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Crafts
coming
of age
— again

Art of creation is
focus at Fort Mason

By Laura Thomas
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The new century has brought an interest by many people in craft, both traditional and innovative.

The word "craft" has a range of definitions — from paste-and-paper projects for schoolkids to gallery-level contemporary art — and includes an intense interest in exploring do-it-yourself experimentation on the part of a generation reputed to be in love with technology.

In response, the American Craft Council has decided it's time to change the format for this weekend's 32nd annual American Craft Show at Fort Mason.

"The Craft Council wants to tell the story of craft so it will make sense to people. For too long, it's been about the object," said Andrew Wagner, the new editor of American Craft magazine.

The show, which runs Friday through Sunday, will be "more than a shopping mall for products," he said. "We want to help the artists get exposure, but we also want to create an experience."

The work of 250 experienced and skilled studio artists will still be on view, but the program will also include free wine tastings and a panel discussion on the convergence of craft and design.

Also included will be demonstrations of flame working, welding, torch cutting and blacksmithing presented by the Crucible, an Oakland school of industrial and fine arts that is an example of youthful enthusiasm for experimentation with traditional techniques.

"All the vibrant energy in craft is coming from the street level," Wagner said, "not from the top down."

Wagner, a Californian who helped start the modern design magazine *Dwell* in 2000, is pushing for more dialogue and public participation in shaping the future of craft in the United States.

The latest explosion of interest, which has been tied to the events of Sept. 11 and seen as a reaction against technological speedup, is "a powerful sentiment," he said.

He noted that the contemporary craft movement disappeared into galleries in the 1980s and '90s as it sought recognition as fine art, but with young people feeling the freedom to experiment with making things with their hands, a change is in the wind.

"People are coming back to knowing how to make things," a good sign, he said because the loss of manufacturing knowledge that results from shipping production overseas can destroy the impetus for innovation.

"In the U.S. we are losing the ability to make things, and I think that's a dangerous place to be," he said.

Along with presenting the process of craft to the public, the Craft Council wants it to be appreciated and sought after by a

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HOME & Garden



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This year, the American Craft Council wants to expand the American Craft Show's focus to a discussion and exploration of what craft is.

Booths geared to kids will be clearly marked

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wider audience, according to marketing director Mary Fichter.

She noted that, this year, some of the presenters, four jewelers in particular, will be combining their booth space and designing their presentation "to make it more eye-catching and inviting."

Another innovation, linked to the idea of marketing the craft fair better, is that booths that feature crafts pertaining to children will be clearly marked.

Parents will be delighted, she said, because they "are looking for authentic objects for their children."

Wagner said the Craft Council hopes people will attend the show even if they do not think they can afford much of what's on display, an attitude that is beginning to change as more people appreciate design and good craftsmanship.

"Ikea is amazing. It opened the door to modern design and said, 'You can have this too.' Some people will stop at Ikea, but most people will get their Ikea bookshelf and then they'll walk by Limn or the Magazine and

Things you need to know

What: American Craft Show
When: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.
Where: Herbst and Festival pavilions, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco.
Who: Sponsored by American Craft Council
Admission: \$12; \$18 for two-day pass; children 12 and younger free.
Information: (800) 836-3470; www.craftcouncil.org/sf

walk in the door and poke around a bit," he said.

Wagner doesn't think the new format will result in de-emphasizing the importance of skill and technique.

"We get a lot of resistance from artists," he said. His response: "You are a technical virtuoso, but the more people who are interested in making things by hand, the better it is for you."

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Penelope Productions 2006

Arts & Crafts bonanza

Period pieces like this lamp by San Francisco artisan Dirk Van Erp will be for sale at the 13th Annual Arts & Crafts San Francisco Show and Sale this weekend at the Concourse Exhibition Center. The two-day event is one of the largest exhibitions and sales of Craftsman items in the country and features vintage art and furniture, along with work done by revival specialists. The show also includes vintage Art Nouveau, American Indian and California rancho craftsmanship. Hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$10. For information, call (707) 865-1576 or go to www.artsandcrafts-sf.com.