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The Design and construction of furniture to enhance love making

Martin Hahn

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

The Design and Construction of Furniture to Enhance Love Making

by

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April 1, 2002
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CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, furniture has served specific utilitarian functions. Chairs are for sitting, tables are a place for things, beds are for sleeping. A carefully designed and constructed chair is comfortable - the design of the chair enhances the function for which it is intended. Over those same centuries, little attention has been paid to designing and building furniture which has the specific use of love-making, let alone to enhance love-making.

My goal for the year of my thesis project was to build furniture with design and aesthetic characteristics that would enhance love-making. This thesis describes my personal search for an identity as a furniture designer and builder. Because this is a personal search, I felt most comfortable designing and building furniture for heterosexual couples. The process by which I would achieve this goal, the search, would be iterative, I would design and build a piece of furniture and solicit comments from others. Based on the comments, I would design and build another piece and so on. I would solicit comments from three groups of people. The first group would be professional furniture designers and builders, the woodworking professors of the Rochester Institute of Technology. They would evaluate the aesthetic qualities and craftsmanship of the pieces. The second group would consist of a couple or several heterosexual couples who would actually use the furniture to test the functional theories that I had for the piece. The third group would be my thesis committee who would guide me through my year’s search. The comments of the groups were not to be definitive, not a scientific study with random sampling and control groups but rather a set of focus groups, who as individuals or
couples would provide their own perspectives on various aspects of each piece of furniture. Including couples who use the pieces may seem unusual, but it is similar to the process that an apprentice violin maker might use. The apprentice seeks feedback not only from master craftsmen who evaluate the aesthetics and craftsmanship of his violin, but of equal importance he seeks feedback from musicians on the musical or acoustic qualities of the violin.

During this search I was especially interested in three ideas which are involved in love-making as I saw it at the beginning of my search: the sex act itself (physical aspects of love-making), love (psychological and emotional aspects of love-making) and control. By control I refer to the design characteristics of the piece itself which would facilitate some activities and restrict others as the couples experimented in love-making. These three ideas guided the development of designs during the search.

By the end of the thesis project I had designed and built five pieces of furniture. I had secured the assistance of three couples who evaluated the furniture. I had received numerous and helpful comments from my thesis committee members and the woodworking faculty of the Rochester Institute of Technology. The design for each piece of furniture was influenced by the comments of those groups. I learned a great deal about: the sex act, love, and design for control, the three ideas which guided my search. Finally, I have now placed the entire experience in perspective and am able to see where my development as a furniture designer and builder will take me next.
CHAPTER 2.
THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF FURNITURE
AND COMMENTS BY GROUPS

PIECE ONE: *Fervor*

Design and Aesthetics

The first piece I designed and built was a lounge that I called *Fervor*. *Fervor* is a word which reflects a feeling of intense heat. The design drawing and an illustration of the completed piece are on the following page. The lounge is narrow and about the length of a human lying down. I designed it to comfortably support a couple so they might make love in a particular position. In this position the man lies on his back and the woman stands over him, facing either his head or his feet. This position is a variation of a position for intercourse where the woman sits on top of the man with her knees bent and legs tucked under her (Kaplan 1975, 63). In my opinion, this position is difficult on a flat surface such as a bed since after a period of time it becomes quite stressful to the knees of the woman. *Fervor* was designed to allow the woman to be in this position free of stress on her knees. This design enhances certain positions but is also restrictive; it rules out other positions.

I designed *Fervor* to elicit feelings of intensity and it’s shape and materials were meant to reflect those feelings. The lounge is constructed of two symmetrical side sections of bent laminated plywood which were veneered in Tamo, a Japanese ash, because of its curvy and undulating grain. These two sections were then laminated together and on top of them was bolted a third piece of upholstered plywood. I chose plywood for its inherent strength which is
Furniture Piece One - Fervor: a., and b
necessary for *Fervor* to support two people. The color red was chosen for the top’s upholstery because of its potential to excite the mind according to the color theorist Faber Birren, who applauds “the warm active and exciting qualities of red” (Birren 1950, 40). I chose velvet for the upholstery because it is tingly to the touch.

The top of the lounge is narrow in the middle and wide at the ends. The wide end of the top provides ample room for the man’s head and shoulders. The bottom end is wide providing an option for the man to keep his feet together or move them apart. It has a narrow middle, which is only 10” wide, allowing the woman to stand over the man with her legs shoulder width apart. Half of the top is parallel to the ground and the other half angles downward at 20 degrees, for reclining.

