

# ***It is time to knock off the knock-offs***

**BY ROBERT E. STANNARD, ASFD  
Design Registration Committee Chairman**

Horror stories of design copying are part of the lore and "tradition" of our industry, including both upholstery and case goods. We're all familiar with "Polaroid designing," re-labeled photographs and claims that a popular design can be had for less. This kind of jungle atmosphere existed in the music industry before the enactment of modern copyright laws. Today, the music business has some order — and is creative and healthy.

How long must we go on with this legal piracy, with customer pressure to duplicate a competitor's product, with a popular design copied until it becomes generic? What manufacturer enjoys paying for the development of a new item or line when he knows that a lower-priced version may appear at any time and threaten his investment?

ITEM: A well known manufacturer had copies of his chairs offered to him at less than his wholesale price.

ITEM: A designer reported that copies of his furniture were imported by a major retailer.

ITEM: A small exhibitor in Dallas boasted that he would have copies of a best selling table group available at reduced prices in less than a month, "and there's nothing they can do about it," he said.

The sad thing is, he is probably right. Present copyright law specifically excludes "useful articles." Trying to patent a new Art Deco sofa or buffet is difficult, expensive, frustrating and usually futile.

Most industrialized nations have followed closely our leadership in laws relating to patents and inventions, but in the case of protection for the industrial designs of "useful products" they have had little to follow. Our country, when compared to others, offers much less protection to industrial designs (radios, cars, furniture, appliances, etc.). For example, design "registrations" in Japan are 10 times those in the U. S.; in Germany, they are 20 times U. S. registrations.

In our specialized area of furniture design, Europeans have a reputation for design leadership and innovation. Yet, European designers are reluctant to provide designs for U. S. firms because they know their designs will be copied (stolen).

Most of my fellow furniture designers have been victims of this design piracy. It can mean immediate and drastic loss of

income for us. In my own case, a New Jersey company has been selling furniture based on my design to some of the top department stores and furniture retail chains in the country. There is little chance that I can collect without costly and uncertain litigation.

But there is legislation now in Congress that would provide this needed protection. The bill, HR 1900, would allow a design to be registered by the Copyright Office for a fee of \$15.00. Protection would last for 10 years. Design registration is important to our industry; to better compete in the international market place, to stem the flow of jobs overseas and to stop losing much of our new product investment. It would not prevent us from creating new designs or from following trends. It is aimed at those who merely copy or demand that we copy.

Congress is simply waiting to hear from us. Everyone in the furniture business can be influential. I recently met with my local congressman at a nearby town meeting. His aide was helpful and interested and wanted to know all sides of the issue. He finally wrote that he was recommending to my congressman that he co-sponsor the bill. Try this in your own district. It will help. HR 1900 is now in the Judiciary subcommittee on courts, chair by Robert Kastenmeier (D-Wisc.). Ask your representative to urge hearings on the bill. And request a recommendation for approval by House.

Other industries share our problem and will cooperate with us to work for passage of this legislation. Companies publicly active in this include AT & T, Ford Motor Co., Hillenbrand (American Tourister) and Caterpillar. Rita Castle of Caterpillar heads a coalition of Trade Association Representatives for companies advocating design registration. Support from our companies and our trade professional associations will help. Ms. Castle may be reached at (309) 675-5815.

The ASFD has urged its members to look into the bill's merits on an individual basis. The group will vote on supporting the bill by the end of its semi-annual meeting at the Fall Market in High Point.

