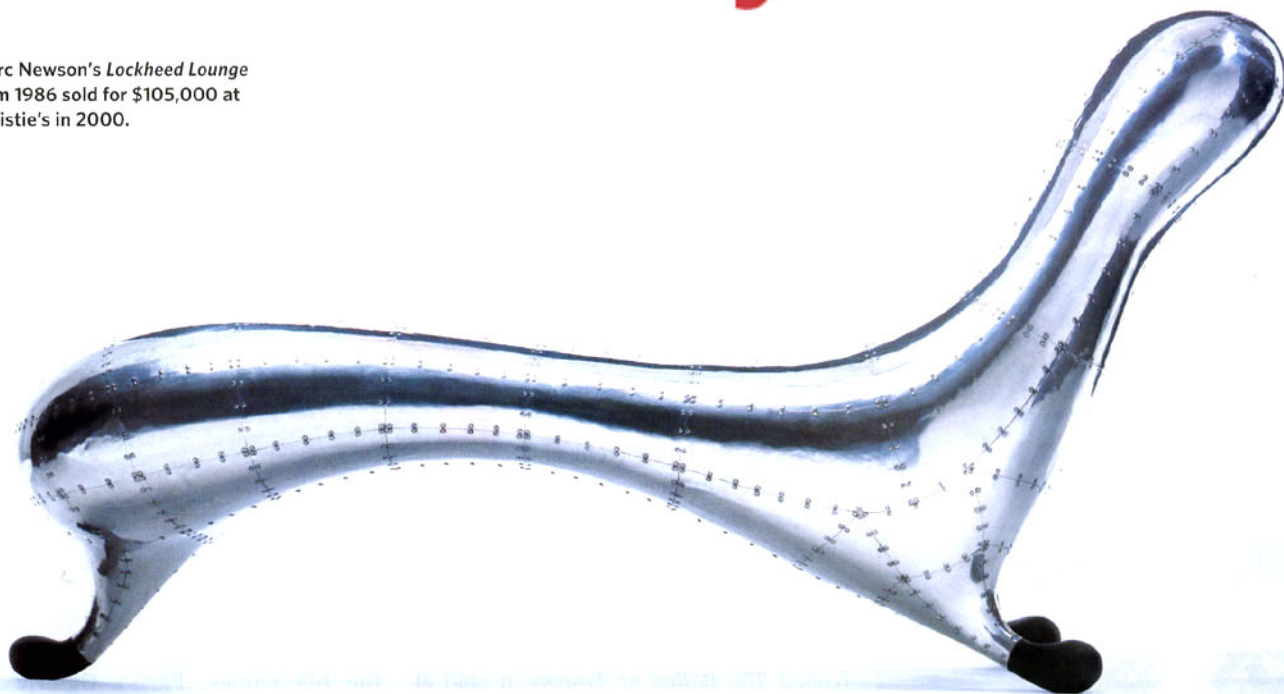


Marc Newson's *Lockheed Lounge* from 1986 sold for \$105,000 at Christie's in 2000.



Furniture Flair

Inventive and thought-provoking sofas, tables, desks and chairs have moved out of the showroom and into the gallery, catching the attention of contemporary-art collectors the world over. *By Jean Bond Rafferty*

Once upon a time there were the Fine Arts in one corner and the Decorative Arts in the other. In the 21st century, however, the distinction has blurred. Today avant-garde furniture is being taken as seriously as contemporary paintings or sculpture. In fact, in the hands of the reigning talents, furniture *is* sculpture—eliciting critical admiration and booming prices in galleries and auction rooms in New York and Europe. Consider the contemporary-art sale at Christie's New York in May 2000, when technical wizard Marc Newson's iconic riveted-aluminum-and-fiberglass *Lockheed Lounge* sold for an astonishing \$105,000. Or look back to last October's FIAC, Paris's top contemporary-art fair, when ten design galleries set up shop alongside the usual fine-arts dealers and gave the show a juicy shot in the arm, attracting a record crowd.

"There's been a huge change of mentality in the contemporary-art world," explains Jennifer Flay, FIAC's artistic director. "Design

Edited by *Anthony Barzilay Freund*

is right at the soul of the adventure—it strives for the same degree of excellence, creative importance, deep emotion and commitment that you find in art."

The fine-art furniture we're talking about isn't the mass-produced designs you might encounter at, say, Conran's. It is one-of-a-kind prototypes or limited editions (usually of no more than twelve pieces) that are at the cutting edge of creativity, form, technical virtuosity and clever use of luxurious materials.

A table and a *Bell* lamp by France's Bouroullec brothers.



ARTS & CULTURE

This is the new art—think of Newson's *Black Hole* table, fashioned in a luxury-auto body shop out of polished aluminum and lacquered glass (available in such colors as red, lime green or tangerine orange). Produced as a series of twelve, it sold out, at \$117,000 apiece, at last fall's FIAC. Increasingly, these pieces appeal to established contemporary-art collectors, among them Peter Brant, Ian Schrager, Aby Rosen and George Lindeman in New York, François Pinault in Paris and such fashion-forward trend-setters as Karl Lagerfeld and Jean Paul Gaultier.

Prices for fine-art furniture are soaring, but they pale in comparison to those of contemporary art. If Maurizio Cattelan's taxidermied horse is art (called *The Ballad of Trotsky*, it sold at Sotheby's in May 2004 for \$2.1 million), why not the Campana brothers' cuddly stuffed-toy-alligator prototype chair (a relative bargain at \$14,340 at Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg in December 2003)? What's more, you can sit on the chair.

Contemporary furniture that had metamorphosed into fine art began to show up in Paris and London auctions and galleries in the '90s. It first captured New York's attention in 2000 at Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg, thanks to the hip,

young auctioneer James Zemaitis (who has since decamped to Sotheby's) and European director Alexander Payne. Now the action has moved to private galleries that have been duking it out to represent

The Brazilian Campana brothers fashioned a chair out of stuffed toy alligators.



the big names. Paris's Galerie Kreo (founded by art collector Didier Krzentowski in 1999) produces impeccable limited editions and represents Newson, along with Martin Szekely and brothers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. London art dealer David Gill produces Mattia Bonetti's elegant limited-edition furniture. And in New York, contemporary fine-art furniture is championed by eminent 20th-century art and furniture dealer Barry Friedman (who gave Milanese master Ettore Sottsass an important retrospective last fall and is now showcasing design star Ron Arad). Meanwhile, Murray Moss opened a gallery this winter next to his eponymous SoHo design store "to help erase the defining line between art and design." One more indication of how hot the field is: art-world powerhouse Larry Gagosian is planning a Marc Newson show at his gallery in New York's Chelsea.

"Furniture is a viable collectible," affirms New York art adviser Thea Westreich. "Designers like Hella Jongerius and the Campana brothers are as inventive and new as some artists. I'm advising my clients to buy. Museums definitely are."

Ron Arad's *Narrow Papardelle* chair.

