

HOME & REAL ESTATE

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Home Front

PENNY-WISE WORKSHOPS ...

Design Associates West, Los Altos, is offering workshops, themed "Penny Wise Pound Foolish," to help homeowners make practical remodeling/design decisions. Workshops are scheduled for **Saturday, May 23**, or **Saturday, June 6**, each from 10 a.m. to noon, or **Thursday, May 28**, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., at Stone Creations, 1061 Duglas Ave., Redwood City. Participants are asked to bring house plans, exterior and interior photographs and room layouts. Cost is \$25 per family. Space is limited; reservations can be made by contacting Judy Simes at Design Associates West, 650-208-5183.

FOR THE BIRDS ...

Jim Howard, district conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, will teach a class on "Gardening for the Birds" on **Saturday, May 23**, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Common Ground Educational Center, 599 College Ave., Palo Alto. Focus is on creating a thriving native ecosystem and bird sanctuary, while conserving water. Cost is \$29. For information, call 650-493-6072 or visit www.commongroundinpaloalto.org.

SUMMER FLOWERS ...

Floral designer Matt Wood will present a Summer Floral Design program for the Garden Club of Los Altos on **Tuesday, May 26**, at 1:15 p.m. The group meets at Christ Episcopal Church, 1040 Border Road, Los Altos. Copies of Wood's book, "The Seasonal Home," will be available for purchase. Guests pay \$10. For information, call 650-964-7614.

FABULOUS RHODIES ...

Master Gardener Bob Weissman will offer a free class on growing rhododendrons and azaleas on **Tuesday, May 26**, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Los Altos Library, 13 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos. Weissman will offer tips on the basics, including planting, feeding, pruning and care. For information, call Master Gardeners at 408-282-3105, between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., Monday through Friday or visit <http://mastergardeners.org>.

REVISIT SPRING TOUR GARDEN ...

Maureen Decombe,
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Above, a custom-designed table by Palo Alto interior designer Carol Lippert, who works for private and commercial clients. At right, Menlo Park interior designer Brooke Grafstrom finds new uses for old items, including a snowboard turned into a light fixture.



Artist Nelleke Demmer aims for whimsy and playfulness in her creations, which range from a Medieval mural with coordinating velvet-upholstered chairs, above, to a harlequin bureau of drawers, above right. At right, interior designer Brooke Grafstrom uses ceramic elephants to create a glass-topped table.



MADE JUST FOR YOU

Custom-made
furniture
showcases
individual style

photographs by Dasja Dolan
story by Megan Rawlins

Ideally the conversation would go something like this:

Friend: I love that table.

You: Thanks, it's one-of-a-kind.

Friend: Really?!

You: Yeah, I had it custom-made.

While the script sounds like a cheesy commercial, it actually reflects a growing and increasingly accessible option — one-of-a-kind, custom-made furniture for homeowners looking to create their own style.

During a recession, people put off buying new homes or remodeling existing ones. One of the upshots of this trend? Not a lot of new furniture being purchased. Given all of that, the idea of buying a custom piece may be pushed aside as wanton wastefulness.

But custom-made furniture is hardly a monolithic behemoth to be dismissed with such finality. Local designers and artists exemplify the incredible range of techniques, styles and functionality that fall under the term of "custom furniture." And, as designer Carol Lippert put it, for around the price of a designer handbag.

Art teacher from The Netherlands, Nelleke Demmer, is known mostly as an artist and muralist, designing large wall paintings for bathrooms and children's bedrooms. Before moving to Los Altos, Demmer began customizing furniture by painting chairs, chests and tables.

Her pieces are, in her words, "whimsical" and "playful," painted in vivid colors with creative

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Interior designer Carol Lippert fashioned a mirrored dining-room cabinet to fit the mood of a 1930s-era cottage.

Custom-made

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patterns: a tartan cupboard, a harlequin bureau, chairs adorned with Dutch children.

"It's about giving a new life to old furniture," Demmer said. "I take a piece someone might not like and re-imagine it in a way that is personal to both me and the client."

She strips a piece completely, both of paint and hardware, and then, using stencils, sponges, tape, paints, small tools and whatever might strike her fancy, she recreates it to reflect the style of the owner, the artist and the item itself.

"Sometimes I make things whimsical because I like that style, but there are pieces that just need to be traditional," she said.

And if it doesn't work the first time?

"The great thing about paint," she said, "you can always paint over it and change the piece completely."

Brooke Grafstrom, an interior designer in Menlo Park, scours salvage yards and demolition or deconstruction sales for forgotten or neglected treasures.

Stacked in the corner of her garage are a half dozen shimmering blue chair seats.

"A couple of chairs in this set broke; they were throwing them all away," she said.