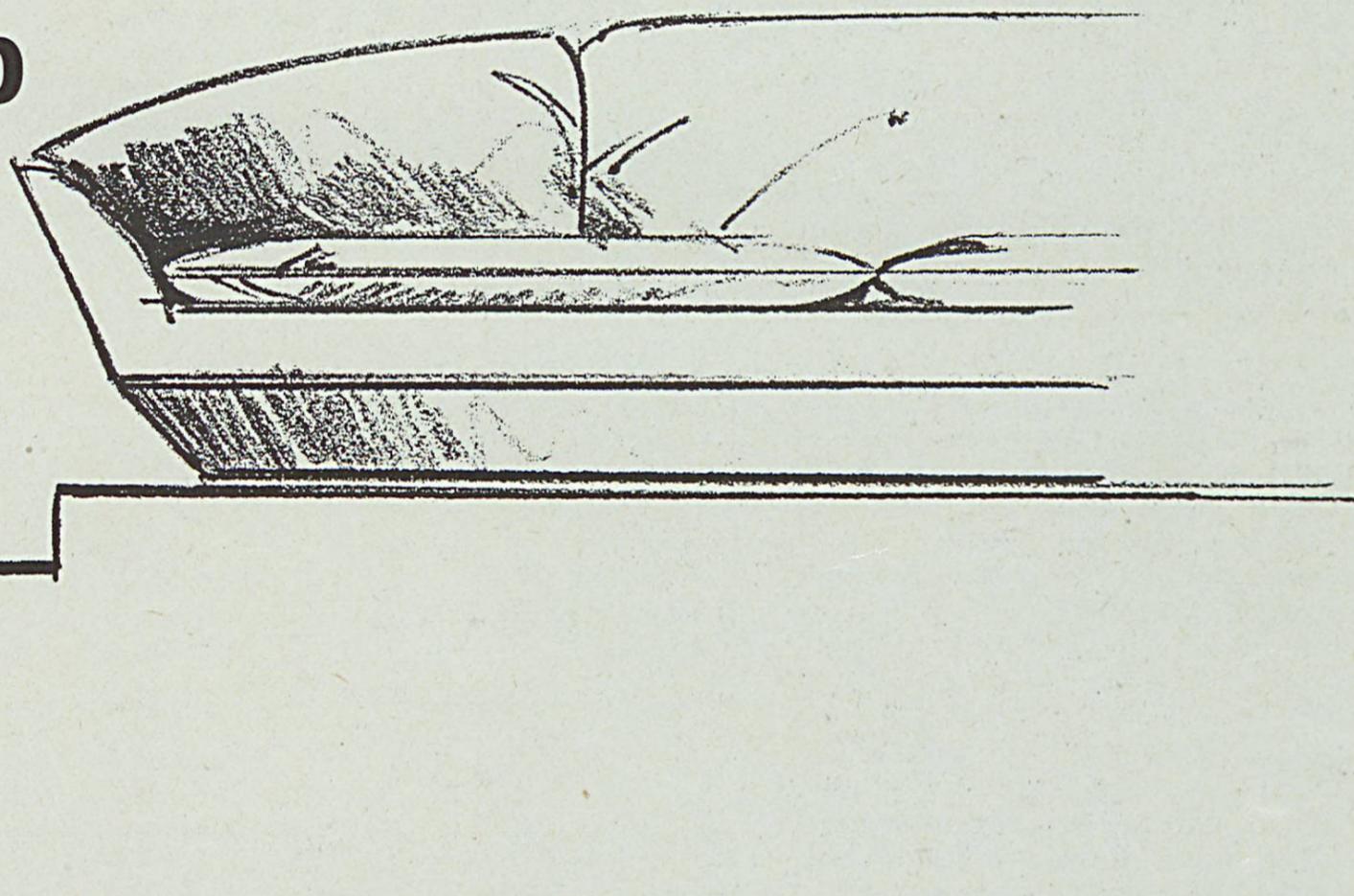
There is no need for us to suffer any longer in our haven for knock-offs. There is no need to let the importers copy our best sellers for 30 percent less. And there is no reason to limit our investment in well designed products out of fear of the copycats. □

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## DESIGNER'S FORUM

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# Step up to a better image



**BY RON SONNENLEITER  
ASFD**

Is upholstery ever going to change its marketing approach? How can so many companies produce similar looking items, some of which I'd have to say are mirror images of one another? The few manufacturers that venture even a little bit forward and become innovative, ever so slightly, stand out from the crowd. It gives these companies an edge over the rest of the competition.

