

O. B. Solie

The cartoon character, Bart Simpson, probably couldn't identify with O.B. Solie.

The self-proclaimed underachiever just wouldn't appreciate the furniture designer's abounding creativity and positive outlook.

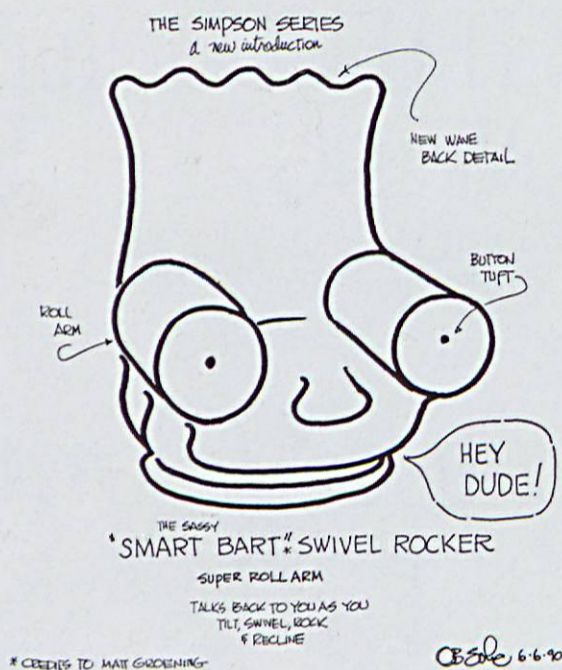
No way, man.

Yet, moments after America's No. 1 cartoon brat and his useless comrades hit television screens, Solie put the Simpsons in his furniture cartoons and promptly faxed them to the furniture world.



Moods II — 15 years in the line.

Interiors Wi



To Solie, fax, like the Simpsons, is the wave of the present.

"The revolution in design today is the instant visual communication of ideas," says the designer of upscale Contemporary seating, accent and storage pieces for residential and contract markets. "You'd be amazed at the reaction people have when they can see what you're talking about."

"When I started designing in 1951, before a decision was made, we used to spend lots of time doing color renderings and fancy formal presentations of an entire group," he says. "Delivery



th O.B. Solie

alone would take up to a week. With the fax machine decisions are immediate."

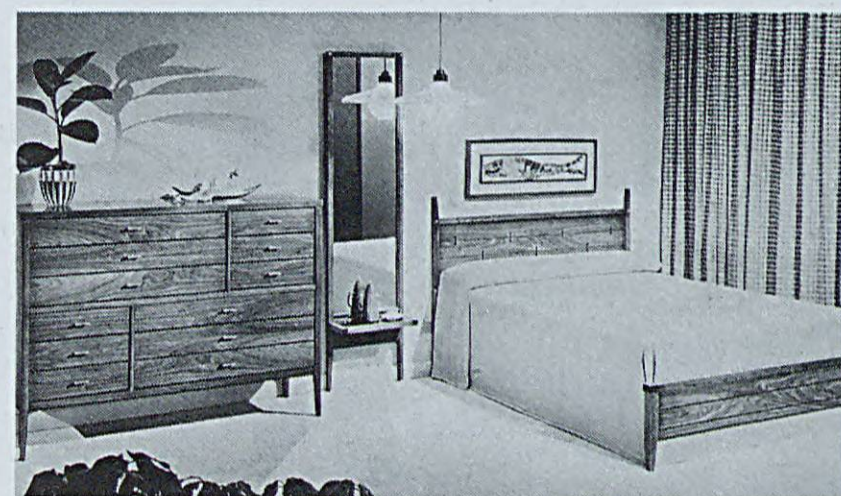
As a result he can better focus on the business of creating at his Rockford, Ill. or Delray Beach, Fla. Studios.

And create he does. On a daily basis it is not unusual for Solie to dash off 25 to 50 sketches and to fax 75 to 100 messages, including holiday and birthday greetings.

Solie's design credits for upholstery, case goods and occasional tables read like a Who's Who of the Furniture Industry. Currently his designs are being produced by Ello, H.T.B. Contempo-

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rary, Dansen, Flair, Emerson and Motif. Other clients have included Bernhardt, Bassett, Dixie, Drexel, Broyhill, Selig, Schweiger, Bradington/Young, Flexsteel, John Widdicomb, StavOak, American, West Michigan, Electrohome, Kaufman of Collingwood, Indiana Wood and Fibersin.



