Duality in furniture design

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DUALITY IN FURNITURE DESIGN

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Introduction

Throughout history, furniture has been built to fulfill different needs. While most pieces were made to serve in a single capacity some were constructed with several functions in mind. Examples of this type of furniture include expandable tables, fold-out beds, gaming tables, and library stools/chairs. I decided that these multi-functional pieces would make an interesting point of departure for a group of contemporary work. I began experimenting with ideas for furniture that could assume different roles. From these roles arose a sense of duality in a piece's design. This formed the basis for my thesis work which combines function and aesthetics in a unique and vibrant style.

Designing and building contemporary, multi-functional furniture would have been one way to approach this study. However, I chose to look at the subject in a different manner. Furniture assumes roles other than merely functional ones. Its aesthetics are akin to those of sculpture and other art forms; while its ultimate appearance and use is often determined by its placement within an interior composition. In some ways fine furniture can be considered art work, for it is designed and crafted with aesthetics in mind. Yet furniture has more than a purely aesthetic function, therefore, it cannot be as free in its form as pure sculpture. While I do not intend to answer the art versus craft argument, I will offer these words from Arthur Crawford N. S. I. D. from the forward to The Art of Woodworking by Laszlo Katz.

"Furniture uniquely combines, and even transcends the basic art forms which, by themselves, are greatly appreciated and highly prized; i.e., sculpture, painting, fabrics, ceramics, the decorative arts and even, to a degree, music and literature."  

The duality I sought to explore was that between form and function or the aesthetic and the practical. In most furniture design, form is subordinate to, or at least somewhat dictated by function. For example a dining table surface must be predominantly flat if one wishes to serve dinner on it. In my work I attempted to create forms which are freed from the dictates of function while still remaining useful pieces of furniture.

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The other issue I wished to address was the context within which my pieces exist in any given room. Most pieces of furniture have little control over the environment within which they are placed and, as a result, have little control over their final appearance. As a furniture designer, I like to have some input about the the way my work is viewed. Therefore, I sought to give each of my pieces a built-in environment in which to exist inside a larger setting. I see this as a duality wherein a piece creates its own context while still acting as an element of a larger composition.

This paper is intended as a written supplement to my thesis work. Its purpose is twofold. First it will provide what I see as historical and contemporary precedents for my work. Second it will record the thoughts and conclusions I have come to having completed the four pieces which comprise my thesis.

**Historical Perspective**

While the craft movement of today has its roots in the middle ages, there is considerable evidence that civilizations were creating fine furniture thousands of years earlier. Descriptions are left to us from the writings of those times. At about 900 B.C. Homer wrote in the Odessey: "They put a chair for Penelope to sit by the fire. Wrought with ivory and silver, the craftsman Ikmalios made it long ago and fitted it with a foot stool for the feet." In the Bible there is a passage describing the furniture of the time. In II Chronicles 17 and 18 there is a description of the throne built for King Solomon. "Moreover the King made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure gold. And there were six steps to the throne with a footstool of gold which were fastened to the throne, with stays on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing by the stays." Egyptian hieroglyphics dating back to the twentieth century B.C. depict rather sophisticated furniture designs and the craftsmen who made them. These early records demonstrate that even at the beginning of our recorded history man was creating furniture that not only was functional but was aesthetic as well.²

The relevance of this early furniture to this thesis is that even in the earliest part of history, man incorporated elements of the

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² Laszlo Katz, p. 13.
fine arts into his furniture. One has only to look at the carved legs of an early Egyptian chair (circa 2000 B.C.) to see how craftsmen interpreted sculptural forms in their work. Almost all known examples of early Egyptian chairs had animal forms for legs, as did many of their tables and beds (Plate I). Other civilizations existing at roughly the same time, utilized shapes and forms that were remarkably similar even though a different animal may have been the model. While the everyday Egyptian furniture may not have been all that elaborately crafted, any piece made for the royalty had special care lavished upon it and is, therefore, a prime example of the Egyptian woodworkers art. The detailing, materials, workmanship, and symbolism go far beyond that called for in a functional piece and take the furniture into the realm of artwork.