Concepts can be created in every style category that can achieve this step-forward look. Better scaling, proportioning and material combinations, are just some of the means by which one could be achieving such an edge. Slight and calculated modifications, such as the difference between a Mercedes convertible and a Mercedes sedan, are the key. Try a tuck here or there, gracefully curve an arm or add some simple sculpture of form. You don't need major modifications when simple and small changes, such as in height, length, shape or color, will be able to create that come-sit-on-me look everybody is striving to achieve. From this point it is the manufacturer's discretion as to the total quality and the perfection of image wanting to be marketed ...and sold.

Slight modifications and changes in color will also

complement similar adjustments in shape and form.

So far, we have only been discussing shape and form. Now we will have to address the color aspect.

Furniture fabrics — textures, weaves and patterns — are all vital elements in the overall picture of selling upholstery. Since the consumer has to live with his or her purchase day in and day out, it becomes difficult to blend one sofa or chair with the buyer's current items. We are not as fortunate as the apparel industry, where one can buy a bright red dress or jacket which can be worn, or hung in the closet, as desired. Upholstery colors need some real consideration. But here again, a manufacturer can be ahead of his competition by "selecting" on a creative basis. Blend some colors. Add some contrasts, such as welting or stitching. Add more than one intensity or the same color for heightened interest. Combine two or more fabrics and colors to add excitement.

When it comes to selling upholstered furniture, big changes are flashy and newsworthy. When it comes to selling on the retailer's floor, small, calculated changes will ultimately sell better.

There is a never-ending number of shapes, sizes, textures, materials and colors one can use. Somewhere, a combination will be right for every manufacturer. □

# New 'FR' foam family hits upholstery market

BY LARRY BRADFORD  
Technical Director  
Recticel Foam Corp.

In the past few years, there has been increasing interest in, and awareness of, the size and versatility of the family of flexible foams available to manufacturers who use cushioning materials. Each member of this family has a range of physical properties different from the other such as variation in density and IFD (indentation forced deflection). The family members are separated by special characteristics which determine their area of use.

This new kid, who is generating a lot of interest now, is in that branch of the family known as combustion modified foams, more commonly referred to by their nickname "FR". These are identified by the particular combustion tests (of which there are many) they are designed to pass. The new foam is so new it is just now being named and is fast becoming popular.

At Recticel Foam, it is called "Iso-guard®" and is orange in color. In other places it has other names and is of different colors. BASF Wyandotte calls it Resteasy® regardless of color. Its performance in combustion tests is impressive and broad-based.

The secret of this new foam's success is a product called Melamine, which when exposed to high temperatures, changes from a solid to a gas and takes heat from its surroundings. This product gives good results in many burn tests and compares favorably with CMHR foams. CMHR is a superb product but is limited in market size because of three factors: 1) poor physical properties (low tear strength); 2) high density (up to 5# per cubic foot); 3) high cost.

The new kid has shown major improvement in all three areas and is now defining just how much market is available. □

## Typical test values

	ISOTHANE® CMHR	ISOTHANE® HR
ASTM-E162-81	PASS 75	PASS 100
ASTM-D3675	PASS 75	PASS 100
UL-94	Meets 94 HF-1	V - 0
CAL. 117	PASS	PASS
F.A.A. 25.853	PASS	PASS
New York and New Jersey Port Authorities	PASS	PASS
Boston Port and City Code	PASS	PASS
MVSS 302	PASS	PASS

*Courtesy of Recticel Foam Corp.*

## Hickory Springs offers FR version

Hickory Springs Manufacturing introduced Code\*Red™, a new combustion inhibitive polyurethane cushioning foam, during the Suppliers to the Furniture Industry Exposition in Hickory, N.C., in February. The new foam offers not only improved safety, but higher levels of durability, comfort and affordability.

Bobby Bush, sales manager of Hickory Springs Foam Division, pointed out that the introduction of Code\*Red marks a major milestone in the evolution of fire retardant foam products. "In the past," he said, "while foam products, such as combustion modified high resilience foam, exhibited acceptable fire retardant characteristics, they offered only marginal cushioning qualities, tore easily and were extremely expensive. In the production process, these foams were difficult to handle and frequently became unusable because of in-plant damage. Now with Code\*Red, manufacturers

for the first time will be able to purchase a foam cushioning which not only inhibits combustion but also is easy to handle, comfortable, durable and competitively priced."