This downward angle allows the man’s legs to drop so that his genitals are more exposed, allowing for deeper penetration of the woman who is above him. There is a back support for the man which is located at the point which the top begins to slope downwards at 20 degrees, for reclining. There are two pillows which can be placed upon the lounge. The first can fit under the feet and raises the legs so they are parallel with the ground. The second pillow can rest under the head and allows the man to better view his partner. Underneath the top is an edge roll upholstered in red velvet. This edge roll gives the participants a place for their fingers to grasp obtaining better leverage while making love.

**Comments of the Faculty and the Thesis Committee**

After the completion of *Fervor*, I went through a series of critiques from my faculty and thesis committee, I then categorized their comments into two groups: sex versus love, and self
expression. Committee members raised concerns about the difference between sex and love. I refer to love-making in my thesis yet Fervor is designed for a very specific act of sex. Fervor deals with a specific period of time during love-making, the act of intercourse or sex. As a designer, could I also enhance activities before and after the act of love-making - enhance love as well as sex? My self expression as a sexual person was another topic raised by the faculty and thesis committee. They viewed Fervor as mechanical and lacking in personal expression. Could I better express myself in the next piece by supplementing mechanical aspects with my beliefs about sexuality?

Comments from Couples

The Search for Couples

Like the apprentice violin maker, wondering whether his first violin would be musical, I wondered whether my furniture would be sexually enhancing. How could I assess this? I decided to find a couple or couples who would be willing to use the furniture and comment on it. At the beginning I thought it would be best to work with one couple who would use and comment on each piece of furniture I designed and built. One of the Rochester Institute of Technology's furniture design professors, Bill Keyser, thought that approach would give me consistent feedback over the entire project. That sounds simple, but finding a couple willing to participate in the process turned out to be a very difficult task. By the end of the year, I had worked with four different couples. The headaches I endured while searching for a dependable couple, however, were well worth the trouble. The feedback from the four couples played the role that I had imagined, it helped me to develop my designs as I progressed.
As the word spread around the School for American Crafts of my thesis exploration, people would come up to my bench in the wood shop and exclaim, “I’ll try that out!” When it came to getting a serious commitment of time or use, I was unable to find a pair that was willing. During the first ten weeks of the fall quarter I heard many offers but found no couple who was serious enough to participate.

**Couple One**

John and Mary were friends from RIT and were the first couple who were seriously considering using the lounge, or so I thought. They had seen *Fervor* in my studio space and said they would love to try it. Since I was going out of town for a weekend, I thought this would be a good opportunity for them to discover the lounge’s functional characteristics. With the lounge moved to my apartment and the keys in their possession, I took off for the weekend. When I returned, I learned they never made it to the apartment. John revealed that they were a little intimidated to go to a strange place to have sex. They wanted to feel secure when they were having sex. This first couple taught me a valuable lesson that I would apply to future couples and future furniture. That lesson, was, that people need a sense of security for love-making. That lesson was important and I used that information later, but I had not gained any information about the functional aspects of my design. I needed another couple.

1 I have changed the names of the individuals to preserve their anonymity.
Couple Two

I found a second couple through a friend. William, was a single man who worked as a bartender at a local pub and had a girlfriend. I spoke with William, informed him of my project and asked if he and his girlfriend were willing to participate. He agreed. Learning from the mistake I made with the first couple, I asked William where he would be most comfortable using Fervor. He wanted to use it in his apartment. As I was driving to William’s apartment, I came to a realization. I had invested 10 weeks of work and more than a thousand dollars in making Fervor. Now it was on its way to the home of a person I had spoken to only once. Upon entering his apartment I saw immediately that it was a pigsty and that he was a smoker. I became worried that the lounge would be stained or the upholstery burned. Looking back, I see how naive I was to leave the lounge with him, but I was determined and a little desperate. Ten weeks had gone by, the first couple had not worked out, and I had yet to find a couple that was serious about using the piece. All the ideas I had about the function of Fervor were theoretical. I had begun designing the second piece and wanted to use the comments about Fervor to improve the second piece. With this in mind, I took a risk and left Fervor with him, hoping that I would get useful feedback on the functioning of the piece. As I was leaving his apartment, I told him how to get into different positions on Fervor. His response was, “Let me figure that out.” That turned out to be very important feedback.

