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Hot Home Products Made in Canada furniture as good as it gets

January 20, 2012

Vicky Sanderson

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Much hand-wringing is done over whether Canada has a national identity that encompasses anything beyond hockey, big blue lakes and maple syrup.

In fact, there are lots of ways in which we differentiate ourselves, right down to the furniture we use in our homes. Canadians, for example, like softer



Jane Lockhart's new furniture line makes it easy to co-ordinate pieces.

seating than their European counterparts, but want it firmer than those buying Stateside, who tend to choose larger, deeper and more cushiony seating. We also demand great style, but are slightly suspicious of anything that's too trendy.

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Lifestyle expert Janette Ewen (www.janetteewen.com) thinks Canadians have it right, and show an innate understanding that the best furniture design balances form and function.

"Canadians love good quality, and good design," says Ewen. Given that, she says more of us should be choosing Canadian-made furniture. "There are the obvious reasons to buy Canadian — supporting our industries, reducing the time and distance that products have to travel. But mostly, it's because Canadian furniture manufacturers are so good at combining great design with livability."

Ewen made the comments during a tour of the Canadian Home Furnishings Market (www.tchfm.com), held last week at the International Centre. Celebrating its 40th anniversary, the trade-only event brought together retailers, designers, decorators and suppliers, who previewed the offerings of over 300 furniture manufacturers and distributors. Of those, we'll look at just a few of many that stood out.

Huppé (www.huppe.net) is a Quebec-based manufacturer that's been around since 1967, and whose furniture is distributed throughout Canada and the U.S. They showed a line of bedroom suites made out of wonderfully veined American walnut, and another more affordable line in birch veneer. Both have clean, straight lines and flat finishes that allow the beauty of the wood grain to shine through.

- Matte, distressed and hand-rubbed finishes, both on new wood and pieces crafted out of reclaimed lumber, such as the dining table made from timber from a sunken boat created by Le Débarcadère (www.ledebarcadere.ca), was a recurring material at the show.

G. Romano (www.gromano.com), another Quebec-based, family-owned manufacturer that's celebrating 50 years of business, showed a sleek line of sofas, sectionals and chairs in neutral grays, some with textured finishes. Ewen pointed to the crisp finishing, such as a flat "flange" edge — a modern take on piping — combined with lush but sturdy feather/down seating, as examples of how to blend comfort and style. "It's got this neat, tailored look, almost like good English menswear. But it's still incredibly comfortable. That's good

design," says Ewen.

The other big news was the launch of a furniture line by celebrity interior designer Jane Lockhart (www.janelockhart.com), who has created eight collections in collaboration with Korson Furniture and Statum Design Inc. The pieces, which will be in stores in the spring, are designed to coordinate either with other items within their own collection, or with pieces from other suites. The thread that ties it all together is Lockhart's trademark understated elegance.

A trend display offered a sense of which looks homeowners will favour in 2012. Emerging themes included nods to glamour, reflected in silver, brass and bronzy golds, both as accent pieces such as table lamps, and on hardware, such as nailheads and pulls. Pearly and glossy whites that evoke Art Deco chic are also on the rise, as is the use of large decorative mirrors, which do double duty by adding visual interest and bouncing light into a space.

The popularity of smaller urban spaces means more interest in furniture that incorporates storage, notably beds with pullout drawers and coffee tables designed to hide magazines, electronic devices and other items. Leather furniture continues to be hot, but the material — in pale creams — is also showing up on unexpected surfaces such as headboards. Eco consciousness is reflected in hand-finished woods, earthy colours, plant motifs and naturalistic accessories such as tree-stump end tables.

Ewen also created 12 pop-up "inspirational" vignettes that were placed throughout the show. For pictures of these, go to www.thestar.blogs.com/onthehouse.

She hopes the vignettes encourage retailers to promote personal involvement in home design, rather than showing customers how to turn out carbon copies of design magazine looks. Gone, says Ewen, are the days when an influential magazine editor could dictate decor styles that would be slavishly followed. "That really killed people's imagination, I think, and underestimated individual creativity," she adds.

"People have stopped using rooms done by designers and design magazine layouts as the basis for their own spaces," says Ewen. "Now, the sources are more personal and reflect what you're passionate about, like travel, or entertaining. So that becomes the jumping off for the design.

"The editor's role then becomes showing people how to find, and how to mix pieces together, rather than prescribing a look."

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