Bush indicated that more than five years of research development had gone into the company's efforts to create a foam that could successfully meet a diverse range of fire code requirements as well as rigorous demands of the furniture, bedding and transportation industries. In recent months, Code\*Red has passed a battery of laboratory tests ranging from the relatively simple California 117, Underwriters Laboratories 94 and the Motor Vehicle Seating Standard 301 to the very stringent Boston Fire Prevention Code and the New York/New Jersey Port Authority Code. The new foam performed well and met all requirements of each of these tests.

The product has essentially the

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## DESIGNER'S FORUM

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## ASFD designed to improve standards, recognition of designers

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### BY ROLAND CARTER President, ASFD

ASFD is not just another confusing set of letters. ASFD stands for the American Society of Furniture Designers, an association of staff and free-lance designers and others with interests closely related to furniture design. As a young organization (founded 1981), the ASFD is not widely known and recognized. Nevertheless, we've already come a long way and are just beginning to establish our presence in the furniture industry. My purpose in writing is to tell you a little about the aims and activities of the American Society of Furniture Designers.

First, like any professional organization, the ASFD aims to serve its members. To this end, we have programs at each High Point market featuring industry-prominent speakers, seminars, how-to sessions and informal get-togethers. Member after member has been delighted with these opportunities of open communication with their peers. This is a first time experience because there hasn't been a nationwide organization of furniture designers. Also, the ASFD gathers annually for a conference away from the day-to-day pressures. These conferences feature more educational programs, speakers and fellowship. ASFD publications provide our members with association news and informative articles. Regional chapters allow members in various areas to get together at other times throughout the year for various programs and meetings.

Second, the ASFD is reaching out to serve the furniture industry. For instance, we worked with the AFMA to hold a

round-table discussion among manufacturers, designers and suppliers at the International Woodworking and Upholstery Supply Fair at the beginning of August in Charlotte. This is the first cooperative effort with the AFMA and, as president of the ASFD, I look forward to joint efforts in other areas. The ASFD is just beginning to explore the possibility of an educational program for consumers to tell them something of the process of design and manufacturing which develops the furniture they buy.

The internal programs of the ASFD indirectly serve the industry, too. Our standards for professional membership mean that every designer entitled to use the ASFD initials after his or her name has met our qualifications for membership. As we grow, we will strive to improve these standards so that ASFD membership will be recognized as a standard for designers throughout our industry. Our educational programs are a benefit to the manufacturers we serve, too. A well-informed designer is a better designer. The ASFD is establishing a computerized referral service which will help those manufacturers seeking designers, staff or free-lance.

As I mentioned earlier, the American Society of Furniture Designers is young — we have much to learn and we will certainly make some false starts; but youth is an advantage, too. It means that we are flexible, full of ideas and anxious to work with manufacturers for the benefit of every segment of our industry. Good intentions and hard work are a winning combination. Remember the ASFD — we're coming on! □

## NEWS UPDATE

### Hickory Springs To Open New Manufacturing Plant

Hickory Springs Manufacturing Co., supplier to the furniture industry, has announced the opening of a new metal manufacturing facility in Bell, Calif. The plant, which manufactures sleeper mechanisms, is Hickory Springs' first West Coast installation.

P.C. Underdown Jr., president and CEO of Hickory Springs, stated, "Our new facility in Bell, Calif., will enable us to serve the growing West Coast furniture industry in a much more timely and economical manner. We feel this very viable market area holds good potential for our company's future growth and profitability."

### Grace Marketing To Sell Allied Leather Line

Feuer Leather Group announces that Grace Marketing Corp. of High Point, N.C., will introduce and sell nationally its upholstery leather line produced by Allied Leather, its subsidiary.

