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"For the next 17 months, I'll be on call 24 hours a day."



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Photographs: Randal Ford (Crawford)

# FURNITURE FOR KEEPS

Eight design stars, no matched suites. That's the idea behind Bernhardt's striking Global Edition.

By Linda Tischler



**REMY LOUNGE CHAIR  
JEFFREY BERNETT**

New York City-based Bennett, founder of the design consultancy CDS, said he wanted his lounge chair, suspended over a stainless-steel swivel base, to "sit well and be a graceful and elegant seating solution for both commercial and residential settings." \$1,400

WHEN JERRY HELLING SEES retailers offering a five-piece matched living room "suite" of furniture, he feels a little depressed. "As they say down here in Carolina, it jes' ain't right," he says, affecting a disheartened Southern drawl. "You shouldn't go in and buy a whole roomful of furniture."

That might seem an odd thing for a furniture maker to say. But Helling, creative director of Bernhardt Design, the cutting-edge, design-driven division of the venerable North Carolina firm, loves furniture too much to see it purchased like a Happy Meal. "These mega-lifestyle collections don't represent true, long-lasting design," he says. "They're paint-by-number solutions."

Helling would like to see Americans approach the task more like Europeans do: shopping carefully for individual pieces, assembling them in a way that reflects their style, and keeping them for a good long time. And he's going to help us. At the 2007 International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York, Bernhardt is set to debut the Global Edition, a line of furniture expressly created to stand the test of time.



**ARO STOOL | LIEVORE ALTHERR MOLINA**

The Barcelona team of Alberto Lievore, Jeanette Altherr, and Manel Molina wanted to create a stool that appeared spatially weightless—just three loops and two legs. The rotating seat, in walnut, fabric, or leather, is meant to be discreet, "just like the barman who listens to everything and says nothing." \$700

**WHISPER CHAIR | CULDESAC**

Pepe Garcia, Alberto Martinez, and Lucia del Portillo, of Spain's CuldeSac, say their design is visually "all connected. If you drew this chair on a piece of paper, your pen would never leave the page." Carved from solid maple. Available in fabric (\$700) or leather (\$800).




The collection features 11 pieces of furniture, and a complementary line of fabrics, from eight distinguished international designers, including Yves Béhar, Shin Azumi, PearsonLloyd, Arik Levy, CuldeSac, Jeffrey Bennett, Christian Biecher, and Lievore Altherr Molina. While presented as a unified body of work, each piece is meant to be used individually and in a wide range of environments. (Prices range from \$250 for PearsonLloyd's stacking chair to \$4,000 for Levy's leather sofa; they'll be available to order in late May.)

The line is the result of a quest Helling and his team undertook in early 2006, when they compiled a list of 50 designers or design firms whose work they admired. They invited eight of the stars to create a single piece that would be "best of show" in its category. The catch: None of the designers knew the identities of their counterparts. "If each piece was to be truly universal, we didn't want them to be influenced by each other in any way," Helling says.

That created a tantalizing sense of mystery, says Luke Pearson of London's PearsonLloyd. "But in a way, we didn't want to know the others. It shouldn't make any difference to what we do." Béhar, who designed the Fly bench, found the exercise "a little bit like a wine

tasting: I knew there were going to be some grand cru there, and I just wanted to add the best I could produce."

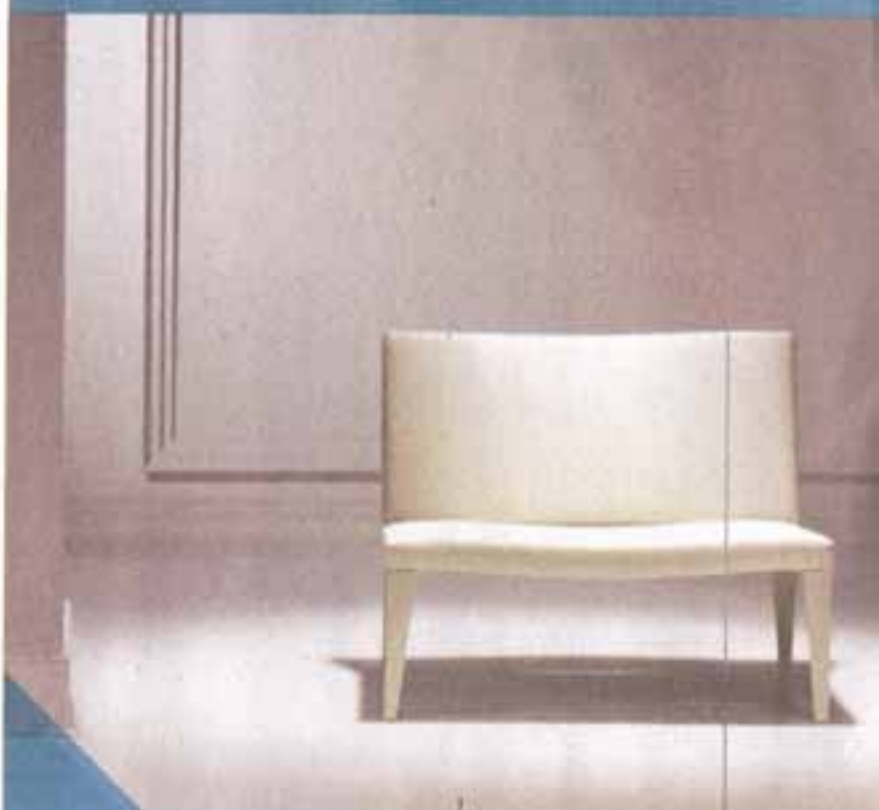
What unites the line is its sense of timeless simplicity (a result that can be maddeningly difficult to achieve; one piece, CuldeSac's wooden chair, required 14 iterations over 20 months to attain the desired appearance of effortlessness). Helling hopes buyers will grow so fond of their purchases that they'll hang on to them, handing them down to their children as cherished heirlooms. That would satisfy his desire to create not only a lasting design legacy but an environmentally responsible one as well. In the furniture trade, "we're still too focused on recyclability and cradle-to-cradle," he says. "We should spend our effort creating things that will last and that we will want to keep forever." 

**COAST STACKING CHAIR | PEARSONLLOYD**

The London team of Tom Lloyd and Luke Pearson set out to create an "honest piece of design that combined a high-tech seating dish with high comfort." The result: technical complexity merged with visual simplicity. Available in red, orange, black, and white. \$250

**FLY BENCH | YVES BÉHAR**

Béhar, founder of the San Francisco studio fuseproject, created the sculpturally expressive Fly bench out of two triangular stainless-steel shapes combined at their apex for structural integrity. "It's about tension, a walnut plank lifted effortlessly in mid-air." \$1,500

**ONDA CHAIR | CHRISTIAN BIECHER**

French architect Biecher wanted to design something simple that responded to the weight of the body in it. He used thin legs, so the chair would appear to float, and shaped them like triangles "because they are sharp shapes, very elegant." \$1,000