Tuxedo-Pier mirror/bed and master chest done in walnut veneers and walnut solids. This correlated group was produced in the early 60's by Lane. A very good seller for four years or more.

Add to that kitchen, housewares, hospital and nursing home designs, and consulting for suppliers of furniture materials such as laminates, vinyl, mechanical attachments and hardware trim.

"A furniture designer should be able to design anything for the home," he maintains.

A NEW DESIGN PROCESS

Team design, according to Solie, can be a mixed bag.

"Sales input is valuable because salesmen know most about what's selling and therefore what people want," he says. "On the other hand, in order to achieve new looks, production must be somewhat forgiving to accommodate some designs."

A furniture designer, he stresses, must first feel very good about a design before it is shown to anyone. "It's like

shopping. When you spot the right thing, you know it."

"No one has all the ideas and I appreciate tips," he says. "But sometimes with all this input you can end up with a watered-down nothing. Of course, if the result is high volume broad marketing, that's good."

When it comes to sketching, Solie is a quick study. He holds a bachelor of science and a master of science degree in art and design from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His master's thesis portrayed "The Design of the Chair as Art."

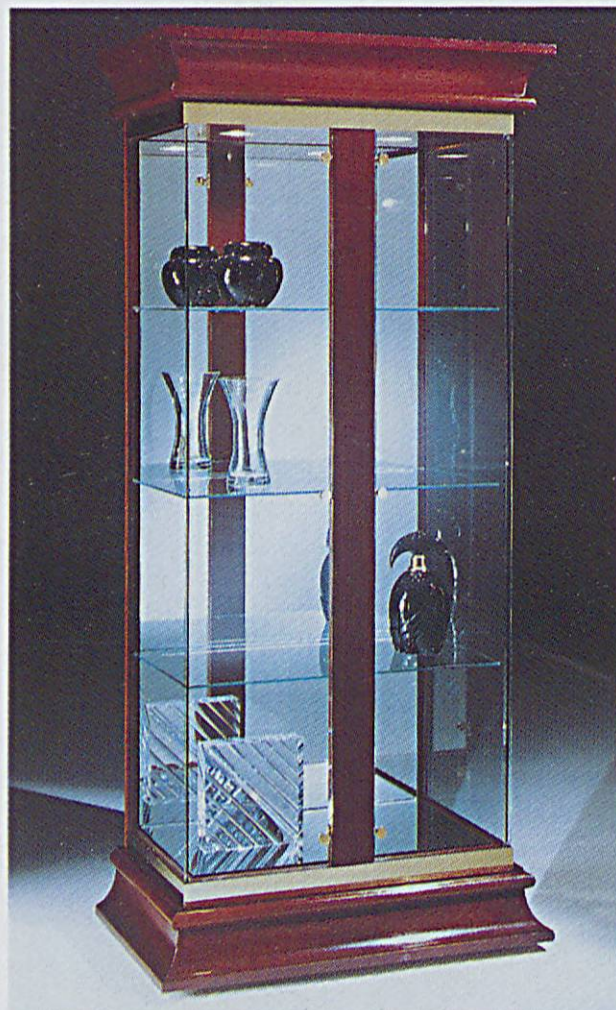
A brief stint in the interior design department of Marshall Field in Chicago served as a precursor to working in Rockford, Ill., with furniture designer Ernest Swarts.

"He had no real furniture design experience but O.B. seemed so capable and personable that I hired him full time," Swarts remembers.

He was not disappointed. "O.B. oozes ability. He's smart. He's ambitious, has great imagination and loves people. He's a great idea man."

Of his style of design, Swarts says, "O.B. has never been one to add embellishment. When he does, it is in good taste and in proportion."

When Swarts moved in 1964, Solie opened his own design studio founded on his "appreciation of the inherent beauty in materials. My intent is to stay slightly ahead in style with the combi-



"La Cage" Vitrine shown in mahogany with brass trim.

nation of design and fashion that is elegant and comfortable and expresses a feeling of timeless sophistication."

His continuing design successes are his philosophy incarnate.

The Moods Collection, introduced by Ello Furniture Manufacturing Company in 1974, still is production and marketed as Moods II.

