

At home

DESIGN ICONS

For 50 years, Eames chair a throne to style

Few items of furniture are as instantly recognizable as the Eames chair and ottoman, perhaps the only chair to make its debut on live television. Now, 50 years after it was introduced on *The Today Show*, Charles and Ray Eames' leather-and-rosewood lounge is being reissued in a limited collector's edition.

For a \$6,500 donation at

Stories by Maria Puentes
USA TODAY

EamesFoundation.org, mid-century modern aficionados can buy the molded plywood chair in Santos Palisander, a sustainable rosewood. Originally, most Eames chairs were made of endangered rosewood Rio Palisander; manufacturer Herman Miller discontinued its use and switched to walnut and cherry.

The new chair set will be available at retail for around \$4,000 starting in May. Money raised from the collector's edition will help maintain the Eames house museum in Pacific Palisades, Calif.

The Eameses (he died in 1978, she in 1988) were among the most influential architect/designers of the mid-20th century as advocates for the then-unprecedented idea that low-cost, high-quality modern design could be appreciated by the American masses. The Eames chair immediately found its way into the homes and corner offices of



Pretty pair: The iconic Eames lounge and ottoman are available in a limited collector's edition.

Herman Miller Inc.

millions of striving Americans — and, eventually, the Seattle living room of NBC's *Frasier* and the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

"It became a symbol of accomplishment, style and luxury," says John Berry, author of a book on Herman Miller and the liaison between the furniture maker and the Eames Foundation. "It has that iconic quality that

people continue to seek. And it fits with a variety of décor schemes, from Queen Anne to ultra-contemporary."

Besides the chair's reintroduction, the 50th anniversary also will include an exhibit, *The Eames Lounge Chair: The Evolution of a Modernist Icon*, opening at the Museum of Arts & Design in New York in May, and a film about the chairs by the Eameses' grandson.



Rock me: The Sumato countertop is made of carnelian.

LUXURY FINISHES

How precious: Exotic stones become countertops

To demonstrate how much people are willing to spend on luxury for their homes, consider this: Some are buying kitchen countertops made of semi-precious stone and costing up to \$500 a square foot.

"Surface art" is what they call it at CaesarStone, makers of Conetto. Introduced two years ago, the handcrafted surface is made of exotic stones from around the world.

Raw chunks of blue agate, rose quartz and picture jasper are quarried in such locales as

India, South Africa and Guatemala, then shipped to Israel, where they're thinly sliced, glued together and polished to top coffee tables, bathroom vanities or reception desks for office suites.

"We're not selling this under the practical flag," says CaesarStone president Arif Tendler. "Still, the material is as strong and functional as granite: It doesn't stain or scratch, and it's heat-resistant, he says.

But the reason people buy it is because they're obsessed

with having something unique.

"We've sold countertops to people I wouldn't even dream would spend this kind of money," he says. "One older lady said, 'This is my last kitchen, so I'm going for the best.'"

Two-thirds of Conetto sales are to Hollywood types and business tycoons, Tendler says. With homes worth multimillions, "they want something you're not going to find at Home Depot."

Indeed not. Find it at caesarstone.com.

REAL ESTATE

Sellers paying for home inspection

Now that the lift is starting to dissipate from the real estate bubble, home sellers are turning to new strategies to sell quickly and at the right price. Thus the boomlet in homeowners hiring inspectors before they put their homes on the market.

For the last two decades, home inspectors routinely have been hired and paid by buyers; many states require inspections.

"If I had to ballpark it, I would say around 10% of business today would be pre-listing inspections, and 10 years ago it was virtually non-existent," says Mallory Anderson, director of the 2,400-member National Association of Home Inspectors.

The major motivation is to head off demands for costly

price reductions from buyers. "It's cheaper to fix it than to negotiate the price down," says Dan Steward, president of Pillar to Post, an inspection company with offices in 500 locations.

"It's been suggested that for every \$1 of identified repairs, the buyer would be looking for double that in price reduction."

Liz Moore, a broker in Newport News, Va., says her firm pays for a pre-listing inspection for all her sellers. Average price: about \$380.

"It's fair to say that is the reason our listings sell 30% faster than the market average," she says. And early anecdotal evidence suggests that inspected houses "consistently sell for a few thousand dollars more."

BATHROOM

Bathtubs making bigger splash

Contemporary Americans generally aren't tub people; they prefer to perform their daily ablutions in the shower. But as

American bathrooms grow ever-more sybaritic, design-conscious bathers are opting for tubs so strikingly arty that they look like Henry Moore sculptures.

Sensuous, curvy and huge, these vessel-style tubs stand out in stark advertising in home magazines. Often showcased in empty rooms with dramatic lighting, it's sometimes hard to tell they're actually bathtubs.

Peter Schor, a consultant on bathroom products and the self-described "Doctor of Bathroom Knowledge," says bathtubs are resurgent. "The elaborate designs bring back the best of the Roman era," he says. "Bathing has become more fun than ever," with such features as whirlpools, air massage, chromotherapy and waterfall spouts.

The move toward unconventional standalone tubs goes along with the increasing popularity of bowl-style sinks and modernist design in bathrooms, which for many Americans are no longer just the place to do



You're soaking in it: Waterworks' asymmetrical bathtub; \$8,500.

necessary business. Homeowners are pouring millions into bathroom renovations, including such things as see-through fireplaces, huge vanity areas and heated towel racks.

"If you are building a beautiful, restful, spa-like bath — your private retreat — there is no question but you are going to have some kind of bathtub, whether you use it or not," says Barbara Sallick, co-founder of Waterworks, maker of the 25 tub, an \$8,500 asymmetrical bowl that is one of the most arresting on the market. It's "bathtub as an art form ... designed for function, because, like a chair, a bathtub has no value if it's not comfortable."

Other examples of freestanding tubs, some with lacy wrought-iron cradles, are offered by such companies as Azura, MIT Whirlpools, Elite Bath, BainUltra, Kalista and Victoria & Albert.