During our initial conversation I told William that I would like to speak with his girlfriend about her experience with the lounge. He foresaw no problem with my speaking with her. He also agreed to fill out a questionnaire that rated the function of Fervor. What actually happened was that his girlfriend was not interested in talking to me, in fact, I never learned her name.
Neither of them filled out a questionnaire. He did agree to spend about 15 minutes speaking with me about *Fervor* and its function.

I asked William if he used the pillows. He said he used them on and off the lounge. The larger pillow raised his head and shoulders. He was able to cradle his girlfriend when she was on top making love to him. He always felt that a flat mattress hampered his cradling her. He commented that the smaller pillow supported his girlfriend’s lower back when she was lying on the lounge underneath him. He wished that when engaged in that position there was a better way of holding on to the lounge, such as looped handles.

I was curious if the lumbar support functioned well when William was reclining. He said that he had no back strain while laying face up on the lounge. His girlfriend liked laying face down and using the lumbar support to raise her pelvis while he engaged in oral stimulation and when he was making love to her from behind.

The top of *Fervor* is thin in the middle (10" wide) and I asked William if he had trouble staying on the lounge. At first he thought the top was too thin to support him. While using *Fervor*, he felt secure in the shoulders and back and mentioned that once he began to have intercourse, he forgot about it’s thin middle section. After intercourse, he felt less secure and found it awkward to lie on *Fervor* holding his girlfriend. They would either roll onto the floor or move onto the bed.

I asked him if the lounge enhanced love-making. He said that he and his girlfriend were able to attain every position they were able to think of and that it made the positions more exciting. He wished he could keep *Fervor*. 
From this conversation I decided that there were three areas in the design of *Fervor* that I was going to improve upon in the next piece. I would include easily accessible hand and foot holds, curved forms that would allow a couple to cradle one another, and most importantly an open area. I anticipated that an open area would create a space for them to interact before and after intercourse while providing room for a greater variety of positions during intercourse.

“Let me figure that out,” stated William, as I delivered the lounge to him. At that time, I did not know just how pivotal his statement was, but it became a turning point of my search. It became a new challenge to design furniture that would give control to the users rather than restrict them to a specific use that I had in mind. I began to conceive of furniture that would allow partners to choose their own positions and thereby give them control. This allowed them to be creative. William provided some much needed feedback about the lounge, however, his lifestyle led me to deem him unsuitable for further testing.

**Couple Three**

Only in the last few weeks of the thesis project did I find a third couple. The information they revealed to me was very helpful, even though it came late in the development of my thinking. I met Matthew and Ruth during the fall quarter walk-through where *Fervor* was on display. Matthew spoke with me and asked if he could use the lounge with his wife, Ruth. Once again I applied the lesson I learned from the first couple. Matthew and Ruth asked to use *Fervor* in their studio where they felt secure, and I agreed.

There was a vast difference between this couple and the first two. I had approached the first two couples about using the lounge. Matthew and Ruth asked me if they could participate.
From the beginning, Matthew and Ruth were forthcoming, honest and open in their answers to questions I posed. It was much more difficult to get information from the other two couples.

Matthew and Ruth’s comments were similar to ones made by John and his girlfriend. Matthew and Ruth were both able to achieve any position they could think of. They, as did John and his girlfriend, wished that Fervor had better handholds. The most important comment they made, was that Fervor was difficult to cuddle on after intercourse.

PIECE TWO: UNDULATION

Design and Aesthetics

An undulation is a wavelike motion in a fluid. Using the comments of the couples, the woodworking faculty and my thesis committee, I began to design a piece that would include easily accessible hand and foot holds, curved forms that would allow a couple to cradle each other, and what is most important, an open area. A design drawing and an illustration of the piece are on the following page. I anticipated that the open area would create a space for a couple to interact before, during and after intercourse. I sought to design a piece in which I expressed my beliefs as a sexual person. Undulation’s aesthetic reflects sexuality by utilizing an undulating form, I see this form as analogous to a couple making love with physical and emotional rhythm and pulsation. Undulation’s form resembles a large cupped hand which supports a couple in its palm. The top comprises 12 upholstered segments which are supported by an undulating base. Each segment is curved upward on both ends. The segments are made of bent laminated plywood that is veneered with American cherry to add warmth and color, and upholstered with a heavy grade deep purple vinyl. Color theorist Faber Birren’s research shows
Furniture Piece Two-Undulation: a., and b
that the color purple has a psychological effect of "deep, soft, atmosphere," (Birren 1950, 103). The vinyl wraps the segments in an undulating pattern exposing some of the cherry veneer underneath each segment. I used vinyl because it is convenient to clean and because it has an appearance similar to leather.