Similarly, the Greeks (800-150 B.C.) developed a highly sophisticated society rich in the arts and culture. One of their most notable and lasting furniture designs was the Klismos chair which appeared in the fifth century B.C. (Plate II). The grace and elegance of the Klismos chair has become something of a standard against which other chairs are measured. Its elegant, curvilinear lines and delicate sections are nothing if not sculptural qualities. The Romans (500 B.C.-300A.D.) derived their furniture from Greek influence and modified it to suit their more elaborate tastes. Marble, silver, gold, and bronze were among the materials used in high-style Roman furniture. Other characteristics include heavy turned legs, bone carvings and glass inlay. With the fall of the Roman Empire the art of furniture making dwindled and lay fallow for hundreds of years.

The furniture of the Middle Ages was almost entirely Gothic in style, so named during the Renaissance to mark it as old-fashioned and uncivilized. It does however have a certain dignity to it and has lasted for hundreds of years in the ecclesiastic venues where it began. The Gothic Style originated in France about the twelfth century and spread throughout Europe. It started with the construction of the great cathedrals and carried over into the furniture built to fill them. Almost all furniture from this era was built for religious or royal use. Its one major sculptural element is the linenfold, a relief carving style used to make wooden panels look like the linen tapestries that shrouded the walls in the large-scaled buildings of the era.

4 Laszlo Katz, p. 35.
With the coming of the Italian Renaissance in the early 1400's, the arts flourished. Once again woodworkers were highly respected and in great demand. Woodcraft itself was elevated to the status of a fine art and perpetuated through the next several centuries. Renaissance furniture is characterized by ornate carvings in wood and plaster of flowers, vines, shells, female busts and other forms. Scaled down architectural features were also popular as were inlay and intricate veneer work. The creative fever in Italy soon spread throughout Europe and led to many different regional styles. Exotic woods became available as new trade routes opened adding a new dimension to the craft.

The Renaissance led into the Baroque era. In 1660, the French crowned Louis XIV as their monarch and cabinetmaking entered a period of renown. Furniture became a showcase for the craftsman's talents, and ornamentation was pushed to its limits. Heavy three-dimensional carving, ornate veneering with exotic woods and materials, as well as gilding and silvering were typical techniques to the day. The carvings became increasingly ornate and gilded moldings practically dripped from the edges and sides of the cabinetry. As tastes changed, furniture design evolved into what is called Regence style. During this evolution furniture grew lighter, and more refined. After Louis XV took power the pursuit of grandeur showed no restraint. The protective metal work applied to edges and corners soon grew as ornate foliage over the surfaces of finely laid veneer. This became the Rococo style, noted for its asymmetric ornamentation.

In England cabinetmakers were somewhat removed from the influences of mainland Europe and styles developed that were distinctly English. The most noteworthy era in English furniture history is the Georgian era. Lasting from 1740 until 1806 this period had significant influence on the American cabinetmakers of the day. Of the craftsmen working at that time the most significant was Thomas Chippendale. Chippendale came from a long line of cabinetmakers and became a skilled workman at a young age. In 1754 he published a book of his designs entitled The Gentlemen and Cabinetmaker's Director. This book and similar ones by the other notable designers of the era brought Chippendale's designs across the ocean to America where American craftsmen modified it to suit their

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5 Laszlo Katz, p. 66.
own aesthetics. Chippendale's furniture is characterized by his strong lines, excellent proportions and detailed carving (Plate III). While not quite as ornate as the French Regence furniture, Chippendale's work reaches far beyond the realm of function.

