

LUXURY LIVING

Anything is possible with custom

Beautiful bespoke furniture takes patience and collaborative vision.

PAUL BARKER
Special to Postmedia Network

Customized furniture fulfills the need to own a distinctive couch, table, chair or bed that is strictly designed with yourself in mind. It's this very thing that created a market, which according to one report released last year, could be worth upwards of US\$35 billion by the end of 2025.

As the report notes, the "significant growth in the real estate sector is continuously influencing the demand for luxury furniture across both the residential and commercial sectors. Moreover, manufacturers are coming up with striking new designs of furniture and collaborating with interior designers to increase their visibility to capture a wider customer base."

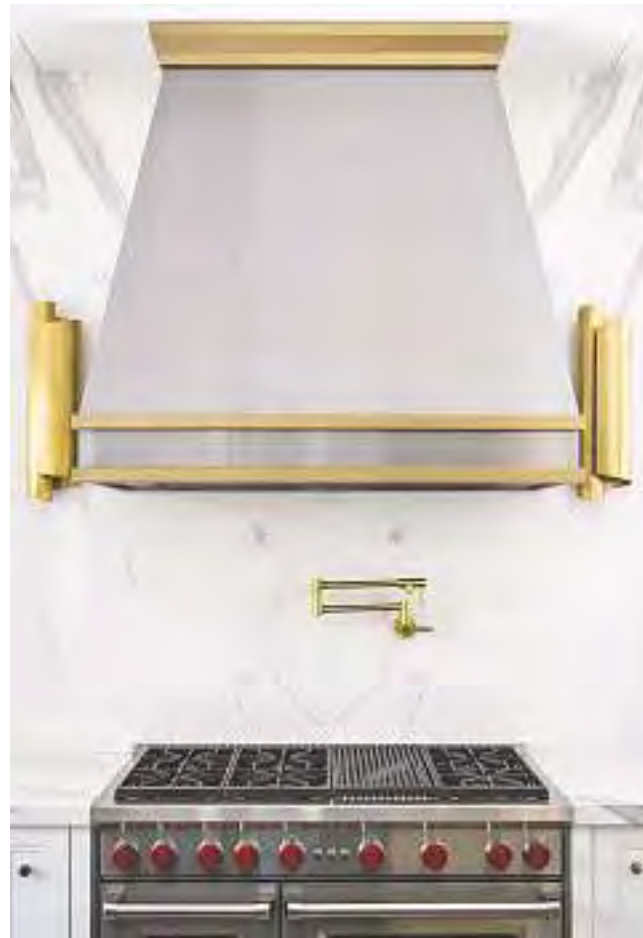
Toronto-based Andrew Pike, principal designer of

Andrew Pike Interiors, and Jennifer Backstein, founder of Jennifer Backstein Interiors, are two such designers specializing in custom furniture. Both have extensive experience making bespoke pieces for the one per cent.

"It's always important to start with a site visit and in-person consultation, which has been challenging these last couple of months, but we are muddling through with Zoom and distance meetings," says Pike. "They hire me to interpret their vision. I really believe it's a collaborative effort to create a beautiful space for a client."

As for the clients, he adds, they definitely run the gamut.

"Some know what they want, they have seen your work, they will reference a previous project and ask for something similar to that or they've been to someone's home that you



JENNIFER BACKSTEIN INTERIORS
JBI created this custom range hood with brushed metal and bands of matte brass to mesh with the sconces that flank the range.

have done and they want something along that vein," he explains. "Other clients take endless hours to make decisions and really need hand-holding, which my firm is more than happy to provide."

According to Backstein, the discussion of ideas, designs and concepts is key. The client, in turn, will express what they need or want, and it's up to her team to figure out how to make their vision come to life.

"I do have clients who have an exact idea of what they want," she says. "All they need to do is tell us and we put it together. Others give us a concept and we run with it, and create the whole design. That is what I love doing the most because it really gets my creative juices flowing."

Because custom pieces are tailored to a person's taste and style, clients

aren't constrained by the limits of retail.

"Anything is possible!" Backstein says. "I am working currently on a 7,000 sq. foot home in King City and we are customizing each space."

In one example Backstein cites, a client didn't want their television set to be visible. So her team designed a wall that the television could be built in, with shelves on either side of the wall and closed cabinetry on the bottom. They installed a floating wall to cover the TV when it isn't in use.

"That is not something you can buy in a store," she says. "We have customized it to every specification using materials and finishes that are all high end. We get to incorporate metal, lighting and wallpaper and hardware. We have trades that can create beautiful, customized hardware to a



LARRY ARNAL, INFO@ARNALPHOTOGRAPHY
A custom wall of storage and mirrored Murphy bed designed to look like an armoire.



LARRY ARNAL, INFO@ARNALPHOTOGRAPHY
This is a master bedroom with custom drapes, fireplace, and wall panelling.

client's specifications. It's endless, it truly is."

When money is not an issue, the rules change considerably. Pike adds it all comes down to what the clients value.

"There is status to buying furniture, but when you are building custom, you really are getting a one-off piece," he says. "You are getting a design just for you. It is like buying art. When the client finds that item that is important to them, they will pay to make it happen."

As a result of the pandemic, both sides need to be patient due to a supply chain Pike describes as "a complete mess."

"I ordered a coffee table that was coming from Europe in February," he explains. "It was supposed to be here in May, that got pushed to August, and now it is scheduled to arrive in November. It really is a case of following the bouncing

ball. Everyone is doing the best job they can, but we have pivoted because we are unsure what the second wave will look like, and doing a lot more supplying of materials here in the city."

