

JASON MILLER'S NEW LIGHTING COMPANY, ROLL & HILL, PRESENTED A NUMBER OF IDIOSYNCRATIC OBJECTS, SUCH AS THIS FOUR-SIDED CHANDELIER.



AMERICAN BEAUTY

US designers went back to their mid-century roots at the recent International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York.

WORDS SHONQUIS MORENO
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS

We often forget that the largest furniture fair in the USA takes place twice yearly in High Point, North Carolina, and has done so for the past 100 years. Four times the size of New York's ICFF, it is focused wholly on the domestic market and on business, in the form of orders. At the ICFF, where non-Americans abound, the focus is on design. Last May the usually fragmented Americans coalesced into not just a presence but a personality. The design was excellent, if not innovative, drawn on tradition, but not traditional: a mix of quirky and elegant, rough and refined.

Brooklyn designer Jason Miller's early work riffed on the eccentricities of Americana, including a duct-taped armchair and a graffitied 'I Was Here' picnic table. Superannuated Antlers, a hunting-trophy lamp belonging to

the capricious inaugural collection of Miller's new lighting company, Roll & Hill, highlighted a convocation of pieces that have only their idiosyncrasies in common. Miller will work with designers outside the US, but this first crop is American and offers a peculiarly American perspective. 'Designed goods in the American market don't have broad appeal in the US, because most of them come from Europe and feel European,' Miller observes. 'In general, Americans don't like things to be excessively abstract or minimal. They don't want the product to be blank; they like a story. Depth and viewpoint are important.'

Jamie Gray of Manhattan's Matter, who also presented his shop's first collection at the ICFF, would agree: 'American manufacturers generally produce traditional furniture or

something that emulates the European market,' he says. 'But with such a rich history in design, craft and production, it made sense to start doing something fresh that was American and contemporary at the same time.' Gray's first batch of designers was also all-American but will not always be so. Commonwealth translated its material and formal experiments into the wooden Truncheon task light, Christopher Specce updated the Windsor chair, and Lindsey Adelman's brass lighting looks both buttery and barbed. Paul Loebach's Great Camp series – based on the rustic 19th-century Adirondack vacation culture of Upstate New York – is intrinsically American. Calling his approach 'aesthetic athleticism', Loebach reinvigorates familiar forms by combining technologies like rapid metal printing, CNC milling and >>>

THE GEOMETRIC FORMS OF PAUL LOEBACH'S HIMMELI CHANDELIER FOR ROLL & HILL CLEARLY RECALL THE ART-DECO PERIOD.



REMINISCENT OF AN ANTIQUE OIL LANTERN, THE PENDANT LAMP BY STEPHEN BURKS FOR MATTERMADE, SPORTS A CONTEMPORARY SHELL OF BLOWN GLASS AND BRASS WIRE.

THE EVER-POPULAR WINDSOR CHAIR HAS RECEIVED A MODERN AMERICAN-STYLE MAKEOVER, COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER SPECCE FOR MATTERMADE.



AMERICAN DESIGN IS THRIVING, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE SUCCESSFUL FURNITURE DESIGNERS BEHIND BLU DOT.





WINNING ONE OF BERNHARDT DESIGN'S FIRST DESIGN HONORS AWARDS GAVE JONAH TAKAGI THE RARE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE HIS DESIGNS MANUFACTURED IN THE USA.



AT THE LIFT, HOLD, ROLL SHOW FOR THE FUTURE PERFECT, OBJECTS MADE WITH PULLEYS, CLAMPS AND CASTERS WERE PRESENTED AS RESOURCEFUL LIVING SOLUTIONS.

'Americans don't like things to be excessively abstract or minimal'
Jason Miller

aerospace machining with, say, good old joinery.

A contributor to Matter's Mattermade range, Jonah Takagi of Washington, D.C., received the first American Design Honors award from High Point-based manufacturer Bernhardt Design, a company that mentors, rewards, showcases and produces the work of young designers. But such businesses are rare. 'There are plenty of talented American designers,' says Gray. 'There just aren't enough American manufacturers willing to set the bar higher or take risks. But I think we're witnessing a sea change, with more small manufacturers popping up every year.'

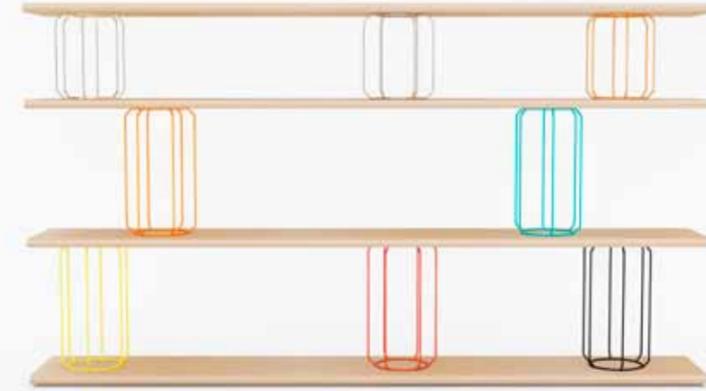
Indeed, American design is thriving, as exemplified by Minneapolis's burgeoning Blu Dot; Philadelphia's Asher Dunn, who won an ICFF Editors Award; and young northern-California design label Council. In ICFF's new Noho Design

District, energy (and Macallan whisky) radiated from satellite shows. In Williamsburg, Brooklyn designer Kiel Mead curated the resourceful Lift, Hold, Roll show for The Future Perfect, showing objects made with pulleys, clamps and casters only. Mead also cofounded the year-old curatorial collective, the American Design Club, which mounted an exhibition in the Meatpacking District of glass objects by US designers who responded to the Club's calls for submissions on Craigslist and in the blogosphere. Mead calls the increasing strength of this response an example of the 'American spirit'. 'Maybe American design doesn't have a particular style simply because of how the country was formed: we're a country of immigrants,' he points out, 'and the American Design Club is the Statue of Liberty for undiscovered American talent.'

Although the work was eclectic, these pieces didn't have to give up their big personalities – or their elegance – to feel home-grown. Avant-garde American design, however, continues to be manufactured incidentally or accidentally – and simply self-produced. One imagines designers in cities across the United States repeatedly whispering the same question to themselves in recent years: do I have to do everything myself? The answer, of course, was 'yes.' So they did. ■

rollandhill.com
mattermatters.com
bludot.com

A PLAYFUL SHELVING SYSTEM WITH A QUIRKY NAME IS STEPHEN BURKS' CIRCUS, WHICH IS HANDMADE FOR MATTERMADE.



BLU DOT'S CANT DESK WAS DESIGNED ESPECIALLY FOR THE AMERICAN MARKET.



THE GREAT CAMP COLLECTION BY PAUL LOEBACH FOR MATTERMADE WAS INSPIRED BY THE 19TH-CENTURY ADIRONDACK CHAIR.