The LaCage Vitrine Collection of glass, beveled mirrors and geometric shapes was introduced in 1986 and continues as one of Ello's most successful groups.

"While all the other free-lance design-



Parquet door faces and tops are matched (from Italy) then mounted by Ello and fitted, Original Moods.





Regency Imperial bedroom shown in polished brass with bronze mirror.

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Ernest Swarts

ers have fallen by the wayside during the last 20-plus years, we ultimately have worked almost exclusively with O.B.," says Lothar Molton, Ello president. His company manufactures medium to upper-priced Contemporary and Transitional furniture featuring metal and glass.

"O.B. is an all-around furniture de-

signer, willing to go in new directions without having to do it his way," he says.

Joe Richardson III, president of Richardson Brothers Company and past president of the American Society of Furniture Designers, describes Solie as "a modernist who sticks with clean, unique design and interesting uses of materials other than wood."

B. B. Lane, former chairman of The Lane Company, agrees. Tuxedo was one of the first successful collections introduced in the 60s. He describes the walnut bedroom and dining room group as "a crisp and elegant use of modern materials in combination with the motif of a traditional butterfly joint as a rosewood inlay."

"He understands production," notes

Chet Allen, now senior vice president of Markwood Inc. He worked with Solie at Flair during the late 60s.

"A masculine belted sofa made of top grain suede leather was a bonanza for Flair. It was innovative, stylish, timely and the correct use of materials," he says.

Bernie Moray, president of Gorman's retail home furnishings chain in Michigan marvels at Solie's proven "sensitivity and insight into what consumers want. He anticipates and sets design directions."

DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

To Solie who started designing a myriad of housegoods in the 60s because "designing furniture got boring," the 90s present the most opportunity for design thus far.

Part of that opportunity rest with the opening of the European market. "The exchange of ideas and products will grow as people travel. In about five years unique craftsmanship in the underdeveloped European countries will influence furniture, accessories and accents," he believes.

"The influence of electronics—from television and compact disc systems to the fax machine and home office equipment — creates new needs for new kinds of furniture in all styles," he says.

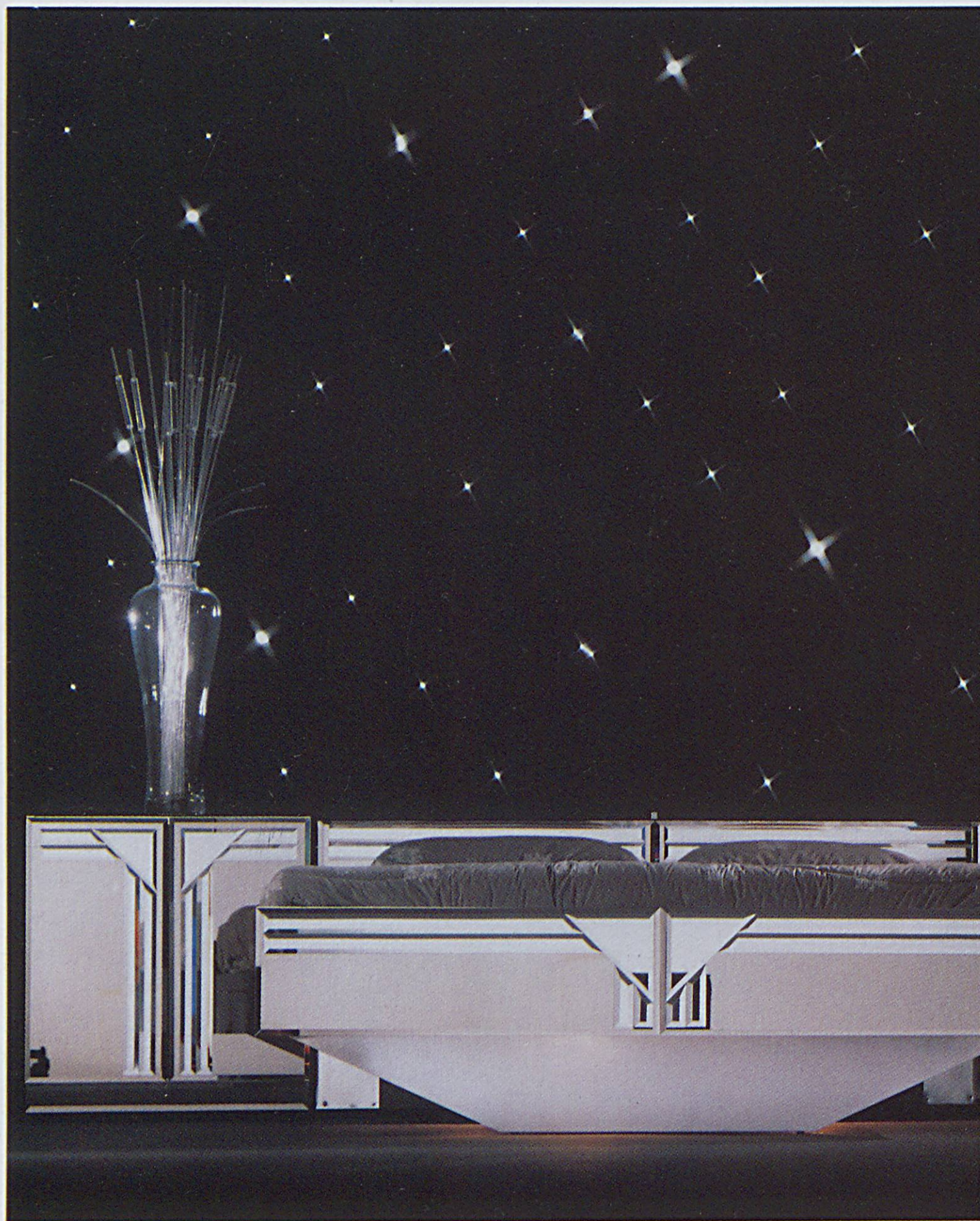
"Everyone will need a fax shelter because you can write it off," he quips.

