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Interior Design • Landscaping

SECTION H

Craft-show artisans proud of their work

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THERE'S A STRANGE dichotomy in design these days.

On the one hand, there are the ever-expanding empires of Pottery Barn, Pier 1, Target and Gap. Then on the other, there's the insistent presence of hand-crafted goods.

It's mass production versus artisanship. And while it'd be easy to conclude that mass production is winning — based on the sheer number of Pottery Barn catalogs that arrive in the average household's mailbox alone — the American Craft Council would beg to differ.

The buzz around the council's San Francisco show, Aug. 10-12 at Fort Mason, indicates that good old-fashioned craft may be finally chipping away at those Pottery Barn apothecary tables and Pier 1 rattan weave Lindi trunks that everyone — yes, everyone — either has or at one time had.

Hey, there's a reason "Friends" did a whole episode on the Pottery Barn apothecary table some seven years ago.

"You can buy a glass-beaded lampshade now at Kmart — but the difference is that the level of design, the quality of work and the handmadeness of my work is really apparent," says basket weaver and former glass-bead lampshade maker Lesley Cantor of Walnut Creek, an exhibitor at the San Francisco show.

"When I was in college I would have given my eye teeth to have those Pottery Barn glass-beaded shades. And don't get me wrong, someone is making those, just not like we, as artisans, do. And the people that appreciate it are the people that come to the American Craft Council shows. They get that, as artists, we have to do this. There's not a lot of choice."

The numbers that do "get it" seem to be increasing, at least anecdotally, according to the American Craft Council. "Does society like to craft, or does craft reflect society? Either way, we're seeing another resurgence right now," says Mary Fichter, director of marketing and communications for the American Craft Council. "I think it's that people have just grown tired of the aesthetic that's mass-produced at stores."

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Crafts

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The Craft Council's San Francisco show is celebrating its 32nd year. And while the council's largest show in terms of the number of exhibitors with booths is in Baltimore in February, the San Francisco event is perennially popular. Fichter attributes it to that special Bay Area dynamic.

"The first show was in 1975, and you can imagine, it was not only a significant and poignant time for San Francisco, but the nation as a whole was turning away from mass-produced objects and embracing natural materials, like clay and wood, out of initial concerns for the environment."

Fast-forward 32 years and things haven't changed much here in Prieus-by-the-Bay. Concern for the environment is an understatement around the Bay Area, and if you're not doing something to green your life and reduce your carbon footprint, something's wrong with you.

"The whole green phenomenon is something that's made craft very appealing," says Fichter. "We'll have lots of green artists at the show. But in 2008, we'll promote them heavily and with great signage. It's something we think is important, and it's important to the artists."

The Craft Council, always

looking to promote artists and their work, isn't just tapping into the green movement. At this year's show is another new installation, called Craft 4 Kids. It's not a demonstration where kids make macaroni necklaces; instead, it's a category of crafting where the products are designed especially for children.

One of the artists in the Craft 4 Kids program, Sara Drower of Wilmette, Illinois, says she un-

derstood why the Craft Council turned to kids as a promotion tool after taking a trip through a local shopping mall.

"One-third of the stores were marketing to kids," says Drower, who makes hand-painted quilted vests and jackets for children. "I think the Craft Council is broadening the marketing because if that's what the general retail market is looking at, then that's what we should be looking at, too."

First forays into the children's market weren't perfect, though, says Drower. Though some entries were a few wooden toys and perhaps some stuffed animals, other artists just tried to make their existing products work at a children's level.

"Some were like, 'Well, I guess this night light could go in a kid's room,'" says Drower, whose vests and jackets range from \$55 to \$75. "No! You've got to put bunnies on it! It doesn't



AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL
KEEPING IT REAL: Show exhibitor Steve Baldwin's wooden toys.

PREVIEW

- **WHAT:** American Craft Council's San Francisco show
- **WHERE:** Fort Mason, S.F.
- **WHEN:** 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Aug. 10-11; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Aug. 12
- **HOW MUCH:** \$12 per person or \$18 for a two-day pass; children 12 and younger admitted free
- **TICKETS:** Available at the door or online at www.craftcouncil.org; for more information, call 800-836-3470

have to be, how do I say it, sappy. But some designs work for kids, and some don't. Like with my vests — daisies work for kids. But orchids? No."

Still, whether the crafts are designs for kids or for their elders, the common denominator is handcraftsmanship. That means higher prices for a wooden fire engine or a hand-made vest — compared with a Hasbro Transformers figure or a Baby Gap sweater — but artists such as Drower say there's no comparison.

"People that go to the craft shows want a different product," says Drower. "They're looking for something unique and distinctive. When they come to the shows and say 'I could get that for \$10 at Target,' we all say, 'Go to Target.' It's not personal. It's individually made, and it reflects the craftsman."