

DESIGN; Nouveau Brooklyn; A creative wave is rolling west from an unexpected place. Young eco-friendly designers are leading a movement that feels more California than East Coast.; [HOME EDITION]

David A. Keeps. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, Calif.: Mar 2, 2006. pg. F.1

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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table. [Bart Bettencourt], left, and [Carlos Salgado] are designers of recycled wood furniture. Their furniture factory, [Scrapile], transforms lumber leftovers into functional, yet artful, pieces. "We are working on a way of making things from sawdust," Salgado says jokingly.; NEIGHBORLY CREATIONS: The Future Perfect showroom in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, top, champions such local design as the antler chandeliers in porcelain by Jason Miller. Below the fixtures is hivemindesign's walnut-veneer rune table. Bart Bettencourt, left, and Carlos Salgado are designers of recycled wood furniture. Their furniture factory, Scrapile, transforms lumber leftovers into functional, yet artful, pieces. "We are working on a way of making things from sawdust," Salgado says jokingly.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Photographs by Tina Fineberg For The Times; SECONDS TEA SET: Porcelain set (\$725, at Twentieth) and I Was Here side table (\$500). By Jason Miller, www.millerstudio.us.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Tina Fineberg For The Times; RUNE BED: Poplar with lathed interior posts (queen size, \$14,000). By Sather Duke and Ruby Metzner, hivemindesign.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: [hivemindesign](http://hivemindesign.com); STRIKES BACK CHANDELIER: Empire style, hand-crocheted from gold thread with black hematite crystals (\$3,600, special order at Show). By Alex Vadich and Christine Warren of [redstr/collective](http://redstr.com), www.redstr.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: [redstr/collective](http://redstr.com); SELF-PORTRAIT MIRROR: With laser-cut acrylic mustache (\$70 at Show). By [Jeannie Choe] and [Steve Tomlinson], above, of the Design Can, www.thedesigncan.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: The Design Can

Full Text (2857 words)

(Copyright (c) 2006 Los Angeles Times)

THE fashionably coiffed woman of a certain age stares curiously at sawdust-covered Bart Bettencourt and Carlos Salgado as they have their picture taken on striped benches on North 6th Street.

"Oh, are you in a band?" she inquires.

Not quite. Bettencourt and Salgado do call themselves Scrapile, a worthy rocker name, but this duo makes recycled wood furniture, not music. In the low-rent, semi-industrial neighborhood on the Brooklyn side of the Williamsburg Bridge, scrappy young architects and crafts artisans are forging a 21st century design movement.

Summoning the example of Charles and Ray Eames, who led a midcentury design revolution in Southern California 50 years ago, the Williamsburg set -- some self-taught, some educated at New York art academies such as Parsons and Pratt, and some formerly apprenticed to industrial designer Karim Rashid -- are form-follows-function modernists.

What binds them is design that is ecologically sensitive and reflects the possibilities of the California lifestyle. Turning their back on Manhattan to follow design developments in Europe and the West Coast, they share a cheeky wit summed up by the name of the neighborhood shop and hangout that shows their work: the Future Perfect.

For L.A.'s cutting-edge home decor retailers such as Show in Los Feliz, Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood has become the most important resource in New York for bold new designs. Show owner Brad Cook estimates that nearly a third of his merchandise comes from the emerging design destination.

"I go to New York specifically to meet with Brooklyn designers," says Laser Rosenberg of L.A.'s Homework, which has sold Williamsburg-based architect Matt Gagnon's light fixtures to clients here and abroad since 1999. "That's where artists can afford to live now and it's where the freshest designs -- furniture that is pared down but sophisticated and thought-provoking -- are coming from."

Rosenberg's L.A. clients, many of them transplanted New Yorkers, are attracted to the Brooklyn designs for their minimalist forms and interesting materials. They work equally well in Hollywood Hills Case Study homes and converted old industrial spaces in downtown L.A., Rosenberg says, and the fact that many pieces are handmade in limited quantities adds exclusivity to bragging rights.

Brooklyn designer Alex Valich, a partner with wife Christine Warren in [redstr/collective](http://redstr.com), feels a kinship with Angelenos. "Our ideal consumer is someone young in Hollywood who wants something new and individual," he says. "The nature of our businesses is the same; we are all looking for the next interesting project. Brooklyn designers could easily create beautiful things that make tons of money. We've already done that for other people."

Some, such as 32-year-old Ruby Metzner of [hivemindesign](http://hivemindesign.com), serve two masters. In addition to creating furniture and interiors with partner Sather Duke, 28, Metzner has a full-time position working on the Essential Home collection for Kmart, which also employs two former [hivemindesign](http://hivemindesign.com) staffers.