*Undulation’s* top segments are attached to its base with bolts and 1" rubber blocks which provide shock absorption. The base is made of solid cherry shaped into a flowing form. There are two identical wavelike forms undulating from the pieces front to it’s back over an eight-foot span. Joined by mortise and tenon to these center wavelike forms are two legs which elevate *Undulation* about two and a half feet.

The shape of the segments and base produce a compound curved area intended to encourage a couple to cradle prior to, during, and after intercourse. The open space forms an area where the users can move about freely and engage in different positions. There is a two-inch undulating space between each upholstered section. This space is consistent as one section’s curve follows the next section’s curve. Functionally, this two-inch space permits hands or feet to slip around a section’s edge to obtain a better grip and provide better leverage. I designed *Undulation* to allow physical activity and love to be expressed together in one piece.

**Comments from the Faculty and the Thesis Committee**

The construction of *Undulation* was a challenge. The piece was technically complex and very large in scale. I spent more than three months in the construction and as I was approaching completion of the piece, I met with the woodworking faculty, and with my committee members.
Their comments on the piece were primarily focused on its aesthetics and on my attempts to communicate sexuality. Individuals from both groups argued the need to resolve several issues. They suggested that there was no visual transition between the top segments and the base. They argued for a stronger relationship among the waves depicted in the base, the horizontal waves of the top segments and wavelike manner in which the upholstery was cut into the top segments. They suggested that the vinyl I used gave a cold appearance. Cowhide might produce a warmer appearance. Finally, they suggested that there were too many undulating forms which weakened one another. Fewer and more selectively used Undulations might improve the power of the piece.

Comments from Couples

From the beginning of this search, I had no intention of testing the furniture myself. My comments about the qualities of the functioning of the furniture would be biased by my knowledge of the design and by my desire for the piece to be successful. Because of the serious problem of finding reliable couples and the value of feedback from the couples, however, I decided to evaluate Undulation myself. Late one night, my girlfriend and I visited the wood shop where a full scale prototype of Undulation awaited. I was concerned with evaluating the function of three areas, the hand and foot holds, the open section, and the area for cradling one another. As we climbed into Undulation, we felt a desire to lie in the curved section and our bodies came together making cuddling quite natural. We found that the open area of the lounge provided ample room for us to move around and interlock in various ways. My girlfriend commented that while in the open area, the upward slope of the curved sections felt comforting
as if being held in a nest. I was able to slide my hands and feet between the segments freely in the various positions we assumed. However, being able to see between the segments to the ground was somewhat unsettling psychologically for us both. My girlfriend found it easy to cuddle in Undulation’s open area.

To summarize, my girlfriend and I said the following: 1) Undulation did encourage cuddling. 2) The open area allowed for them to interlock into a variety of positions. 3) The hand and foot holds provided leverage in different sexual positions but it was also unsettling to be able to see through the leverage space to the ground. Again, this feedback was useful in evaluating the three ideas I wished to explore during this project: the sex act itself (the physical aspects of love-making), love (psychological and emotional aspects of love-making) and control. We found Undulation’s design and construction would enhance the physical act of love-making. We also found the design of this piece promoted pre- and post-coital activity. One of the most important issues was that of control. Undulation was not designed for a specific sexual position but is designed for specific love-making activity, cuddling. This became an important lesson for me as a furniture maker.

In evaluating my first piece, Fervor, the woodworking professors, thesis committee and the first three couples commented, among other things, that I should focus my designing on love-making rather than sexual intercourse. Our own testing of Undulation demonstrated that it worked well for love-making.

Though I completed a full scale “working” prototype of Undulation, I did not complete construction of the piece. The scale and technical aspects of the piece presented demands on time that I had not anticipated. Since this was only the second piece in my search, I decided to
move on to additional pieces and hoped to return to complete Undulation prior to my thesis show. An unexpected lesson I learned during my thesis project was time management.

