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Special to Lisa Hutchurson, D&C

This October, the major players in the furniture industry headed south to High Point, North Carolina for the annual International Home Furnishings Show. From October 20th to 26th, thousands of retailers and manufacturers from all over the world gathered in the large exhibition halls to see what's new, what's not, and to pick up on the latest trends that will influence home decor.

The Furnishings Show is very important for retailers as they strive to make the right decisions about what will capture the imaginations of their markets. They then "place their bets" in the form placing orders for the new merchandise and subsequently allocating showroom space.

John Buchheit, owner of Viking International Furniture in Eastview Mall and Thomasville Furniture Stores in Victor and in Syracuse, makes this trek to North Carolina twice a year and usually comes back with new ideas for Rochester. (We believe John is one of just a few Rochester furniture retailers who attend this show. In addition, John attends one to two European market shows per year.)

Following are some general observations on national and local trends and on what Rochester's furniture buyers can expect to see.

Colors and textures: The new hot color? Orange. "It was everywhere," says Buchheit. "Oranges accentuated with teals." He says this combination of warm and cool provides balance in room settings. He also observes that brown is the new "neutral" color these days, replacing white, tan, and taupe.

General styles: Contemporary is very popular right now. Not the hard, ultra-contemporary look of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (was it ever *really* in?); but a soft, warm yet clean look. What impressed Buchheit were the combinations of wood, leather, and granite, which gives a "warmer look and feel. Just about all the American and European manufacturers are jumping on board with this combination," he says.

The traditional collections or groupings of pieces – often featured in the higher-end chains of furniture stores – also sported updated looks. "I saw increased use of lighter woods in traditional collections such as maple than in previous years," he says. Traditional upholstered pieces are beginning to feature fabric and leather combinations.

Now for the good stuff, as expressed in categories.

Home Entertainment. This was one of the hottest categories in the show “and the new styles and designs I saw here really reflect the changing nature of how families spend their leisure time,” Buchheit says.

Gone are the big entertainment armoires with the swing-out folding doors that house and hide the electronics and the big TV. Also gone are the large, enclosed wall units.

“The hot items are the credenza-like units,” says Buchheit. “As prices of the large, flat-screen TVs drop and sales go up, consumers need furniture that can accommodate and show off this new generation of electronics,” he says. “And this furniture must be multifunctional.”

Furniture must hold the TV set at a comfortable viewing height, show it off to the owner’s satisfaction, and accommodate the peripheral electronics such as DVD players, TiVo devices, center speakers for surround-sound, etc.

“According to industry surveys, 70% of purchasers of the newer TVs don’t have the proper furniture to accommodate the new sets” says Buchheit.

He also points out that many of the newer TVs can be mounted on the wall. “This means that surrounding furniture must be a bit lower to the floor, yet still accommodate peripheral electronics and compliment the new, sleek stylings of these TV sets,” he says.

“As more and more people spend large amounts for these TVs and electronics, and with the widespread popularity and excellent video quality of DVDs, they’ll use their TVs for more and more of their entertainment time and budget,” says Buchheit. “And that trend can only strengthen the market for the furniture that compliments and enhances this equipment.”

Upholstery. Say goodbye to the loveseat, that mini-couch that seats two in utter discomfort.

“Consumers have had enough of these dinosaurs,” says Buchheit. “They’re hard to place in a room with other furniture and they’re not very comfortable.”

Chaises, Chair-and-a-halves, and other occasional pieces are much more popular and versatile. Also continuing in popularity are contemporary and traditional leather recliners, “especially those with sleeker styling and a trimmer look,” says Buchheit. “I didn’t see much of the over-stuffed and over-covered look.”

The newer array of upholstered colors were fresh but toned down. “I saw lots of greens, lavenders, blues, creamy yellows, and variations of the citrus colors, with orange leading the way.”

Also very popular at the show: the traditional leather “cigar chair,” that large and comfortable all-purpose chair known for its comfort and its ability to accent the other pieces in the room, “only now with a newer look,” says Buchheit.



Home Office. This category remains hot, “and like home entertainment, it reflects the changing nature of our lives,” says Buchheit. “With more and more people working exclusively from a home office, or splitting time between a corporate/business office and a home office or den, the demand for functional furniture will only increase.”

Regardless of the look or style, furniture must be able to accommodate today’s technology. “This means the correct height and surface areas for the screens and keyboards, properly sized storage/filing areas, and enough access openings for the multitude of wires and cables that accompany all this stuff,” says Buchheit. “Plus, it has to look good!”

Dining Room. Consumers are looking for new arrangements other than the traditional buffet/hutch. Servers with granite tops or fold-out top surfaces are replacing the larger hutches we’re used to seeing. Vertical display cabinets with areas for wine and beverage service were also popular. “I saw an emphasis on cleaner looks as Shaker and modified Mission styles were prevalent” says Buchheit.

“I did see a new and exciting line of dining room furniture designed and manufactured in Italy, something that the Rochester market has never seen before,” he says. “It features a unique look of wood and granite and should prove to be a trend-setter.

“The first shipments will arrive into port in the next few weeks and be displayed at Viking International by late December. We will feature three unique dining collections along with entertainment units and occasional tables for living and family rooms.”

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In January of 2006, John will travel to Cologne, Germany to attend a large European furniture show and exhibition. We believe that no one else from this area will be attending this show.

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Lisa,

John Buchheit is available for interview and to expand on his comments. In addition, he can send you high-resolution pictures of many of the items he describes here (or you can dispatch a photographer to one of his stores). In fact, you might want to visit and interview him in person.

Please call him anytime at (585) 223-8060.