Although this discussion does not include all the individual craftsmen or noteworthy historical periods it does provide an overview of the cabinetmaker's art and a feel for the legacy left to the craftsmen of today. Throughout history fine wooden furniture has been elevated beyond function to the realm of art. While different styles of fine furniture are distinguished by specific characteristics they all have a common intangible element that allows them to transcend their functional aspects. From this regard they might all be considered works of art. And as art forms they share their roots with other fine art forms such as painting and sculpture. Today I, as a creator of fine furniture, continue this tradition of treating furniture design and construction as an art form along with the my contemporaries in the field.

Contemporary Issues

Within the context of the current crafts revival, which began thirty to forty years ago, contemporary woodworking is coming of age. No longer are immaculate craftsmanship and beautiful grain patterns the primary criteria against which furniture is judged. Among artists in the field today there is a growing sensitivity to design and conceptual issues. Diverse and unexpected materials are becoming more widely used. Color has become a major element in many furniture makers' aesthetic vocabulary. Technical skill is not being ignored; it is simply no longer a main focal point but a means to the ultimate manifestation of a craftsman's idea. According to a letter to the editor of Fine Woodworking magazine from Gail Smith in 1983:

"Woodworking will not come of age until woodworkers stop thinking of technique and wood as ends in themselves, and start producing pieces of aesthetic value and conceptual statement."6

Plate III
In 1988, woodworking has almost reached this point, though not without growing pains. In some ways woodworkers are still searching for their place within the art community much the same way as a maturing young adult looks for his or her place within the world.

In this search for an identity, there have arisen several different classes of furniture. Arthur Carpenter defines two in an article in *Fine Woodworking* magazine: artiture and furniture.

"My daughter Victoria calls this work "artiture," artifacts that have the traditional form of furniture, but are not of any practical use.... But to cut a chair in half, paint it striped, and hang it on the wall draws much more attention, brings ten times the money and is much easier than making a chair that works, and that sings with the care of its maker."7

A third category might also prove useful: art furniture. Almost any contemporary piece can be defined within these three categories: artiture for those non-functional pieces that speak about furniture without actually performing the role; furniture for those pieces made to serve a physical need; and art furniture as a grey area for those pieces that are functional yet go beyond the issues that furniture normally addresses. These classifications are not meant to judge pieces as to their value but to ease discussion of their relative merits and problems. Certainly a well-made, well-designed chair can transcend its function to speak to one's emotions, yet it is still a piece of furniture. Likewise a piece with no physical use is quite functional if it speaks to one's aesthetic appreciation.

These three categories span the boundary between the fine and applied (decorative)arts with artiture on the fine art side, furniture on the applied art side and art furniture somewhere in between. Here is where the art versus craft argument begins. For some people the label of fine art carries a mark of greater honor and prestige and commands a higher price than does a label of applied art (or craft). For that reason there is a push for furniture makers to have their work declared fine art. For example Pritam and Eames, a fine furniture gallery on Long Island, usually advertises its shows as "The Furniture Art of...". If not for the economic and prestige factors

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the whole debate would probably be a moot point. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a definitive answer to this discussion it is important to deal with it, for it is the duality between fine art and furniture making that is at the heart of my work.

There is a vast gulf between artiture and furniture. Consider a chair made as furniture and one made as artiture. The two may have similar forms, yet they were made for very different reasons. The furniture maker builds a chair to answer a physical need for a seating device that is comfortable and perhaps beautiful. The artist builds a chair to make a statement. Both work in a similar manner, exploring materials, proportions, and form; but the solutions they are looking for are different. The craftsman must consider the functional aspects of his chair and create accordingly. His end result is a chair existing for its own usefulness and beauty (Plate IV). The artist must consider the visual statement he is trying to make and find a way to convey it. His end result is a piece that makes his statement, even if it is ugly and totally impractical as a seating device (Plates V & VI). There can be a sense of duality here in both instances. The functional chair can be made from very sculptural elements such as cabriole legs or carved forms and the sculptured chair can have heavy furniture overtones. However it is in art furniture that duality is most prevalent.