**PIECE THREE: SUNDRY**

**Design and Aesthetic**

Sundry is defined as an undetermined number. In this piece, I attempted to design furniture that would enhance a couple’s ability to make love in a variety of ways, and to enhance per and post-coital pleasures. The design drawing and illustration of Sundry are on the following page. With the focus of this piece being enhanced variety in love-making, I wanted to design a piece that would be mobile. I settled on a design of small pillows that would be light in weight and easy to stack and move. I chose the oval shapes since ovals provided a long thin surface for reclining and have a shape similar to that of a human body. I also thought that using ovals of different sizes would enhance variety in love-making by allowing a variety of positions. I decided on four different sized ovals: 4 x 6 x 18 inches, 8 x 20 x 40 inches, 12 x 25 x 45 inches and 16 x 30 x 50 inches. The ovals were made of foam blocks that were cut into oval shapes and upholstered in a dark blue velvet. Moving and stacking the individual ovals would allow the couple to place themselves in a variety of positions.

According to my thesis committee and the woodworking faculty, the previous piece, Undulation, suffered aesthetically because it had too many elements and lacked consistency. I attempted to deal with those comments in the current piece by allowing the aesthetics to be guided by utility. The simple and repetitive use of ovals produced a conservative look that I
Furniture Piece Three-Sundry: a., and b
carried through with dark-blue velvet upholstery. That color is “subduing, melancholy and contemplative” according to Birren (1950, 34).

**Comments from the Faculty and the Thesis Committee**

After completing this piece, I met with the woodworking faculty and my thesis committee members. Their comments were primarily focused on the aesthetics of the piece. I was asked if I had considered investigating the fundamental qualities of the foam as a material. What can the foam be besides upholstered blocks? They noted that *Sundry* was quite conservative compared to *Undulation* and *Fervor* and that my next piece might reflect the energy of the first two pieces.

**Comments from Couples**

**Couple Three**

Couple three, Matthew and Ruth were the only couple to use *Sundry*. Matthew said that the sections were easy to move around. He found that the different heights of the ovals allowed for a variety of sexual positions but that the softness of the foam presented a problem once in those positions. The foam was so soft that he and his partner sank into the ovals. This made intercourse difficult. After intercourse, *Sundry* was great for cuddling, which he and Ruth found difficult to do on *Fervor*. Matthew and Ruth liked the height differences between the two large pieces (heights of 12 and 16 inches) but found that the smaller ovals were too small compared to the larger ones - recall that the small ovals were 4 and 8 inches in height.

In summary, comments from all three groups were useful in continuing to evaluate the three ideas I was exploring in the thesis: the physical aspects of love-making, the psychological
aspects of love-making, and the control exercised by the designer. Since Matthew and Ruth had used two pieces, *Fervor* and *Sundry*, they were able to offer some comparative comments. Their comments that variety in love-making could be attained with both *Fervor* and *Sundry* but that *Fervor* was superior in use were helpful. They further commented that *Sundry* was superior to *Fervor* in allowing cuddling following love-making. Their comments that the small ovals were too small, led me to wonder if I could use foam without putting limitations on the function of the piece. I wished to continue the design theme of an open area for love-making that I began with *Undulation*. I also wished to continue the more provocative aesthetics of *Fervor* and *Undulation* since they reflected my own beliefs about sexuality.

**PIECE FOUR: SANCTUARY - CONTAINMENT**

**Design and Aesthetics**

A sanctuary is a place of refuge and protection. Containment is the act of keeping something within limits. Putting those ideas together, I thought of *Sanctuary - Containment* as a sacrifice of freedom for the safety of a protective relationship or environment. In this piece I wanted to design an environment that was as free as possible from love-making limitations due to the intentions of the designer. A design drawing and an illustration can be found on the following page.

In designing *Sanctuary - Containment* I focused on creating an environment that was mobile enough to allow a couple to make love as freely as possible. Inside this environment, I needed an object or objects that could be easily molded into different shapes that would physically support a couple. I began manipulating organically cut pieces of foam by squeezing and tying
them. What resulted was a building block which could be piled one on top of another to form shapes which would physically support a couple while they made love. I made 60 of these small foam pieces. They varied in size from approximately 4 x 4 x 4 inches to about 16 inches cubed. I then cut a four inch thick piece of foam to the dimensions of 8 x 10 feet. I tied it as I had tied the small pieces and filled that large foam piece with the 60 small foam pieces. This created the love-making environment.

Those small foam forms took on characteristics far beyond physical support. Part of the inspiration for Sanctuary - Containment was a question from one of the thesis committee members on the piece, Sundry. I was asked, “Can the foam be manipulated from a flat shape to something more 3-dimensional?” Aesthetically, the free flowing organic cut symbolized freedom. The rope ties symbolized containment. In the initial stages of building this piece, I wanted to speak about containment within a sanctuary. This is a reflection of what love-making, sex and relationships are, or can become. Rope constriction of an organically flowing piece of foam seemed to be an excellent representation of this idea. As I began cutting and wrapping the foam, an evolution occurred. The constricted foam shapes became playful and fun. Each piece looked like a funny character as well as a constricted free flowing form. Sanctuary - Containment became fun.

