

VOGUE *Living*

SPECIAL ISSUE

FALL/WINTER 2006

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HOUSE OF MIRRORS
PAVED WITH GOOD
INTENTIONS, RON
ARAD'S INSTALLATION
PRESENTED BY BARRY
FRIEDMAN GALLERY AT
DESIGN MIAMI IN 2005.

PRECIOUS METAL
MARC NEWSON'S
LOCKHEED LOUNGE
(1986) RECENTLY SOLD
FOR A RECORD-
BREAKING \$968,000.

ancient vs. modern

With the soaring auction prices for contemporary furniture, some collectors are finding more value in past treasures.

Jane Withers reports.

When the hammer came down in June on Lot 162 at Sotheby's New York, a "prototype" Lockheed Lounge by Marc Newson fetched the highest price ever for a contemporary-design piece, at \$968,000 almost hitting the symbolic million-dollar mark. The Lockheed Lounge (1986) is a seminal early work by the Australian designer whose style is characterized by the utopian sci-fi glamour of a seventies childhood. The cartoonish form—in profile it looks a bit like a portly dog stretching—gained iconic status when Madonna reclined on it in her "Rain" video and Philippe Starck positioned it center stage in the lobby of the Paramount Hotel, which opened in 1990. Since it initially retailed at around \$2,000, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the Lockheed made a pretty impressive return for its early adopters.

The contemporary-design market has been climbing steadily for a decade, with an extra spurt into aerospace in the past couple of years. If, 25 years ago, gilded eighteenth-century furniture and Impressionist paintings were considered the epitome of blue-chip taste, interest

in the last few years has shifted rapidly forward through the twentieth century, lionizing Ruhlmann and Royère, Perriand and Prouvé, Mollino, Eames, and Gio Ponti until—following trends in the contemporary-art market—it edges closer to the present day. Today's hot collector might give floor space to a modern classic refinished by blowtorch by the young Dutch designer Maarten Baas until it is a charred, skeletal shadow of its former self (from \$3,700 to \$7,400). Or one of Marcel Wanders's Airborne Snotty vases (\$1,900), which look as if they might have been exquisitely modeled after Japanese tree roots but in fact have a different organic origin—each of the five designs in the series is based on a particular strain of the influenza virus, scanned and reproduced using digital prototyping technology.

Design was once considered a shabby cousin to the art world and was kept at a disdainful distance, but now the two

are becoming increasingly linked, their union officially blessed when Design Miami, dedicated to postwar-to-current furniture, opened in collaboration with the influential fair Art Basel Miami last December. Designers are starting to pop up in the exhibition rosters of art galleries: a Marc Newson show scheduled at New York's Gagosian Gallery next spring and the late Danish designer Poul Kjaerholm at Sean Kelly next December. And this year the

Maastricht Art Fair, bastion of the European antiques establishment, also opened its doors to contemporary design, showcasing new works by Ron Arad.

According to Alexander Payne, head of design at the New York auction house Phillips de Pury & Company, "The market is still in its infancy, but recently significant art collectors are starting to focus on design." Payne stresses that it is "the more experimental sculptural or conceptual pieces that are attracting the most interest." If every age has its style clichés, in ten years we might caricature the early-2000s power home as a downtown apartment in a building by Herzog & de Meuron or Richard Meier, where statement pieces by Gaetano Pesce, Shiro Kurumata, or Hella Jongerius are given equal billing with the Andreas Gursky, Richard Prince, or Kippenberger artworks.

Part of this new loosening of boundaries is in the mind-set *collecting* >96