Art furniture falls somewhere in between the two extremes. It is probably the most difficult of the three to define and to build. To fit this category a piece needs to function as a piece of furniture and also to make a statement beyond function and pleasing design. Notable among the artists making art furniture is Wendell Castle. As a fine arts major in graduate school he discovered that, with a slight modification, he could sit on one of his sculptures. This led to a career as a furnituremaker.8 Now, after more than thirty years, he is attempting to gain acceptance back within the fine art world through his furniture. His original forte' was furniture sculpted from stack laminated blocks of wood. These pieces ignored all aspects of traditional furniture design and instead dealt with shapes from such things as trees flowers and shells. While quite functional, the pieces also dealt with form and volume and their interrelation with furniture design. In the late 1970's, however,

Castle moved away from stack laminated work into pieces with a more traditional feel. He experimented with trumpe l’oiel carving, building traditional furniture with objects such as coats and books carved realistically in place.

These trumpe l’oiel pieces were accepted in the fine arts world, for the carved embellishments prevented use. They rightfully can be classified as arture, being more sculpture than functional furniture. However, as sculpture, they are little more than clever jokes about furniture. Castle then went on to do a series of pieces based on the work of Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann, one of the leading French cabinetmakers in the 1920’s and 1930’s (Plate VII). Castle’s work gradually evolved from this extreme Art Deco influence into more of a Post-Modern commentary on the relationship between architecture and furniture design. All the while Castle pushed craftsmanship to the limits of perfection. This period in his work culminated in a group of thirteen tall clocks which he completed in 1985 (Plates VIII & IX).

The clocks began as an effort to break away from the "furnituremaker" label that Castle was earning with his Art Deco inspired work. Done in collaboration with gallery owner Alexander Millikan, the group was, as Millikan put it, an attempt to deal with the issue of art. While the clocks are not arture they are art furniture in its truest form and as such, have transcended being simply functional objects. As sculpture the clocks would seem somewhat divergent and cliched. However, they are not pure sculpture. They are clocks and as clocks they are quite splendid. They show impeccable craftsmanship, fine materials and a wealth of creative design. They function admirably as clocks, yet go beyond into a world of their own, filled with whimsy and imagination. Their impeccable craftsmanship causes one to stop and reflect upon the ideas and talent that brought these pieces into being and the beauty of a item so well made. This is, to me, what making art furniture is all about. Castles clock's are fit to join a long line of other such furniture, including Thomas Chippendale's chairs, French Court furniture and the actual work of Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann, all of which have pushed beyond the realm of the functional.

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Since the clock show, Wendell Castle's work has explored a different path. He has done less exacting, more whimsical pieces that have included a series of warped-top hall tables and a number of triangular cabinets with painted bases. His use of paint and form is becoming much looser and more painterly. While I do not appreciate this work as much as I did the clocks, Castle's reasons to move on are apparent. Despite my reservations about his work, I still see Wendell Castle as one of the leaders in art furniture and can admire his efforts to further the craft.

Another artist whom I feel is successful in creating art furniture is Judy Kensley McKie. Though she has a fine art background from the Rhode Island School of Design, she is a self-taught woodworker and has been a professional craftsperson for almost twenty years. Her original work was primarily basic furniture and plywood cabinetry. However, gradually she began to produce pieces that reflected her fine art training and she has now developed her own style of art furniture (Plate X). Animal imagery is at the center of her personal style. Her zoologically inspired forms have a primitive quality about them, and yet they are sophisticated in their simplicity. Like sculpture, they communicate to people on different levels and in differing ways.

"Her designs remind some people of pre-Columbian art, others of Egyptian work. Animal imagery has always had a powerful, totemic impact on furnituremakers. One observer calls her work a generalized "equatorial art," another thinks she touches things that might have haunted a Shaker's subconscious. The designs are, despite reminding everyone of something else, uniquely her own. Her creatures, instead of representing society's domination over nature, are a reaching out to nature, a participation in a wild riot of life."11

McKie's furniture, unlike Castle's clocks is more recognizable as sculpture. As is evident above, there is a great deal of depth in her imagery and form. Conversely Castle's clocks are more complete in a functional way in that McKie's putting a glass top on a base is a rather simplistic manner of creating a table. However, McKie's sculptural bases are so strong visually that anything more

that a glass top might seem extraneous. This leads to the question: Why does it have to be furniture? This is an important question and one that had to be dealt with as I worked on various parts of my thesis.

