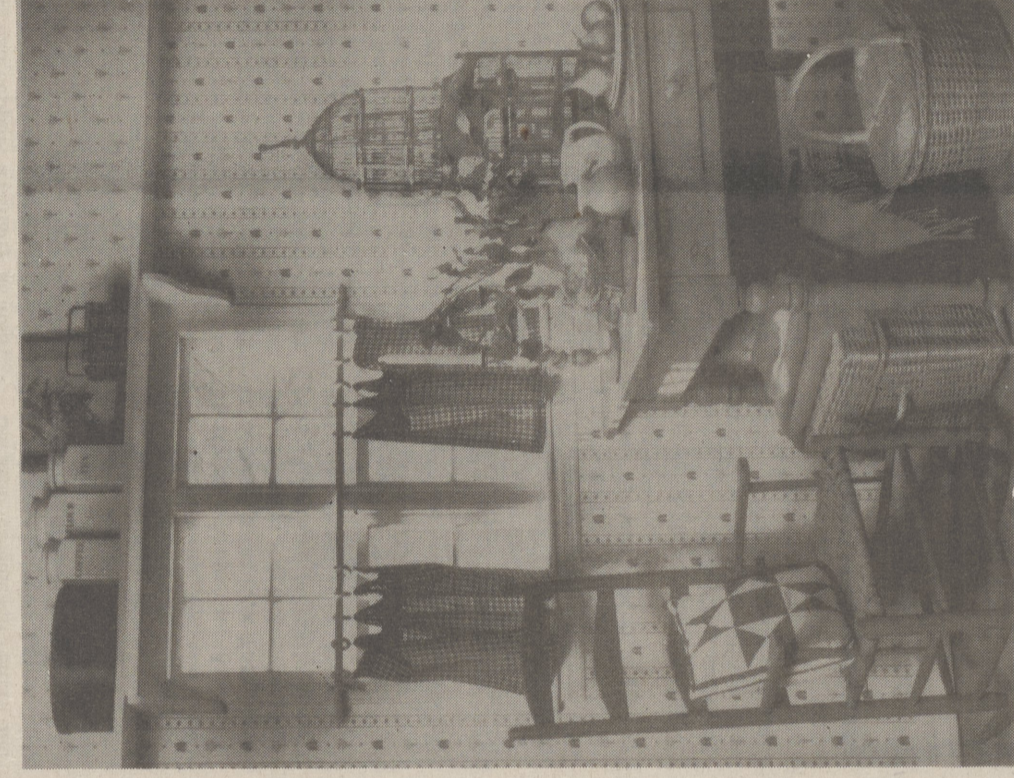
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