"I am learning things that can't be taught in school or as an underground designer," Metzner says of her corporate experience.

As flattering as it might be to design for the same national chain as Martha Stewart, she adds, "I started worrying that I would be blacklisted from the Williamsburg scene for betraying the cause and selling out."

Metzner has reason to take pause. "Brooklyn is an alternative to the commercial marketplaces in New York City," Rosenberg says. "They're there to do business but it feels like a community."

It is more than a community, Metzner says.

"It's an exciting, closely connected social scene," she says of the gallery openings, poker games, studio parties and gathering at Zablocki's Bar on the first Friday of every month. "People work hard and socialize hard, but that sparks a passion that becomes part of whatever you design."

Dave Alhadeff, the 31-year-old owner of the Future Perfect, might be considered the matchmaker between art and commerce in Williamsburg, showcasing dozens of Brooklyn designers. His brick-walled store, which opened in 2003, is a champion of local design, creating a growing list of success stories: Jason Miller, whose porcelain stag horn pendant lights are a fixture at Twentieth in Los Angeles and kick-started the craze for antler chandeliers; and Sarah Cihat, the designer of Fifty-Cents dishware, colorful silhouettes glazed onto thrift store plates.

"It all started when David opened shop," Valich says. "Before that, we were all working in our little pods all over Williamsburg. The Future Perfect gave us a place to show and to go."

Valich, a first-generation Croatian, raised in Brooklyn and schooled in graphic design, first met Los Angeles shopkeeper Cook at the Future Perfect. They struck up a conversation, and soon the Spindarella, an updated early American pedestal table made from recycled paper, was in the front window of Cook's Vermont Avenue store.

The items at the Future Perfect take inspiration from many sources: 19th century decorative designs, late 20th century minimalism, Pop Art and urban graphics. There are antique chairs covered in psychedelic needlepoint, velvety soft benches made from carved compressed cardboard and mirrored yellow skull-shaped cocktail coasters. The latest works by Jason Miller include tea sets festooned with flowers and graffiti-scarred tables made from plastic that resembles wood planks. The intriguing mix has afforded Alhadeff a burgeoning second career as an interior designer, and sales have been brisk enough to allow him to launch A & G Merch, an outlet for "more affordable home fashions" to open this spring in Williamsburg.

"Brooklyn design is sensible and ironic, utilitarian and elegant and defined by new materials and technology like laser cutting and the computer-navigated routing that Miller uses to carve up his tables," says Alhadeff, adding that the West Coast accounts for much of his mail-order business with retailers, decorators and shoppers.

Sustainability is another common denominator, says hivemindesign's Duke. "In Europe, when you make something you have to tell the government how it's going to be recycled," he notes. "We could build all our furniture out of wenge or another endangered wood if we wanted to, but that's egregious. It is far more interesting to take commonplace materials and make them beautiful."

"What connects us all is the desire to create clean, smart, modern design that is not wasteful," says Scrapile's Bettencourt, who also owns a sustainable-wood lumberyard.

For Scrapile's collection, Bettencourt and Salgado reuse lumber leftovers. Fine walnut might be glued to a layer of pressed bamboo or chipboard, a method that makes each piece unique and enlivens their tables, seats and shelves with bands of color and texture.

Scrapile turns smaller pieces of wood into pendant lights and serving trays. "We are working on a way of making things from sawdust," Salgado jokes.

On a Saturday afternoon, as rain splattered against the windows in his 15-foot-high loft in Williamsburg, Gagnon and his assistant Daniel Gorman, a musician in a group called !!!, were hard at work. The soon-to-open W hotel in the Maldives had ordered a pair of Gagnon's giant woven floor lamps, and the two men were standing on ladders, stringing walnut tiles onto rubber cord, letting the piece take shape organically.

After graduating from Cornell with an architecture degree, Gagnon worked as part of the design team in Frank Gehry's offices in Los Angeles for three years. In 2002, he moved to Williamsburg, where many of his East Coast artist and designer friends had settled, to pursue his own vision.

"I was being evicted from a downtown loft that was going to be gentrified," Gagnon recalls. "Real estate prices have been driving my decision-making process."

In Williamsburg, he found working space for \$1.50 per square foot and soon discovered a network of other designers and a wealth of manufacturing facilities. Though design has become a global industry, Gagnon contends that the young talent that flocks to Brooklyn is willing to put up with economic and space constraints to live in a community that supports their endeavors.