There are many other contemporary artists working in the field and pushing the limits of woodworking and furniture design. Some, like Sam Maloof, Art Carpenter and James Krenov have chosen to work within the realm of functional furniture; while others, like Castle and McKie have chosen to push beyond traditional parameters. The craft is maturing and placing more sophisticated demands on its practitioners. Fine craftsmanship is no longer just an end in itself but is used as a means to execute a piece's design. Design integrity and conceptual clarity have become key words in the discussion of contemporary work. There is a growing ambiguity between fine and applied art. The rise of artiture has allowed us to contemplate the role of furniture in society while the coming of art furniture with its associated duality has opened a new avenue for creativity.

Discussion of Thesis Work

When I first started thinking about duality in furniture design I envisioned a series of pieces that had more than one function. I had designed a table that hinged up to become a couch and was excited about the possibilities for other work. The more I sketched, however, the further I digressed from these multifunctional pieces. I wanted to do something different, something daring. I wanted to go out on a limb. I submitted my thesis proposal with the wording as generalized as possible to allow for modifying direction if necessary. I had started to get excited about a series of pieces that assumed different roles depending on their context within a home when I came across a photo in *Home and Garden* magazine that set my final direction (Plate XI).

The photo was that of an interior of a country home decorated in an eclectic manner. Hanging on the wall, almost out of sight, was an old broom hung in front of a stretched canvas surface. I found this method of displaying a three-dimensional item in front of a specially made backdrop intriguing. Why not build a cabinet in a similar manner? The piece could incorporate an integral backdrop which would form a background for the cabinetry. After many
sketches and discussions I ultimately focused upon the idea of creating warped canvas surfaces as a background for fine woodworking. The warped surfaces would serve as visual elements as well. Thus, the entire piece would function as a composition while the woodwork would have a practical function within that composition. Instead of building a piece of furniture composed of sculptural elements, I would use functional components as elements within a sculptural composition.

With this concept in mind I proceeded to and design and build the first piece, REFRACTION (Plate XII). It was conceived as a canvas sail through which a long shelf and two cabinets magically appear. Technically, the piece was difficult to build, for I had to develop my techniques in progress. The framework for the sail had to be reinforced and contoured so that the canvas could be stretched without distorting the whole structure yet still retain the shape I desired. Fortunately the techniques I developed during the construction of this initial piece were utilized throughout the production of the entire body of work. As I was building this piece I searched for the words to articulate the concept behind my work. Why was I using canvas? Why was the sail there at all, since it had nothing to do with the functional aspects of the cabinets? If the whole unit is a composition, why are the cabinets such a large part of it?

Answers to these questions were difficult to find. I was working with concepts totally unique from my previous work and was frustrated with my inability to articulate my new directions. I felt the concept was strong but could not adequate words to defend it. Slowly, as the piece progressed, I began to put my thoughts in order. I was using canvas because it was an expedient medium. Compound curves are not easily attainable in many other materials. The warped surface was an integral part of the piece and had to be there. Its function was to provide a context for the cabinets to exist within. It also played a part in the piece's total composition; removing it would change the piece entirely. Similarly, the cabinets are scaled so as to remain functional and to balance the composition.

As my direction became clearer, the weaknesses of REFRACTION became more apparent. The canvas sail needed more dimension; while it was a warped surface, it tended to flatten visually as one moved back from the piece. It also appeared as too separate an element from the cabinetry. The original intent had
been to make the forms very distinct and independent, the hardedged, geometric cabinets contrasting with the softer, more organic sail. However this separateness did not read well within the composition. The three elements worked against each other instead of complimenting their differences. SHELTERED, the low walnut table (Plate XIII) was built as an attempt to address these concerns.

