

# Oakland Tribune



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## Inside Out HOME & GARDEN



### The real deal:

Whether it's clams in New England or jazz in New Orleans, geotourism is about seeing the real side of where you travel.

Sunday in Great Escapes

## Craftsmanship on display at S.F. show

By Candace Murphy  
STAFF WRITER

**T**HERE'S A STRANGE dichotomy in design these days.

On the one hand, there are the ever-expanding empires of Pottery Barn, Pier One, Target and the Gap. 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 through 12 at Fort Mason, indicates that good old-fashioned craft may be finally chipping away at those Pottery Barn Apothecary tables and Pier One 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 Pot-



**VESTED INTEREST:** Sarah Drower of Illinois makes quilted vests and this year will have a children's line in the American Craft Council's San Francisco Show.

tery 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 hand-madness 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."

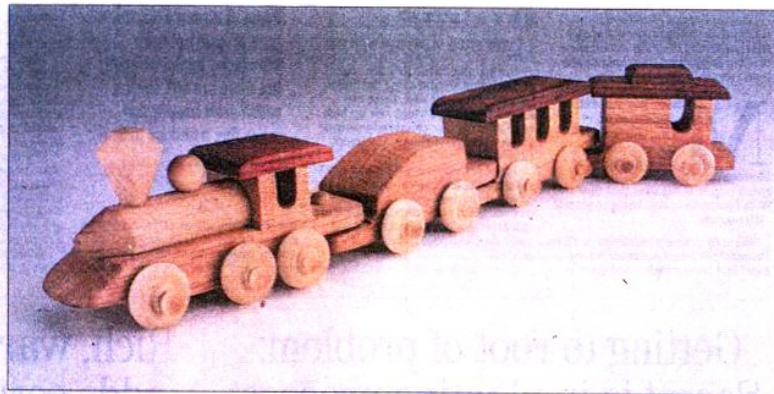
The numbers that do "get it" seem to be increasing, at least

Please see **CRAFT**, Living 3

## Hand-crafting offers alternative to mass production



**HANDMADE TREASURES:** Wooden toys (right) crafted by Steve Baldwin, and baskets by weaver Lesley Cantor of Walnut Creek will be among the exhibitors at the American Craft Council's San Francisco show.



### ► **CRAFT**, from Living 1

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 American Craft Council president Mary Fichter. "I think it's that people have just grown tired of the aesthetic that's mass produced at stores."

The Craft Council's San Francisco show, celebrating its 32nd year, is the oldest in America.

While the council's largest show in terms of the number of exhibitors with booths is in Baltimore in February, the San Francisco one 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," she says, "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 Frisby-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 "Crafts 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 kids.

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Mary Fichter,  
American Craft Council president

One of the artists in the Crafts 4 Kids program, Sarah Drower, of Wilmette, Ill., says she understood 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, 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 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."

Whether the crafts are designs for kids or for their elders, the common denominator is hand-craftsmanship. That means higher prices for a wooden fire engine or a hand-made vest—compared to a

Hasbro Transformers figure or a Baby Gap sweater—but artists like Drower say there's no comparison.

"People that go to the craft shows want a different product. 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,'" says Drower. "It's not personal. It's individually made and it reflects the craftsman."

### Craft Council show

Tickets to the American Craft Council show at Fort Mason, Marina Boulevard and Buchanan Street, in San Francisco cost \$12 per person or \$18 for a two-day pass. Children 12 and under are free. Show hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 10 and Saturday, Aug. 11; and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 12. Tickets are available at the door or online at [www.craftcouncil.org](http://www.craftcouncil.org). For more information call 1-800-836-3470.