

Fine living: Not so off-the-wall space-saving

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The stunted economy didn't stop Mark Skolnick from opening up his new Novato showroom nine months ago and, in fact, it may be helping him.

The owner of the Wallbeds 'n' More Showroom says that when homeowners want to downsize or maximize the space they already have, beds that fold up out of sight are finding favor again.

"Spaces are getting smaller, density is increasing and people are consolidating, but people still have families and they still have a need for ingenious space-saving," he says.

The granddaddy of all wallbeds, the Murphy Bed, he says, was developed in San Francisco by John Murphy. The company ultimately moved to New York, though. The early versions "were really popular and you can still find them in San Francisco, but they were heavy, clunky and they really chewed up the floor. And, once they were in, you're weren't moving it. "

His wall beds aren't installed in the floor but in wall studs, and they're portable, whether it's moving to another room or another house.

Who's his typical customer? The empty-nester. "The kids are off to college and the parents want to reclaim the space for a home office or exercise room," he says. "They still want a bed for guests or for the kids when they come home, but they don't want what I call 'the tyranny of the bed' taking up what is the best space in the room."

Then there are the home office professionals who telecommute and the owner of vacation home who want more sleeping space for renters of guests.

That's the case with Randy Pacelli of Mill Valley. He and his wife just had a Wallbeds 'n' More's Hidden Bed, which folds down with an 18-inch space over the attached desk beneath, installed this week in their Napa vacation home. "It has four bedrooms but we wanted an extra bed for overflow guests without wasting a room," Pacelli says. Their bed folds down over a laptop, printer, two lamps and a telephone. "It's pretty cool."

The Hidden Bed was just one of his choices. He could have picked any one of the 16 design styles, coordinating components (armoires, drawers, desks and slide-outs), finishes and woods (alder, maple, oak, pine, birch or cherry), or he could have customized his own.

Skolnick says the top seller in Marin, though, is the \$3,200 Paris, a model with crown molding and optional glass doors and lighting. The U-Do-It bed, at \$1,600 for a full-size, comes unfinished.

Wallbeds 'n' More is at 701 DeLong Ave., Suite H, in Novato. For more information, call 827-1876 or go to www.wallbedsnmore.com.

Artful furniture

Whether you like finding fine handmade crafts or making them yourself, mark your calendar for the weekend of Aug. 13. That's when the American Craft Council Show opens at Fort Mason Center with two new categories - Lawn and Garden and Handmade Under \$100 - live craft demonstrations, lessons and children's workshop.

Billed as the largest craft show in the west, this is a great place to find new artists and artful objects like the playful animal-postured furniture that Oakland artist Ashley Jameson Eriksmoen calls "Mammals at Home." Her art, informed by observing firsthand the devastation of those who lost everything in the 1994 Northridge earthquake, inspired the former engineering geologist to make furniture that was familiar, rather than industrial.

"One house would slide right down on another and the homeowners had no idea where their stuff was and it was very ungrounding for them," recalls the graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. "It gave me a lot to think about. The idea behind my work is to think of furniture as friends of the house, more welcoming and companionable than the alien shapes of manmade objects."

Her footstools - propped up on mahogany legs/paws and upholstered in lime green or rust orange woven wool - are charming. Less than 3 feet tall, they resemble either a sitting or stretching cat or dog and cost about \$1,800. The American Craft Council Show is at the Fort Mason Center on Marina Boulevard and Buchanan Street in San Francisco. Tickets are \$5 to \$18. Go to 800-836-3470 or www.craftcouncil.org/sf.

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