On a more serious note he adds, "Most people put a fax on a night stand or table but then there's no place to store the paper and all the junk that goes with it."

Asa Contemporary and Transitional furniture designer, Solie says silhouettes are softened. "We're taking the themes of many styles, of architecture, of textures and applying them to Contemporary styling."

Contemporary, he believes, has gained much broader acceptance because it satisfies the casual, informal category of the market and is sophisticated at the same time.

"The common thread is that Transitional is 95 percent Modern and 5 percent Traditional," Solie says. "By enlarg-

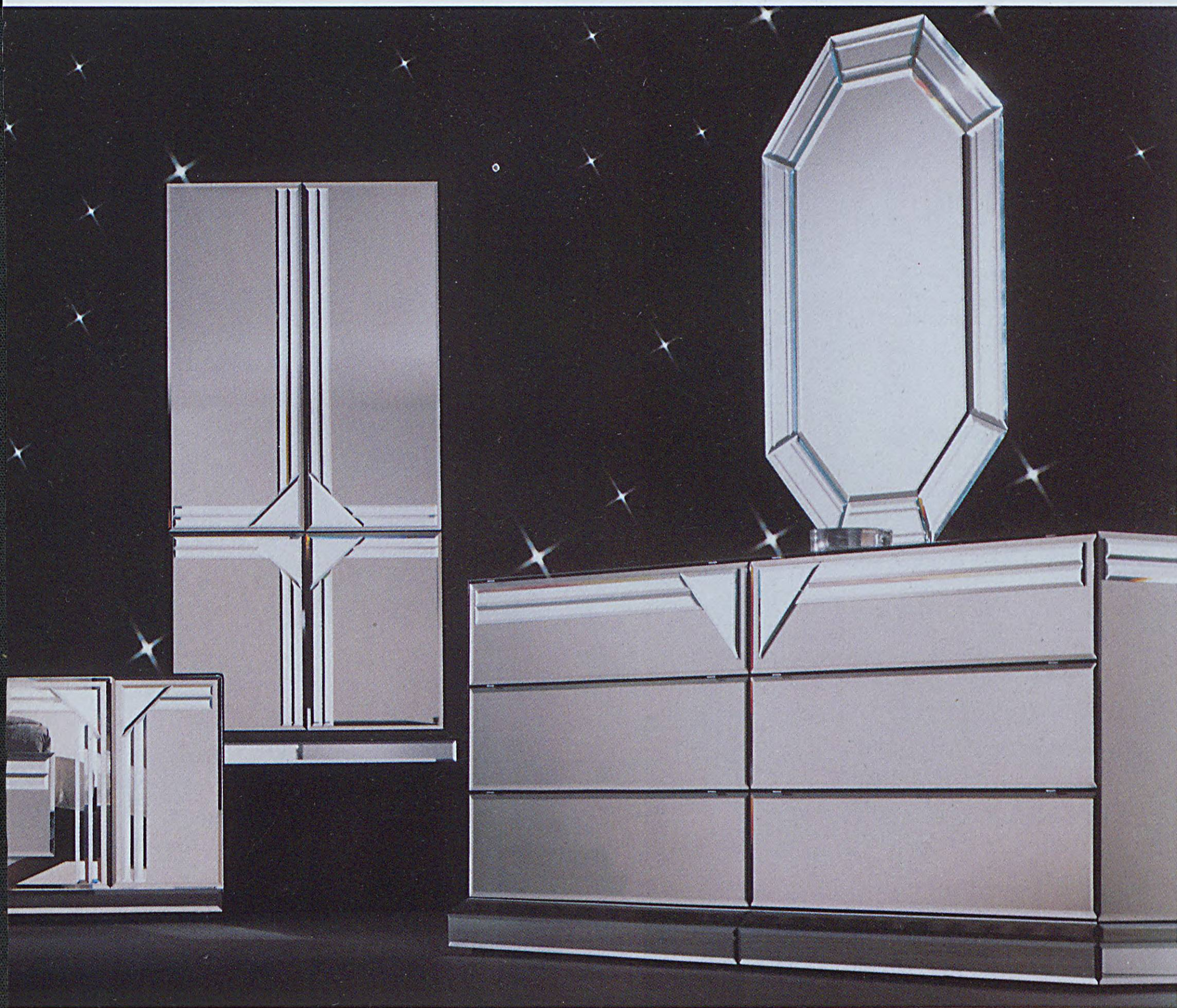


"The influence of electronics—from television and compact disc systems to the fax machine and home office equipment—creates new needs for new kinds of furniture in all styles."

ing and overdoing, by incorporating a Traditional feeling into Modern proportions, we've created what I call Transwish-sional: a whatever-you-wish-look

ABOVE: *Krystal Images* Beveled bronze mirror fronts with clear mirror beveled overlays. Bases also are mirrored and beveled. **BELOW:** *Regency Buffet* by *Ello* Metal base and ends mirrored fronts and top was developed from original *La Cage*. **RIGHT:** *Vitrene, Krystal Images* Three sides glass mirrored base and top, metal accents.





that appeals to both styles.” ■

Another one of many terms coined by Solie is Amerostyle: Contemporary with a little pizzazz, the all-American combination of Modern function influenced by Traditional.

“Darker woods of cherry and mahogany are picking up momentum with younger people who have seen so much change that they see strength in the solidity of the past,” he says. “Intricate carvings and heavy overlays are simplified to clean lines.”

The effect on furniture design has been greater variety, even within a collection, he says.

“We no longer use the same base and

treatments for each piece in a collection because people are combining looks to create something very personal in their homes. They want a mix, variety, a combination of woods and materials," Solie says.

AN INDUSTRY MAN

As a team player, Solie has actively promoted the industry. He has served as president of the American Society of Furniture Designers (ASFD) and as a board member of the American Furniture Hall of Fame.