The result was a visually playful and intriguingly tangible piece that furthered the concept of position freedom and extended into an expression of sexual playfulness. Color added to this feeling. In the previous pieces, I had relied on research into color theory in an attempt to evoke emotional responses. I used red on Fervor in an attempt to elicit excitement. None of the comments from the couples suggested that color performed the roles I had expected. For
Sanctuary - Containment, I attempted to attract attention rather than elicit emotion. Consequently, I used blue, green, yellow, red and purple foam for the small pieces. These colors were eye catching and I thought they added to the playful feeling of the piece.

Comments from the Faculty and the Thesis Committee

After I completed Sanctuary - Containment, I met with the woodworking faculty and my thesis committee to hear their evaluation of this piece. Their comments focused on the aesthetics and my expression of sexuality in the piece. They felt that the aesthetic theme and the expression of sexuality in Sanctuary - Containment worked well together.

Some of their comments were: 1) I might use this theme for the development of future ideas or pieces. 2) This piece might function better if it were upholstered. 3) I might consider using a more sensuous material than rope to tie the individual foam pieces. 4) The density of the foam as a support for two people was also questioned.

Comments from Couples

Only one couple tested Sanctuary - Containment, my girlfriend and I. We tested this piece to evaluate its ability to allow a variety of positions, to see how easily the individual foam pieces could be piled to support us, and to compare this piece to the other one we had tested, Undulation.

As I lay back into Sanctuary - Containment, I immediately had a feeling of psychological comfort because the outer edge of the piece curved upward providing a sense of shelter. My girlfriend had a similar comment saying that the curved sides of the piece made her feel as if she
were in a nest. In that way, it was similar to *Undulation*. As we moved into different positions, we would pile the individual pieces of foam to support us and were able to attain any position we could think of. We found the process of piling the foam pieces fun and quick to do. In most pieces, we found that the small foam pieces provided support, however, the higher we piled the pieces, the more we sank into them.

To summarize, this piece provided a feeling of psychological comfort for love-making. Stacking the small foam pieces to achieve support for various positions was quick and efficient, except when the pieces were formed into large piles. The piece supported a variety of sexual positions and worked well for cuddling after love-making. Returning to the three ideas running through this thesis, this piece facilitated physical love-making. It provided psychological support both in its nest-like structure and in providing a place for cuddling. The design of this piece did not seem to limit or restrict the user’s choices.

Comments from the woodworking faculty and the thesis committee lead me to apply the same aesthetic theme I used in *Sanctuary - Containment* in my last piece, Swing. In it I would provide an open area for love-making and allow the users to decide its functions.

**PIECE FIVE: SWING**

**Design and Aesthetics**

Swing, is an action word. It can mean to move vigorously through a wide arc or circle. It can mean a swaying to and fro. It can refer to turning on an axis. In this piece, I attempted to add motion to a design theme that emerged from the construction of other pieces - the creation of an open area for love-making. In a thesis committee meeting prior to the design of Swing, my
committee members emphasized making a piece of furniture which was unique. I proposed a swing. Symbolically a swing portrays romance, as in a porch swing. A design drawing and illustration are on the following page.

Swing functioned by providing an area large enough for a couple to sit and make love. Swing is expressive. It has a seat that is an organic form. The seat was carved of mahogany for two reasons. It is relatively easy to shape with woodworking tools. Its grain is subtle, which places emphasis on the shape of the swing. Integrated with the organic form of the seat are white ropes which symbolize constraint. As did Sanctuary - Containment, Swing’s aesthetics utilized freedom and restraint as conflicting design elements. I used rock climbing rope, which wrapped around the center of the seat, lead underneath, and up the sides eventually to the ceiling where the piece was anchored.

While the design of Swing was a logical extension of design ideas which flowed from previous pieces, engineering aspects of the piece suffered from a lack of research and time for testing of the piece. There were no couple tests of the piece. Once again, I learned a lesson about time management.

