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innovation



A happy medium

Furniture needn't cost the earth to draw admiring gasps from family and friends

>> Words Marg Hearn >> Photography Chris Groenhout

Budget limitations can sometimes get in the way of our ability to choose well-designed good-looking furniture. It was this observation that prompted furniture and interior designer Grazia Materia to take advantage of what she perceived to be a gap in the market.

She says new homeowners are very house-proud and interested in design yet typically mortgaged to the hilt, leaving little disposable income to buy the furnishings they desire.

At one end of the spectrum, Grazia explains, are the expensive designer names; at the other extreme, poorly made disposable furniture with a limited lifespan.

In launching her furniture design and production company under the label Temperature Design last June, Grazia felt the Australian market had an opportunity for middle-ground furniture items.

"I went out to find something more price-driven that looked expensive, but wasn't," she says.

Less than a year on, 31-year-old Grazia has designed and produced a comprehensive range of furniture, and has more concepts in the wings. Influencing her style, which she describes as simple and classic, is an



Pleasing the customer

Grazia Materia has learnt to trust her design judgment (top, far left)

High light

A co-ordinated timber-base tripod lamp with linen shade (top left)

All-round success

This four-seater Blade dining table is noted for its clean lines (top)

Tailor-made

American oak is Grazia's preferred timber choice (above)

appreciation for Scandinavian design, long admired for its attention to detail, finish and good proportions with sturdy construction.

Grazia's designs often feature solid timber in combination with veneer.

American oak is the timber of choice for all her designs because it "looks great in its natural form, but it also looks great stained", she says.

Defying the mentality that all furniture has to match, another area of focus is the idea of mixing timber colours together.

For example, charcoal-stained bedside tables could work in the same room as a natural-timber chair, suggests Grazia, who studied interior design at RMIT University.

An appreciation for quality contemporary furniture and exemplary craftsmanship was honed during her role as interior designer at Gordon Mather Furniture, from 1998 until last year.

Her four-seater round Blade dining table features the use of solid legs, as a point of difference from the commonly applied pedestal base.

Traditional furniture-making methods such as express joints on the solid timber, have been used to ensure the furniture is manufactured using quality joinery techniques, but also to display a hand-crafted look.

The Sinclair timber dining chair has been particularly well received. A practical feature is the ability to fully remove the seat to make it easier to re-cover to change the look of a room.

Another versatile piece is the Swivel Drum. Its round stool makes a handy extra seat for the dinner table, a side table or an ottoman. It has a swivel mechanism, and it comes in a leather or vinyl covering.

Prices for occasional tables start from \$350, chairs from \$500 and dining tables from \$1000. Her work is available from Milk Furniture, in St Kilda, or visit www.temperaturedesign.com.au for more information.