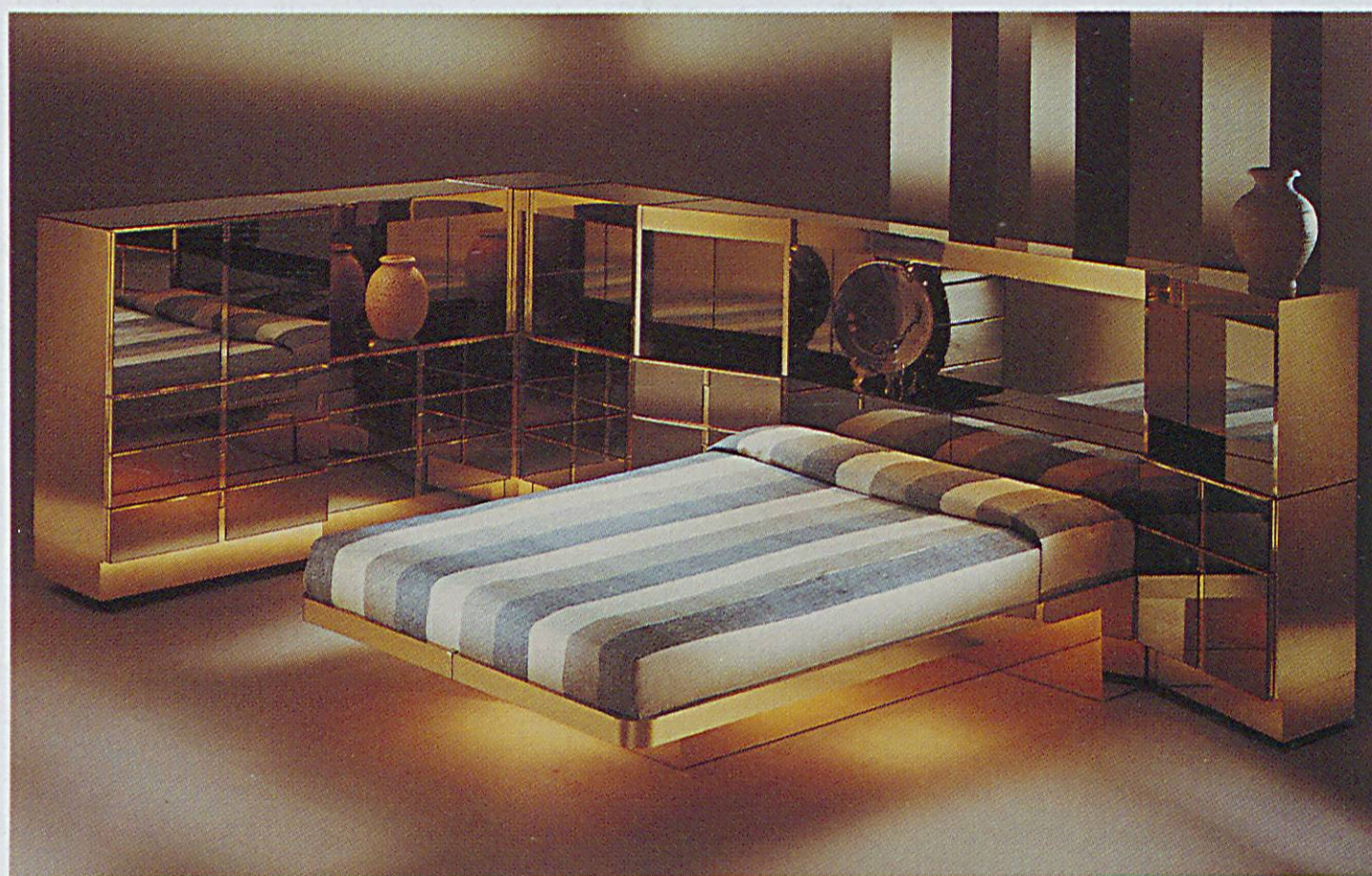
He has received numerous design awards, including the American Walnut Fashion Award, Resources Council Product Design Award, the National Home Fashions League Achiever Award and the Richardson Brothers Humorist of the Century Award. Most

