



George Beland, a Portsmouth furniture designer and maker, creates pieces of affordable modern furnishings featuring clean lines and balanced proportions. His work will be showcased at the Architectural Digest Home Design Show at Pier 94 in New York City later this month. Rich Beauchesne photo

By **Andrew Leibs**

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PORTSMOUTH — In his workshop at the Button Factory, furniture builder George Beland is at work on a custom kitchen set he'll exhibit at the Architectural Digest Home Design Show from March 18-21 at Pier 94 in New York City.

Acceptance into the juried show testifies to Beland's artistry. That the show is a week away and sawdust still swirls over unassembled pieces says a lot about Beland's industriousness, confidence, and unconventional approach to his craft.

AT A GLANCE

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"This is not the way one would normally prepare for a show like this," said Beland, who lost precious weeks to a malfunctioning piece of equipment.

For Beland however, deadlines play to a particular strength—developing efficiencies that enable him to build more pieces for more customers.

The Architectural Digest Home Design Show (the anchor event of the New York Design Festival) will give Beland his first major exposure outside New England.

Belard hopes the show generates leads among retailers, individual clients, and perhaps larger customers (e.g. restaurants or hotels) for his designs—which include tables and chairs for “cozy urban spaces”: smaller pieces built with clean lines and balanced proportions.

“Smaller-scale pieces open up more living space,” Belard said. “Lots of people seek tables to fit a special spot in their home.”

Smaller pieces serve a vital function for Belard: they’re easier to transport and display at shows while enabling customers to envision larger version of a particular piece.

Shows (mostly small, one-day events and festivals between here and Boston) are the core of Belard’s marketing: 35 show days last year, 50 in 2008, including Boston’s SoWa open market and Newburyport Spring Fest.

Portsmouth’s Three Graces Gallery at 105 Market St., is Belard’s permanent local showcase.

Belard specializes in tables made from New England hardwoods such as black walnut, cherry, and hard maple.

He makes chairs, too, though admits these are more challenging. “With tables, so long as the surface is flat and the legs don’t move, no one notices,” Belard said.

Chairs, however, have more parts. “They must be ergonomic; strong enough to support many body sizes, yet light enough to be easily moved,” said Belard.

According to Belard, most people never consider custom-made pieces. “It just never occurs to them, or when it does, it’s seen as cost prohibitive,” he said.

Complexity drives up cost, said Belard. Adding a draw or slot for a DVD player to small console table (i.e. a flat surface on four legs) can add hundreds to a piece that might start at \$550.

Belard tries to create pieces he can reproduce. His machine shop background, especially jig making (holders with clamps that guide intricate cuts) affords him the precision and consistency that speeds replication and reduces costs.

A nightstand, for example, might cost \$1,100 as a custom build, but if Belard adds it to his line, future clients might pay \$750.

Belard makes about three to four pieces per week. Sometimes following a show or after finishing a custom piece, he might devote a week to building one type of piece, such as a larger table or TV consoles.

Despite the artistry he brings to building furniture, what drives Belard is finding ways to make his pieces available to more people.

“I don’t want an imaginary artist’s life,” Belard said. “I just want to build more furniture that people can enjoy.”

Beland's catalog is available online at www.GeorgeBeland.com.