At the time SHELTERED was designed, I felt compelled to give the canvas structure a function other than a compositional one. Therefore the sail took the role of base for the wooden table top. This was an attempt to justify the canvas' existence from a practical point of view as well as to relate the fabric and the wooden forms more closely. To strengthen this relationship, the shape of the table top echoed that of the base. The canvas was designed to appear as if it had twisted up and around the table surface, while the table surface drooped down at one end to follow the canvas as it curves to the floor. In playing with various models of shaped canvas forms, I found that those that were twisted were the most three-dimensional and caused the greatest visual excitement.

In spite of the new ideas, SHELTERED was still not the piece I had hoped for. It had several weaknesses that restricted its success. The canvas form should have varied more in thickness along its length and width. This kind of variation would have given the piece much more drama and vitality. Similarly the canvas should have had a more exaggerated shape where it curved around the end of the table. As it existed, the rear view was not particularly attractive. And, finally, the two forms again felt too separate. The wooden table top did exist within the space delineated by the canvas but the manner with which they are connected did not bring them together well enough.

TWIST, (Plate XIV) was next developed in an effort to capitalize on the strengths and weaknesses of the first two pieces. In designing TWIST, I took the best shaped section of SHELTERED'S canvas structure and elaborated on it. I varied its thickness from one end to the other and tilted it off the floor to add more gesture. To achieve greater interdependence between the wooden and canvas elements I pierced the canvas with the wood and brought all the members to the floor to provide support. The functional part of this piece was minimal. The walnut member pierces through the canvas then flattens out to a table surface of about fifty square inches. TWIST'S weakest area was at the junction where the wood and the
canvas join. The shaping at that point did not relate very well to the other components and the actual method of joining (screws covered by wooden plugs) took away from the rest of the piece. A better fastening solution would have improved the piece considerably.

REFLECTION (Plate XV) was the final piece done for this thesis. It solidified many of the ideas I developed in doing the previous three pieces. One of these ideas was to create a shaped canvas that could stand on its own as a form, then to add the related wooden elements to complete the composition. TWIST was intended to do this but fell short in the inter-relation of its elements. REFLECTION, however, accomplished this objective and consequently was the strongest of the four pieces. The form was by far the most complex of the four, tapering and twisting in several directions at once. Even the armature the canvas is stretched over was twisted and tapered to help the canvas achieve its final shape. The wrinkles across the canvas surface added justification to its use. In the other pieces different media could have substituted for the canvas to much the same effect, however, in REFLECTION canvas was the ideal material to obtain the desired result. REFLECTION’S woodwork was finely detailed and related well to the canvas form without disrupting it. Consequently, the canvas form provided a good environment for the woodwork without overwhelming it.

Surface Embellishment

One of the most difficult things involved in this thesis was the surface treatment of the canvas structures. Since canvas is a traditional artist’s material there is a lot of preconception about how it should be viewed. While I did not realize it at first; if I was going to paint on the canvas surfaces, my pieces were also going to be judged as paintings. This was a frightening thought to one who had never painted before. I put off painting REFRACTION until the last possible minute for just this reason. However, after I began to get a feel for manipulating the colors and the brushes the painting began to become enjoyable.

REFRACTION was the first piece I painted and also the last one. The first application was a light blue background streaked with very dark blue brush strokes. This was an attempt to create a chaotic field which the cabinets and shelf had burst through. Looking back, I think this random, flat painting was the reason the canvas appeared to relate so poorly to the woodwork in the first
place. I repainted the piece just prior to the thesis exhibition and in doing so, improved the piece remarkably. The final painting was much more subtle. A greenish blue gradated from dark around the cabinets to light around the edges. Partial brush strokes remained. This second painting added a lot of depth to the piece and solved many of the problems mentioned previously.