The Allied Leather product is specifically designed to be marketed to upholstered furniture manufacturers and marks the company's entry into the furnishings field.

Currently, Feuer Leather Group, owner of seven New York state tanneries, produces in excess of 1 million square feet of leather daily. Its diverse line of products includes apparel, gloves, work and dress, handbags, small leather articles and shoes.

"Because of the established production capacity of The Feuer Leather Group," Denis Speckman, president of Grace Marketing, said, "Allied Leather will be available in sizeable quantities almost immediately. Small orders of Allied will be filled from a complete inventory warehoused at Grace Marketing headquarters. Large orders will be shipped from the tanneries with a turnaround time of three to four weeks."

Allied products, all aniline dyed, will include both traditional and contemporary leathers. The beginning inventories program will offer a color palette in excess of 50 colors. For manufacturers who are looking

to create their own colors, Grace Marketing Corp. will be able to supply custom colors for orders of smaller quantities within the normal delivery cycle.

### Stafast Products Opens New Warehouse

Stafast Products announces the opening of a new warehouse, Stafast of the Carolinas, located at Fort Mill, S.C. A complete inventory of T-nuts, weld nuts, inserts, joint connector bolts and hanger bolts will be available from stock.

Stafast has been manufacturing and distributing metal fasteners since 1958. Other shipping locations include Cleveland, Ohio, Indianapolis, Ind., Tupelo, Miss., and Los Angeles, Calif.

### AFMA Questions NHFA Dallas Move

The recent announcement by the National Home Furnishings Association that it will sponsor a display of home furnishings manufactured by foreign producers seriously concerns many U.S. manufacturers.

"We deem this activity by NHFA an unwarranted intrusion into the marketing practices of the industry," said Brian Erickson, president of Fancher Furniture and president of the American Furniture Manufacturers Association. "NHFA's activities constitute the first endorsement of a specific market by a major trade association serving the home furnishings industry. As AFMA has members which show only in San Francisco, Dallas, Atlanta or High Point, this express endorsement of Dallas by NHFA will put those companies at a serious competitive disadvantage. Frankly, we do not consider this an appropriate role for NHFA."

"The reaction among many AFMA members has been quite strong. Strong enough, in fact, to possibly jeopardize the positive actions recently taken by NHFA and AFMA concerning the joint establishment of a consumer awareness program. Many feel, for example, that NHFA's actions will result in the spending of domestic manufacturers' time and money to promote the sale of foreign made

products. In today's extremely tough marketing environment, that would be a bitter pill for many to swallow," continued Erickson.

"In summary, we feel the NHFA's activity is counter-productive, unnecessarily impacts an industry which already has a \$1.5 billion trade deficit, and may well jeopardize the prospects of cooperative action so desperately needed by all segments of our industry," Erickson said.

### Cutters Exchange Named As Singer\* Distributor

Cutters Exchange Inc., supplier to the U.S. sewn products industry, has been appointed an approved dealer for Singer\* industrial sewing machines, parts, needles and allied products.

In announcing this appointment, James M. Lower, vice president and general manager, Industrial Products, North American Sewing Products Division, The Singer Co., stated: "The addition of Cutters Exchange to our expanding network of approved Singer dealers gives us greater flexibility in responding to the expanding and changing needs of U.S. ... manufacturers."

The introduction of Singer brand products through Cutters Exchange will cover an array of product categories including programmable sewing machines Opto-Sew\* stitching controls, special purpose sewing machines, standard sewing equipment, motors, parts, needles and supplies.

\*A trademark of The Singer Co.

### La-Z-Boy® Agrees To Acquire Burris

La-Z-Boy® Chair Co. has agreed in principle to acquire Burris Industries Inc., a Lincolnton, N.C.-based producer of motion chairs. Announcement of the acquisition was made by Charles T. Knabusch, La-Z-Boy president.

La-Z-Boy has agreed in principle to purchase approximately 68 percent of the outstanding common stock of Burris at a price of \$.75 per share. The agreement is subject to negotiation and execution of a definitive stock purchase agreement. The agreement in principle contem-