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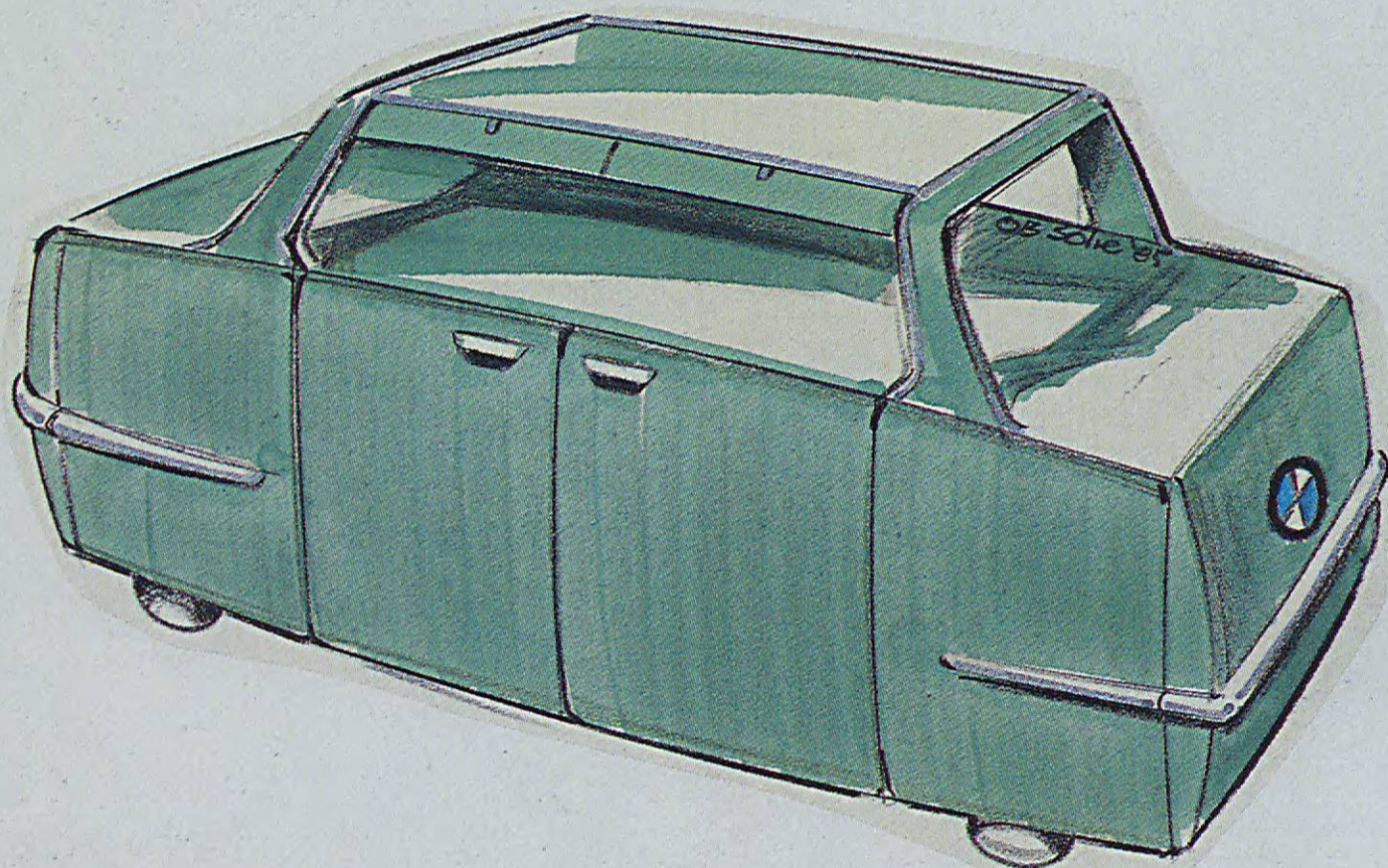
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recently, in 1988 his peers awarded him one of the industry's highest honors, the ASFD Distinguished Designer Award.