There are definite shortages of wood materials and fabrics, says Backstein.

"Recently, I put in an order for a lot of custom fabrics for a client's home to do her family room, living room and dining room," she says. "At this point, some of the items are not in stock and it will be a couple of months before we can receive anything."

"We are doing the best we can in these times. People have to be patient and understanding about the fact some things are out of our control. When materials are low in stock or there is something we can't tackle at the moment, then we'll concentrate on something else."

Lighting the way

Handmade, artisanal fixtures deliver great design.

VICKY SANDERSON
Special to Postmedia Network

Extravagant lighting has always played a starring role in luxurious spaces. Think about the attention-grabbing chandelier. The centrepiece of many a grand room, its sparkling appeal endures, reflected in the longevity of storied brands like Schonbek, the American lighting-maker now celebrating its 150th birthday.

The anniversary is being marked with a collection curated from the company's historical library, including a series called "Century" that features cascading chandeliers with gleaming columns as well as intricate drops and decoration crafted in crystal.

Contemporary interpretations of the chandelier tend to be less formal and more angular, but equally beautiful. Marcel Wander's Amsterdam-based studio Moooi recently released a shining example. Called "Flock of Light" and designed by Studio Toer, its pared-down, scaled-back shape brings to mind a swooping band of birds, or a drift of fireflies.

Re-issues of exceptional lighting from high-end heritage brands offer some of the best table and floor design from any period. Louis Poulson has, for example, brought back the Septima lamp, designed by Poul Henningsen between 1927 and 1931. Wonderfully sculptural, it has seven shades in alternating clear and frosted glass. Its appeal is also func-



COURTESY OF LAROSE GUYON
Larose Guyon's Céleste fixture evokes the magic of sky lanterns.

tional; the design is known for how gently and softly it diffuses light.

In the two decades since Regina Sturrock founded an interior design firm to specialize in bespoke spaces, she says the notion of what constitutes luxury lighting has changed — as it has with just about every element of high-end design.

"Ten years ago, our scale typically ranged between 10- to 15,000-square feet. Our latest projects are from 4,500 to 8,000 max," says Sturrock. The Burlington-based designer is pleased by the shift. "I think people are looking at homes that are more useful, more meaningful, and want them to reflect what's important to them," she adds.

William MacDonald, who designs spaces in toney neighbourhoods across Canada and the U.S., agrees that the idea of luxury has

changed, and says his lighting choices for big-budget projects reflect that.

"I'm still looking for statement pieces, but I am looking at things that are more Bohemian — natural material such as straw or anything woven, where that handmade quality and feel comes in," says MacDonald, pointing to pieces from Serena & Lily as examples.

The smaller scale comes with less emphasis on price tags and prestige brands, says Sturrock, and more on customization, longevity of product, and sustainability of production. That's a welcome trend for small-batch makers like Christopher Solar, who sells handmade, limited-production designs from his Ottawa studio.

Solar insists materials must be both durable and have enduring appeal. He pairs domestic hardwoods like white oak and walnut

with sustainable fabrics and vegetable-tanned leathers. Wood is finished with a low-sheen, hand-applied oil/wax finish that's non-toxic and repairable. His lighting line includes a handsome table lamp with a tall conical base of solid ash that's paired with shades made from artist Lorraine Tuson's strongly graphic felt fabric.

Like an experienced film director, Sturrock knows the way light falls, and the shadows and patterns it creates, can establish mood. "Lighting is such a fine mixture of technology and art," she says. "And a fantastical-dimensionally fixture will guide the viewer and allow them to linger and absorb a space."

For fixtures that add atmosphere, look to Snob, which distributes Zenza Lighting's Egyptian-made, hand-punctured (without stencils) pendants and table lamps. In

solid brass and plated with nickel or silver oxide finishes, or left in the natural gold tone of the brass, they shower spaces with shimmer, dappled light.

Sturrock finds visual interest in pieces like those of Mathew McCormack, the Vancouver-based designer who combined experience as an art director and hands-on electrical work to create lighting that gets noticed around the globe.

Quebec is home to a cluster of highly successful premium-lighting designers. Larose Guyon is a favourite of Sturrock. With dealers in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Greenwich, CT, and Chicago, their home base in Verchères is where they combine an atelier with a by-appointment gallery. From here, visitors can explore materials and finishes, and watch fabricators work.

Founded in 2010, Montreal's Lambert et fils makes beautiful contemporary lighting, both in its original collections and collaborations with emerging designers, in their Montreal workshop.

While pieces that "show the hand" are chic right now, MacDonald says technology is increasingly a factor in higher-end lighting design.

"Now it's not just the piece, but the electronics behind it," he says. "It's being able to turn on the lighting around your art from your phone while you are walking home, and coming in and having it all lit. That's not about bling, it's about beauty — and that's the best kind of luxury."

Canadian lighting designers shine bright

Haute-décor lighting used to be seen as strictly the purview of fabled European makers. These days, there are too many exceptional Canadian designers making names for themselves — not just here at home, but around the world.



Created in collaboration with Canadian designer Rachel Bussin, the colourful glass rectangles of Lambert et fils' Sainte Collection seem to float in space.



Mathew McCormack's Mila marries hand-blown glass globes that hang like pearls among softly geometry bent forms.



Christopher Solar's lamps feed an appetite for handcrafted design.