Comments from the Faculty and Thesis Committee

The woodworking faculty and the thesis committee evaluated Swing. Their focuses were the aesthetics and function. They felt that the rope did not function to sufficiently support the wooden seat. They wondered if the area supporting a couple was large enough to hold two people. Since Swing was intended to provide an open area for a couple to interact, that seemed a real problem. The combination of a small seat and the appearance of instability would
Furniture Piece Five-Swing: a., and b.
generate fear in potential users. This would not lend itself to the enhancement of love-making which was my overall guiding design theme. They did feel that the design did continue an aesthetic that I had developed in *Sanctuary - Containment* and that I should pursue this theme in future work.
CHAPTER 3.

EVALUATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

I set out to determine whether I could design and build furniture with functional and aesthetic qualities that would enhance love-making. In order to make this determination, I designed and built five pieces of furniture. As each piece was built, I asked for comments on that piece from individuals of three groups, the faculty members, my thesis committee, and test couples. Each group had a different perspective. I used those comments in the design and construction of the next piece. As I went through this process, I was looking for information about three ideas that are important to me as a person and a furniture maker: the importance of the physical aspects of love-making, the importance of the psychological aspects of love-making, and the importance of control by the builder over the way a piece of furniture will be used. This thesis report is a record of my year’s search.

THE PROCESS: DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, FEEDBACK

I think that the process worked well. Beginning with the first piece, *Fervor*, and continuing on through the fourth piece, *Sanctuary - Containment*, I received valuable comments from the RIT woodworking faculty, my thesis committee and couples who actually used the furniture. I utilized those comments in the design of the next piece. Some examples follow.

After looking at *Fervor*, my thesis committee asked me questions about the importance of physical versus psychological aspects of love-making. After trying *Fervor*, couples wished to have better hand holds and wished to have a place to cuddle before and after sex. In the second
piece, *Undulation*, I designed the top as a large open space which not only allowed cuddling, but also a variety of sexual positions. Further, the surface of the piece was constructed of 12 segments with spaces in between which allowed hand and foot holds. While the first piece emphasized the physical aspects of love-making, the second piece allowed physical and psychological perspectives.

*Undulation* had positive features, but my thesis committee and the woodworking faculty found the piece overly complicated. For the third piece, *Sundry*, I moved away from a complex design, and designed a series of simple forms, ovals of different sizes. With that design, I may have overcorrected in the direction of simplicity, however, and I became more aggressive again in the design of the next piece. And so it went. The comments from all three groups were extremely helpful.

I learned an unexpected lesson in carrying out my thesis project. Time management was more difficult than I ever imagined. While I expected to have design and technical problems that would require large amounts of time, I was not prepared for the people problems associated with couples who were to try the pieces and help me with comments. As a future furniture designer and builder, I will need to remember this lesson when I work with clients.

**DID THE FURNITURE ENHANCE LOVE-MAKING?**

The central idea of my project is that functional and aesthetic aspects of the furniture would enhance love-making. Did it work? Taken as a set, I feel strongly that from a functional view, that the five pieces did succeed in enhancing both physical and psychological aspects of love-making. Individual pieces succeeded more or less.
The best information on this issue comes from the comments from the couples. William (of the second couple) commented on Fervor. He said that on Fervor, he and his partner could achieve any sexual position they wanted and that it “made the positions more exciting.” After using Fervor, William wanted to keep the piece and it took me almost a month to get it back! Matthew and Ruth (couple three) liked the cuddling that Sundry allowed and found they could achieve any physical position they wished. Matthew and Ruth also liked Fervor, finding that it allowed a variety of positions. They now own Fervor. Couple four found that both Undulation and Sanctuary - Containment enhanced the variety of sexual positions they could achieve, especially using the hand holds of Undulation. They found that the open space in those two pieces enhanced cuddling and that Sanctuary - Containment, generated “a feeling of psychological comfort.” I had no couple feedback on one piece, Swing. As pointed out by my thesis committee, its design may have failed to enhance either physical or psychological aspects of love-making.

I spent a lot of time in thinking about and building furniture with aesthetic characteristics that I thought would enhance love-making. I used exotic veneer, woods with beautiful grains and rich colors, complex curved surfaces, and colored fabrics to stimulate the mind and the touch. While the colors, patterns and textures of the furniture pieces may have influenced the couples, none of them commented directly. I cannot answer the question of whether aesthetics mattered to them.
THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LOVE-MAKING

At the beginning of my thesis project, my ideas of love-making were expressed in the first piece I built, Fervor. Aesthetically, I designed that piece to elicit feelings of intensity. I used curved shapes and a light-colored veneer which has a striking curving pattern for the base. In contrast to the light color of the base, I upholstered the top in an intense red velvet fabric. From a functional point of view, I designed the piece to enhance specific positions in love-making. My thesis committee and the woodworking faculty found the piece mechanical. Couples found that while the piece worked well for the sexual positions of love-making, it did not enhance cuddling and other mental aspects of love-making that precede and follow coitus.