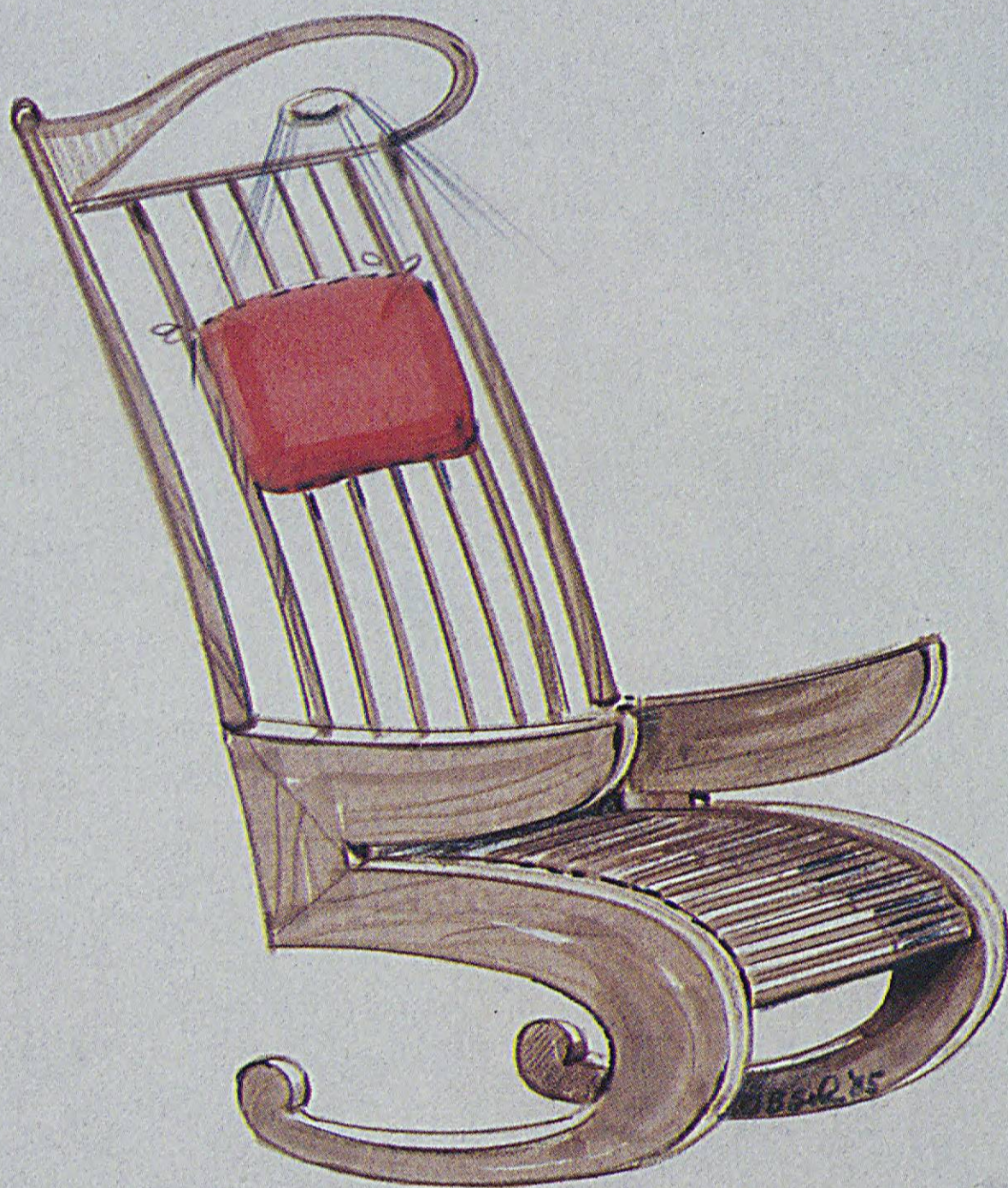
According to ASFD Chairman Joe



TOP: "Ultra" Wall Unit (Ello) Bronze mirror fronts, brass trim. Zig-zag side cabinets have welded glass doors with matching bases in brass mirrored backs. **BOTTOM: Moods II Bedroom** This group has been produced 15 years. One of their best sellers.



BMW 520 BUFFET



TOP: BMW 520 Buffet Original color sketch spoofing "Yuppie era" buffet. **BOTTOM:** Cartoon of Rock '55 sketch for FURNITURE TODAY article on furniture for 55 and over.

Richardson III, "O.B. has made a mark on the profession itself. He is on the leading edge of design and keeps us thinking."

Richardson notes, "He's always hungry to know what's going on in the world and probably was the first person to have a fax machine. He sends me one to two dozen humorous fax messages a year."

The Solie zest for life and its lighter moments is legendary. Anyone who

"O.B. has made a mark on the profession itself. He is on the leading edge of design and keeps us thinking."

Joe Richardson III
ASFD Chairman

knows O.B. has received a cartoon fax, "even if it's only to put together a tennis foursome," Solie says.

Says Lane, "During the design process his sketches provide comic relief. Without any warning he takes off on a tangent. When a play on words would pop into his mind, he immediately puts it on paper as a whimsical drawing."

Adds Allen, "He is one of those rare people who can poke fun at the industry he works with and everyone still loves him."

"I've been drawing cartoons since grade school," Solie explains. "It makes me feel good to make people laugh. It fires up my creative juices." ♦