As an architect, much of the work available to the 32-year-old consists of renovating apartments and designing loft interiors, so Gagnon also practices micro-architecture. His sculptural lighting designs for commercial spaces and homes might also be viewed as scale models for modular apartment towers, a better version of the speculative condominiums springing up all over Williamsburg.

"There's so much hype, that people are moving to other neighborhoods," Gagnon observes. "People in Manhattan think it's super trendy, where the cool bars are filled with 21-year-olds in arts school. They say, 'Hey, on Friday, let's go get wasted in Williamsburg. Oh, and look at that cool furniture store on the corner.' I don't know that it has registered that people are living and working here and leading normal lives."

One subway station from Manhattan, the design community in Williamsburg often feels a world away. For some, designing is like playing in a band without a record contract. They hold down other gigs to pay the rent, and they gravitate to recycled and inexpensive materials in their work.

Metzner and Duke chart the progress of the Williamsburg phenomenon from their 1910 railroad flat furnished with vintage furniture, Miller's antler light and their own designs for tables, seating modules, and walnut and stainless steel shelving.

Only three years ago, Metzner says, "it was everyone for themselves. We had to learn how to make the outside world realize what was going on."

A neighborhood consciousness-raising event based on the art walk concept got the ball rolling in 2003. The following year Metzner co-designed a late-night group show called "Living Spaces" that ran in conjunction with the International Contemporary Furnishings Fair across the river in Manhattan.

"I had a giant blueprint of an apartment made to scale by a vinyl billboard company," she says. "We rolled it out on the floor and put the furniture that nearly 50 designers submitted in the appropriate spaces."

Metzner has always thought big. She joined Karim Rashid's design firm in 1996 and moved to Williamsburg the following year. Interior design commissions followed. For one job, she proposed 30 pieces of custom furniture. With the advance money, she and Duke funded the hivemindesign workshop. They have found clients that allow them to prototype designs -- screens made out of a honeycomb of fabric and furniture held together by magnets.

"No one really understood that," Metzner says of the latter, "but we were very impressed with ourselves."

What is more impressive is that they have used their success and resources to help younger designers. After graduating from the industrial design program at Pratt Institute, Steve Tomlinson and Jeannie Choe, partners in the Design Can, did graphics for hivemindesign.

"They became our mentors," Choe says. "They shared their experiences and told us how and where to get our designs produced."

"We pushed them off the ledge and let them fly," Metzner says.

In an industry rife with competition, the spirit of cooperation, whether it is enforced by friendship or economic necessity, helps define the Brooklyn aesthetic. The Design Can shares work space with redstr/collective and two other designers in the Brooklyn Navy Yard's warehouse-style industrial park. Working in such close quarters, they say, encourages feedback and collaboration and fuels the creativity that sets them apart from one another.

In the front area of their communal studio, the pieces on display highlight the differences. A recent prototype from the Design Can called Achoo is a table that dispenses Kleenex through a hole in the top.

"In our eyes," Choe says, "green design is making things that people won't want to throw away. Our philosophy is discard familiarity and invite thought."

As befits graduates and sometime lecturers at the Parsons School of Design, redstr/collective's work resonates with scholarly historical precedents. Its American Dollhouse collection reinterprets Art Deco design in Metropolitan, a bed and headboard made from pressed sunflower seed board. Strikes Back is an Empire chandelier crocheted in gold thread and studded with black crystals.

"We sample styles of the past and re-contextualize materials to create something new for this time that reveals more layers of meaning the longer you look at them," Valich says. "We consider ourselves DJs of design."

That's a fitting comparison, L.A. retailer Rosenberg says. "The way people are obsessed with their homes in this city, furniture designers are starting to become rock stars."

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(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX)

See it, want it, buy it

Brooklyn designers are turning out bold new looks and cheeky riffs on classics:

Among the places to shop for

Brooklyn designs:

Homework: 139 S. La Brea Ave.,

L.A.; (323) 936-6139; [www](http://www.homeworkbrand.com)

[.homeworkbrand.com](http://www.homeworkbrand.com). Carries

lighting by Matt Gagnon.

Show: 1722 N. Vermont Ave.,

L.A.; (323) 644-1960; www.showlifestyle.com. Designs from

Scrapile, the Design Can and

redstr/collective.

Twentieth: 8057 Beverly Blvd.,

L.A.; (323) 904-1200; [www](http://www.twentieth.net)

[.twentieth.net](http://www.twentieth.net). Work by Jason Miller and Gagnon.

The Future Perfect: 115 N. 6th

St., Brooklyn, N.Y.; (718) 599-

6278; www.thefutureperfect.com.