So, Grafstrom rescued them, repurposing and refashioning them into bulletin boards for her daughter's room or into a milk-can stool with a swivel seat for her son.

"My kids are fidgety," she said. "You have to think of how a piece will be used."

In the same spirit of repurposing, she's turning her grandmother's linen napkins into seat covers for the dining room.

Many of the napkins, for one reason or another, can no longer be used for their original purpose, she said. "But I could never get rid of them; they mean too much to me."

People often have things from their parents or grandparents they can't bear to part with: a chair, a blanket, a lamp. Grafstrom figures out a new way to use the item in the home that suits a client's aesthetic style as well as lifestyle.

The process is a bit like a puzzle, taking seemingly disparate objects or styles and combining them to come up with something useful, creative and wholly original.

"People want something that not a million people will have. They want something that reflects their own house and their own history," she said.

For more than 20 years, Carol Lippert, a

Palo Alto interior designer, has been designing custom furniture for private and commercial clients in the Bay Area.

"Custom furniture is a lot easier than people think for a designer to build," she said. "It works really well if you have a house where normal things don't seem to fit."

By "fit" Lippert means both physically and contextually. She designed a piece for a client's 1930s era cottage. The client wanted something that reflected a style contemporary with the home's construction, Lippert said.

"We wanted it to have the almost French feel of furniture built before World War II that fit the feel of the cottage," she said. "To get a real piece would have taken a lot of time and been really expensive, but I was able to design something that fit everything the client needs."

The creation, a cabinet piece with mirrors for the dining room, looks like a vintage piece, fits stylistically and was constructed with the physical space of the room in mind. A true antique, Lippert said, would have had to have been modified.

In an area where organic, local and sustainable foods continue to grow in popularity, Lippert and Grafstrom have noticed that using recycled and sustainable material is becoming a trend.

"More people are interested in repurposing and salvaging things because of the media emphasis on 'green,'" Grafstrom said.

Lippert said her clients appreciate knowing what exactly goes into a piece of furniture.

"We want to make sure the lumber we buy comes from a green source, that the finish isn't toxic. There are very different standards," she said.

By custom-designing a piece, she and the client have control down to every micro-level of the process.

The rise of stores such as Ikea has normalized the anonymity of furniture. Custom-made furniture is a way to buck that trend. The new dining room table might not be from the 1870s, but it will have an interesting back-story.

Demmer, Grafstrom and Lippert use materials and techniques to different ends. These differences only serve to reinforce the idea of custom furniture as a showcase for individual style and personality. ■

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Midtown Realty presents...

21 WILLOW RD, #42, MENLO PARK

Wow! A phenomenal home

Open Sunday
1:30-4:30



- 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms
- Single level, no one above or below
- Ideally situated between Downtown Palo Alto and Downtown Menlo Park
- French doors lead to a beautiful private backyard with mature landscaping
- Gleaming hardwood floors
- Light, bright and nicely updated

Listed by: Tim Foy

Offered at \$649,000

2501 WAVERLEY ST, PALO ALTO

Spacious Home on a Large Lot!

Open Sunday
1:30-4:30



- 6 bedroom, 3 bathrooms, plus large, finished attic space
- Large living room with Cathedral ceilings, spacious dining room and light filled kitchen
- Refinished random plank hardwood floors.
- Wonderful 9100 sq. ft lot situated in the heart of Midtown
- Ready to move in and enjoy

Listed by: Tim & Tom Foy

Offered at \$1,650,000

155-157 EMBARCADERO RD, PALO ALTO

Rare remodeled Palo Alto Duplex!

Open Sunday
1:30-4:30



Charming remodeled duplex with hardwood floors, dual pane windows, new kitchen and bathrooms. Gated driveway and landscaped grounds. Close to Stanford University and Paly. Many possibilities for ownership.

3 bed/2 bath unit, 1,147 sf
2 bed/1 bath unit, 879 sf

Listed by: Leslie Zeisler
www.dynamideduplex.com

Offered at \$1,589,000

2914 SANDRA PL, PALO ALTO

Completely Rebuilt, Stunning!

By Appointment
Only



- 3 bedroom, 2 bathrooms, 2,012 sf, 6,150 lot
- Enormous "chefs" kitchen with gourmet appliances
- A true "one of a kind" with incredible quality and attention to detail
- Beautifully landscaped grounds with built in BBQ and custom water feature

Listed by: Tim Foy

Offered at: \$1,595,000

295 Ely Place, Palo AltoUnder Contract
80 Roosevelt Circle, Palo AltoUnder Contract
1619 Morgan Court, Mountain ViewUnder Contract
877 Northampton Drive, Palo AltoUnder Contract
553 Maybell Avenue, Palo AltoUnder Contract

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