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from house to HOME™

A Home and Lifestyle Magazine for Bluegrass Living

**Bluegrass Home Boasts
Beautiful Countryside**

Fabulous Flooring²

**Lexington Embraces Beauty
of Modern Design**

sept/oct

Foundations

Lexington's Modern Edge 17

text | Melissa Nipper

images | Mary S. Rezny and Len Wujcik

Behind the doors of some of Lexington's traditional homes, there's evidence of a growing acceptance of contemporary design. Benefiting from this sudden modern spurt are Len Wujcik and Lynn Sweet, modern furniture designers based in the Lexington area.

Travel Treasures Find A Bluegrass Home 20

text | Melissa Nipper

images | Mary S. Rezny

Dressed with treasures from worldly travels, Manderly simply permeates serenity in every direction.

Cornerstones

Resources 13

text | Dorothy Arbor

Initially considered to be a design fad with feelers into the area of self-sufficiency, circular or dome homes were not originally taken as seriously as they are now—time and technology have brought us full circle.

Interiors 24

text | Kathryn Casey

If you've ever stood near a window on a really hot or really cold day, chances are you've noticed just how effective a conductor glass can be—a variety of window treatments are available to seal off entry and escape routes for heat and air.

Essentials 29

text | Kathleen Cooper

Look into new options for your home's hearth. Explore European Masonry at its best.

Design 32

text | Rosie Todino

A new line of modular flooring has been developed that is easy to care for as well as eco-friendly. Carpet tiles are easy to install and allow for consumers to create a one-of-a-kind look.

Additions

Elements 8

Newsworthy 10

Cuisine 35

Literary 37

From House to Home™ Puzzler 38



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"Josephine" sideboard by Lynn Sweet

"Intersection"
sideboard/desk/vanity
by Lynn Sweet



"Stictonic" folk art side chair
by Len Wujcik

LEXINGTON'S *modern edge*

text | Melissa Nipper

images | Mary S. Rezny
and Len Wujcik

Take a drive through almost any Lexington neighborhood and you'll notice traditional-style brick and siding homes seem to dominate the landscape.

But behind the doors of some of these "traditional" homes, there's evidence of Lexington's growing acceptance of contemporary design. "A lot of the homes are only traditional on the facade," explains Len Wujcik (pronounced Voy-check), associate professor at the University of Kentucky's College of Design/School of Architecture. "Once you enter them, they use modern space planning, with open rooms and well-lit, taller spaces."

A growing number of Lexington homeowners are also discovering the beauty of modern furniture, with its emphasis on pure, sleek design, Wujcik adds. Wujcik has studied the growing market for modern furniture firsthand since he began teaching furniture design 25 years ago. Fourteen years ago, he also opened his own modern furniture store, Alteriors, in downtown Lexington.

"(Lexington) is a traditional town, but like all American cities, there are changes afoot," says Wujcik. "With the popularity of media shows like those on HGTV, as well as the work of designers and architects being showcased in national chains, more people are discovering modern design."

Lexington also has the advantage of having an award-winning furniture studio at the University of Kentucky, which has become a national force in furniture design, Wujcik says. UK students regularly show their work in national and international competitions and have shown furniture at High Point International Home Furnishings Market, the largest commercial furniture show in the United States, and the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York City.

While Wujcik spends most of his time teaching students the applied art of furniture design, he occasionally finds time to make his own furniture. Most of his work comes from investigating the abstraction of line, plane, and mass. "I am exclusively a modern designer," he says. "While I appreciate the skills one would use to build more historic furniture, I'm more interested in pushing the structural edge, the material edge, and the process of building."

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A Sweet Niche

Another Lexington studio furniture designer/builder who enjoys pushing the edge is Lynn Sweet. Like Wujcik, Sweet works at UK, where he is a technical aide at the College of Fine Arts/Department of Art's art studio.

Outside of his work at the university, Sweet's niche is designing and creating "neo-modern" or "new modern" furniture crafted primarily from veneer laminated to cabinet-grade plywood. He uses all types of veneer, including exotic African hardwood such as Anigre. He also incorporates materials such as glass, granite, and fabricated steel into some of his designs.

Since Sweet's designs draw from modernist and mid-century modernist furniture, it might be surprising to learn that he sharpened many of his woodworking skills during college while "making antiques" or recreating exact copies of 17th- and 18th-century furniture.

After studying at UK and working at the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, Sweet was exposed to other artists and concepts and started designing his own pieces. His designs are inspired by architecture. "I call it personal-scaled architecture," Sweet says. "If the scale on one of my pieces was obscured, you might not be sure whether you were looking at furniture or a building."

Original, handmade furniture like Sweet's takes hundreds of hours to create. One of his favorite pieces, "Bel Air," a mahogany desk resembling a 1957 Chevy dashboard and hood, took 500 hours to make. A more recent piece he calls "Intersection" plays on the intersection of curves and planes and required about 375 hours of labor. This type of craftsmanship is not cheap; Sweet's pieces cost thousands of dollars, depending on how much time he's spent on them.

In addition to his work featured in galleries throughout the country, Sweet also makes commissioned pieces. Although his furniture is not for the masses, it's well worth the cost to clients who appreciate neo-modern design and want a one-of-a-kind, handcrafted piece.

"Often people buy a house and want to fill it up with stuff that has no personal involvement or they rely on what they've always known," Sweet says. "No thought goes into their style."

When buying furnishings, Sweet encourages people not to ignore contemporary designs. "In the 20th century, we've seen a lot of beautiful design," Sweet points out. "Take time to investigate design that's come about in the period in which you've lived." |

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