As I moved through the three next pieces, I attempted to create an open area in each piece that couples could use for cuddling and various physical positions. From the comments of couples and the other two groups, it became clear to me that furniture which enhanced both physical and psychological aspects of love-making were more successful than furniture built just for specific physical positions. Regarding the sex act itself, feedback from the couples reflected that designing furniture for one specific sexual position did not work. Feedback from the couples showed me that love-making encompasses many things in addition to the physical act. Entering into this thesis, I had a preconceived notion that love-making and sexual intercourse were one and the same. I have since determined that they are distinct, and that furniture designed for love-making needs to reflect this distinction.
CONTROL IN FURNITURE DESIGN

By control I refer to the design characteristics of the piece itself which would facilitate some activities and restrict others as the couples experimented in love-making. The piece that I designed for a small set of positions, Fervor, was used by the second and third couples for having intercourse in a variety of positions - many more than I had in mind as the designer. According to the third and fourth couples, the pieces which were designed to empower a couple by employing a large open area, Undulation, Sundry, and Sanctuary - Containment were more successful than Fervor which did not contain a large open area.

The best the summary statement on this issue, perhaps, comes from William, the first person to use Fervor. As I tried to explain the intent of the piece to him, he said, “Let me figure that out.” This was a lesson for me as a furniture maker. When working with clients, I will need to use care to insure a productive interaction. Perhaps the best strategy is to empower them with some information, give them some design options, and then “let them figure it out.”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Furniture that deals with physical intimacy such as porch swings, love seats, and beds have been created and used through the centuries, however, none of these pieces of furniture deals with enhancing the specific act of sexual union. I was interested in finding examples of furniture that enhanced that act. In the course of my thesis project I found or was given information about three pieces specifically designed to enhance the physical aspects of love-making. Those pieces are illustrated on the following page. They are the Love Table,
The Love Machine

It just could take you where you’ve never gone before.

Three Pieces of Furniture for Making Love: a, b, and c
the Love Machine and an untitled piece designed for a French king in the 1800's for himself and two lady friends. The “Love Table” is advertised as a “device which allows both partners to control angle, depth and speed of thrusting.” The second piece, “the Love Machine,” is advertised with the following, “a trip for two beyond the parameters of mundane expression; where the both of you are free to explore, to experiment, and to experience unbounded possibilities.”

What is Next?

Instead of proposing specific designs at this point, my plans for the future are twofold. First, I wish to study the sexual practices of other culture’s both historical and current, looking for lessons that will assist me in developing more design ideas. While immersed in my thesis project, I did some reading about erotica and its history in various world cultures. I found many societies with a rich history but none as well documented as in India. The Indians accept sexuality as a part of everyday life. “In Hinduism, sex is almost sacramental - essential to life and therefore worthy of serious study” (Burton 1987, 184). “The total absence of any sense of sexual guilt or sin is perhaps the most important message the modern reader from the West can receive from the Kama Sutra.” I plan to explore this aspect of Indian culture and look especially at the furniture or settings they use for love-making. I plan to combine that material with the lessons I learned during my thesis project to develop design ideas for this specialized area of furniture making.

Second, and more specifically, I intend to return to the design idea of my fifth piece, Swing. The design and construction of Swing were appropriately criticized by my thesis committee and
the woodworking faculty. The area of the seat was too small for it to accomplish its stated
design function, “providing as area large enough for a couple to sit and make love.” The method
of securing Swing, thin climbing ropes, did not seem to provide sufficient physical support for its
purpose and that would translate into a lack of psychological relaxation when using the
furniture. The design possibilities of a swing are attractive for two reasons. First, while in all
the other pieces I built, motion during love-making was supplied by the persons involved. A
swing can be made to move but then it can continue to move and thus supply energy to the
couple. Motion may add a new dimension to physical love-making, presenting interesting
design challenges. Also, I am attracted to a swing because in our culture the swing is associated
with romance. The swing would seem an ideal design concept on which to work on the most
important lesson I learned during my thesis project, combining enhancement of the physical and
psychological aspects of love-making.
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