The painting on SHELTERED was intended to be an integral part of the canvas form rather than a surface embellishment. Conceptually, the piece was a shell revealing its precious interior to the world. The dark pinkish-purple outside has a coarse, textured appearance. The texture on the outside was created by adding wood dust to the gesso before coating the canvas. The rose pink inside was pristine and smooth. This seemed a perfect setting for an elegant walnut table surface. The contrasted interior/exterior worked well though other solutions to the division between the outside and the inside were possible.

TWIST's painting represented another experiment with color and paint application. The whole piece was stipled with a gradation of color ranging from red-orange to yellow-orange. The results were quite effective and relatively easy to obtain. The stipling left a slight texture on the canvas. SHELTERED and TWIST looked the least like canvas of the four pieces. The painting on them was the least painterly, and the seam treatment dissipated visual seams almost entirely. I think the paint on both of these pieces works well, though I am partial to the painting on REFRACTION where the form was enhanced through depth and subtlety of color.

The painting on REFLECTION was very subtle. Most of the color in the piece was incorporated into the turquoise accent strips and the turquoise feet. I did add darker grey to the shadow areas between the wrinkles, therefore, making them more pronounced. I like the way the paint interacted in this piece, enhancing the form without making a strong, independent statement. Such an independent statement would have diminished the whole piece.

The painting I did on these pieces was fun. While I do not think any of the pieces are painted as well as they might be, I do think that they are reasonably successful from that viewpoint. Exploring aspects of color theory and paint manipulation made the experiences very worthwhile, even if it was frustrating at times.
Conclusions

Reflecting upon my thesis experience and final works, I can see many things I would like to change and directions I would like to have explored. A year ago this would have disappointed me. Today, however, I would be disappointed if there was nothing I wanted to change. When I started my studies at RIT, I saw the thesis as the culminating experience of graduate school, an opportunity to bring together all that I had learned in a cohesive body of work. While I still view the thesis as a culmination of my graduate studies I also view it as a new beginning rather than a termination.

Sometime during the early months of my thesis work I came to the conclusion that my thesis was an opportunity to explore new horizons and set new standards. It was a chance to further my growth as a woodworker and expand my concepts of the craft. With the four pieces I created as the body of my thesis work I answered my thesis proposal and accomplished the two goals I set out to achieve. Those goals were to: 1.) research and create furniture that performs different roles and 2.) create furniture that provides its own context within a larger environment. While I feel I completed my thesis, I do not view any one of the four pieces as entirely successful in its own right. However, I do see all of them as parts of a successful exploration. From the shortcomings in the various pieces I have come to learn that failure is as important to learning as success.

Of the four pieces, the ones I regard as most successful are REFLECTION and REFRACTION. These two go the furthest toward creating their own context or environment and are the most exciting forms. The other two works, SHELTERED and TWIST seem to be almost studies by comparison. The duality in all the pieces is prevalent. With the exception of TWIST they all function well as furniture as well as being sculptural objects. TWIST comes closest to being a pure sculptural piece with the small table surface faintly suggesting a furniture context. All of the pieces could be considered art furniture with TWIST possibly being classified as artiture. Within this context, the duality in each piece becomes apparent. Each is functional in its own way while the materials and forms imply a fine art approach. While there is still room for further exploration these pieces provide an excellent starting point.
What I will take with me from this body of work is the concept behind it and the method of work that I used to create it. The idea of using functional furniture as an element within a larger composition still fascinates me. I have several more ideas that I would like to develop into actual designs. While canvas and paint may be part of my working vocabulary for a while, I do not see them as remaining the focal point in my work. I am also excited about the methods I used to design my thesis pieces. Sketching compound curved surfaces proved to be inappropriate. Instead, I used loosely scaled models to aid in visualizing ideas. This process allowed me to be much freer in expressing my ideas. I have always been a somewhat conservative designer and this process has helped me broaden my ideas of good design. I intend to continue using this technique in conjunction with my sketch book for designing future pieces. In all, I am pleased with my thesis. I learned a lot doing it and grew tremendously as a craftsman, designer and artist.
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