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MARKETPLACE

In the lap of seduction

An emerging look for home design in the new year: dark, sexy, even a little dirty. Call it bordello chic.

DAVID A. KEEPS

Inside the dimly lit splendor of the 3-month-old West Hollywood nightclub Voyeur, the chairs look like traditional Victorian antiques. Venture closer, however, and they offer a titillating surprise. One wing chair seems to be encased in a lace-paneled corset; others are detailed with the metal hardware and bondage straps of leather fetishists. There is even one with a harness that designer Ted Nemeth calls the Restraint chair.

Restrained, this is not. The furnishings at Voyeur are elegant yet decidedly edgy, and along with the décor in Los Angeles clubs such as Bordello and the Edison, they signal what may be a different direction for interior design in the new year.

As a 21st century take on decadence, the style — let's call it bordello chic — relies heavily on the lushness of 19th century English gentlemen's clubs and Parisian brothels. The design elements include gentleman's classics such as tufted wing chairs, antique lighting, Venetian glass mirrors and velvet seats with carved and gilded details.

Says Voyeur owner Matt Bendik, who brought in high-profile designer Mark Zeff to create the club's interiors: "I wanted it to feel like the film 'Eyes Wide Shut.'"

The look incorporates the glamorous vintage furniture popularized by Hollywood Regency decorating and modern interpretations of ornate rococo furniture, then takes it all to a darker, more dangerous place. It's steeped in old-world classicism, but it plays into the sexually provocative culture at the heart of night life and fashion.

Nemeth describes his furniture for Voyeur as "very beautiful but naughty, a little S&M and a little Gothic."

Los Angeles architect Alex Artigas says history is simply being reinter-



SAMUEL C. FROST

WICKED: Ted Nemeth says his furniture for Voyeur is "a little S&M and a little Gothic."

preted in a provocative way, turning something as simple as a traditional chair into a sexually charged statement. Interior designer Lori Erenberg sees the trend as a response to the current economic climate.

"I think this look is very timely, because there's a lot of pain going on right now," she says, tongue in cheek.

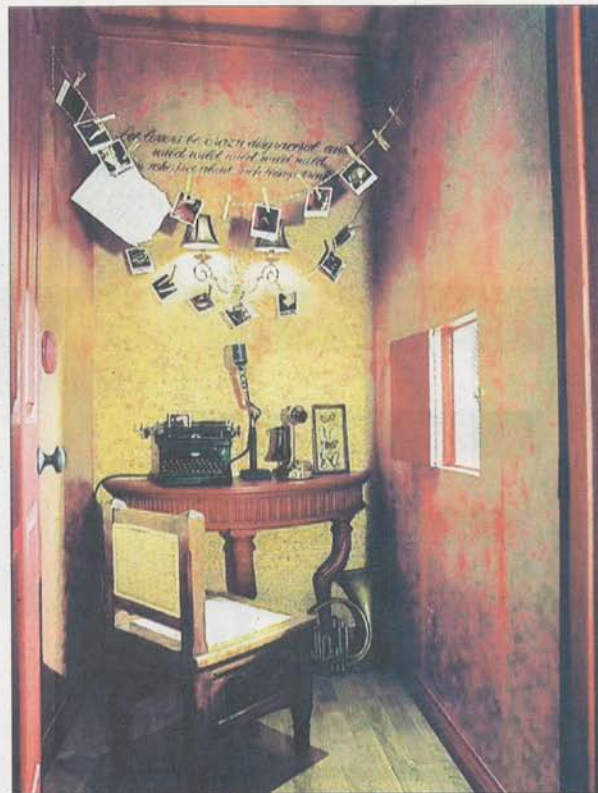
Indeed, many commercial spaces have embraced a more residential environment that invites lingering and promotes intimacy, Nemeth says, and the emphasis is on comfort over stark minimalism.

"People have been to clubs and lounges and homes that are sleek," Nemeth says. "It feels good when you step into a place that is Old World, that is comfortable."

"You feel pampered when you sit in a Chesterfield couch or a big men's smoking chairs."

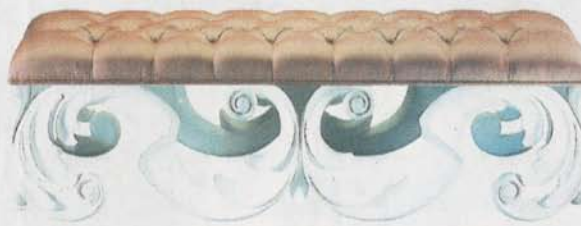
You might also feel like you've stepped into a Toulouse-Lautrec painting or an Edward Gorey illustration. At the Edison, the cavernous downtown L.A. space that was once a power plant, photographic nudes from the early 20th century overlook tufted leather benches and canopy chairs. Tables sport old-time movie projectors that look ready to show old stag films. The rooms ooze mystery and the promise of scandalous behavior.

"Wing and hooded chairs are about



Coco de Mer

DRESSING UP: Lingerie store Coco de Mer's "confessional" dressing room, above, lets partners share in the experience. Cheeky updates of period pieces, including a button-tufted ottoman with a neo-rococo base, below, mark Christopher Guy's style. The London designer recently opened a store in Beverly Hills.



Christopher Guy

creating privacy." Los Angeles artist and designer Aimee Less says of the emerging style. "They are particularly interesting because secret acts can be played out more or less in public."

She is the designer of the thoroughly modern Corset chair, whose fiberglass seat is pierced and strung with rope.

"The corset evokes both pleasure and pain, freedom and enslavement," she says.

At the Los Angeles store Coco de Mer, an upscale purveyor of lingerie, a "confessional" dressing room allows a customer to try on clothes while her companion looks on. Co-owner Sam Roddick agrees with Less' sentiment that for people bound by the respon-



Aimee Less

LACE-UP: The corset conjures "pleasure and pain," says Aimee Less of her modern chair design.

sibilities of work and family, design can be a form of release.

"Decadence doesn't become a symbol of opulence but a relief from reality," Roddick says.

Artigas and others think bordello chic will continue to grow, partly because the look is so L.A. — perhaps not the Los Angeles of Charles Eames or the clean-cut Case Study houses, but the Los Angeles embodied by the gritty writing of Charles Bukowski or the slightly seedy corners of the Sunset Strip. It's an outgrowth of a long-simmering sensibility pioneered by Adam Blackman and David Cruz, owners of the L.A. store Blackman Cruz, who specialize in eccentric designs that often look more suitable for a drafty 1910 London garret than a light-filled contemporary California home.

Many homeowners already have adopted elements of that aesthetic — a wing chair here, a bronze lamp there. But will the full-on bordello style popping up in commercial spaces spread into mass-market home décor? Hard to say, but the look does make fuddy-duddy furniture seem sexy, it can create a seductively cozy atmosphere, and it is much more easily duplicated than some other looks.

"People are not moving into bigger homes or spending their money on naughty weekends away," Roddick says. "Instead they are transforming where they live into their own fantasy, looking for items that make their homes more sensual and erotic."

As with many trends, bordello chic appears to be setting its roots in high-end retail first. The London-based designer Christopher Guy recently opened a Beverly Hills store that carries exuberant updates of period pieces. They may not have corset lacing or harness straps, but the sensibility is certainly implied in his high-backed gilded parlor chair, \$2,540, and a button-tufted ottoman with a white-lacquered neo-rococo base that sells for \$3,758 — madam not included.

home@latimes.com