-- David A. Keeps

[Illustration]

Caption: GRAPHIC: MAP: Williamsburg, New York; CREDIT: Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: COMMUNAL: At right, hivemindesign partners Sather Duke and Ruby Metzner hang out at their Williamsburg railroad apartment where their designs, such as the Cruz credenza that Metzner is leaning on, are on display. At their Brooklyn Navy Yard studio, redstr/collective's Alex Valich and Christine Warren, below, share space with the Design Can and two other designers. The couple are sitting on the PicNic, a walnut-edged table covered in laminate with a gingham tablecloth print. Behind Valich is their Spindarella table. Brooklyn designers credit Dave Alhadeff, below right, with giving them a place to display their creations after he opened the Future Perfect. The store showcases local designs that use materials in innovative ways, such as the Red Light District lamps by Nicholas Furrow that use vintage glass lampshades.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Photographs by Tina Fineberg For The Times; PHOTO: COMMUNAL: At right, hivemindesign partners Sather Duke and Ruby Metzner hang out at their Williamsburg railroad apartment where their designs, such as the Cruz credenza that Metzner is leaning on, are on display. At their Brooklyn Navy Yard studio, redstr/collective's Alex Valich and Christine Warren, below, share space with the Design Can and two other designers. The couple are sitting on the PicNic, a walnut-edged table covered in laminate with a gingham tablecloth print. Behind Valich is their Spindarella table. Brooklyn designers credit Dave Alhadeff, below right, with giving them a place to display their creations after he opened the Future Perfect. The store showcases local designs that use materials in innovative ways, such as the Red Light District lamps by Nicholas Furrow that use vintage glass lampshades.; PHOTO: COMMUNAL: At right, hivemindesign partners Sather Duke and Ruby Metzner hang out at their Williamsburg railroad apartment where their designs, such as the Cruz credenza that Metzner is leaning on, are on display. At their Brooklyn Navy Yard studio, redstr/collective's Alex Valich and Christine Warren, below, share space with the Design Can and two other designers. The couple are sitting on the PicNic, a walnut-edged table covered in laminate with a gingham tablecloth print. Behind Valich is their Spindarella table. Brooklyn designers credit Dave Alhadeff, below right, with giving them a place to display their creations after he opened the Future Perfect. The store showcases local designs that use materials in innovative ways, such as the Red Light District lamps by Nicholas Furrow that use vintage glass lampshades.; PHOTO: SHINING A LIGHT: Architect Matt Gagnon works on a giant woven floor lamp that's part of a pair ordered by the soon-to-open W hotel in the Maldives. He moved to Williamsburg from L.A. in 2002 to be among friends and in the midst of a thriving community that shares his vision.; PHOTO: NEIGHBORLY CREATIONS: The Future Perfect showroom in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, top, champions such local design as the antler chandeliers in porcelain by Jason Miller. Below the fixtures is hivemindesign's walnut-veneer rune table. Bart Bettencourt, left, and Carlos Salgado are designers of recycled wood furniture. Their furniture factory, Scrapile, transforms lumber leftovers into functional, yet artful, pieces. "We are working on a way of making things from sawdust," Salgado says jokingly.; PHOTO: NEIGHBORLY CREATIONS: The Future Perfect showroom in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, top, champions such local design as the antler chandeliers in porcelain by Jason Miller. Below the fixtures is hivemindesign's walnut-veneer rune table. Bart Bettencourt, left, and Carlos Salgado are designers of recycled wood furniture. Their furniture factory, Scrapile, transforms lumber leftovers into functional, yet artful, pieces. "We are working on a way of making things from sawdust," Salgado says jokingly.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Photographs by Tina Fineberg For The Times; PHOTO: SECONDS TEA SET: Porcelain set (\$725, at Twentieth) and I Was Here side table (\$500). By Jason Miller, www.millerstudio.us.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Tina Fineberg For The Times; PHOTO: RUNE BED: Poplar with lathed interior posts (queen size, \$14,000). By Sather Duke and Ruby Metzner, hivemindesign, info@hivemindesign.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: hivemindesign; PHOTO: STRIKES BACK CHANDELIER: Empire style, hand-crocheted from gold thread with black hematite crystals (\$3,600, special order at Show). By Alex Vadich and Christine Warren of redstr/collective, www.redstr.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: redstr/collective; PHOTO: SELF-PORTRAIT MIRROR: With laser-cut acrylic mustache (\$70 at Show). By Jeannie Choe and Steve Tomlinson, above, of the Design Can, www.thedesigncan.com.; PHOTOGRAPHER: The Design Can

Credit: Times Staff Writer