

Opening Doors to Design

By JURA KONCIUS
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Ten years ago, the Washington Design Center, primarily a source of high-end, to-the-trade home furnishings, staged its first Design House in a bid to become more user-friendly. The twice-yearly event, for which designers dress up rooms with furnishings plucked from the center's purveyors of luxury furniture and fabric, has achieved that goal, according to James F. Caughman, vice president and general manager. The 2006 House, which opens tomorrow featuring the work of 10 local design firms, is expected to bring in 8,000 to 10,000 visitors, many of whom will be stepping into the emporium of luxury living for the first time.

"With each Design House, we see many visitors who have never seen what we have to offer here," says Caughman, noting that in the past 10 years the Design Center has opened a kitchen and a bath showroom floor for direct consumer sales. Also, one-third of the other

showrooms in the building are now open for consumer browsing, although purchases must still be made through a design professional.

The Design House is intended to be an idea house for the public. "It's an exciting opportunity to see inventive ways to utilize color and furniture," says Julia Chappell, the Design Center's marketing director. The rooms are not McMansion-size and require designers to deal with challenges such as low ceilings and no natural light.

We have focused here on the work of three design firms that offered fresh perspectives on the Washington look.

The Spring 2006 Design House was staged in conjunction with Washington Spaces magazine, a regional home and design publication owned by The Washington Post Co. It will be open six days a week, tomorrow through June 24. Weekday hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; closed Sundays. Admission is free. 300 D St. SW. For more information, call 202-646-6114 or visit www.merchandisemart.com/dcdesigncenter.



WORTH NOTING: An over-scaled table that does it all in a small space.
ELEMENTS: The command center of this well-ordered space is a generous 54-lacquer top; a hardworking multitasker that can be used for computer time, very cool components; the simple but sumptuous Donghia sofa in ivory cotton; pendant lighting fixture.
DESIGNER: Ernesto M. Santalla of Studio Santalla in Washington.



WORTH NOTING: A platform daybed heaped with bright pillows for one-room living.
ELEMENTS: Flea market pieces mix with investment furniture. A hanging scrim made of netting softens a rear wall — in this case painted with a botanical mural. Pillows of aqua and saffron add punch. A round mirror by Diane Watts at J. Lambeth reflects all the functions of the room: living, sleeping, eating and working.
DESIGNER: Susan Gulick of Susan Gulick Interiors in Reston.





PHOTOS ABOVE, FAR LEFT AND BELOW LEFT BY GORDON BEALL; BELOW RIGHT BY ROBERT A. REEDER — THE WASHINGTON POST

WORTH NOTING: An over-scaled table that does it all in a small space.

ELEMENTS: The command center of this well-ordered space is a generous 54-by-54-inch table in Mozambique wood with an off-white glossy lacquer top: a hardworking multitasker that can be used for computer time, poker or homework, and then host a dinner party for eight. Other very cool components: the simple but sumptuous Donghia sofa in ivory cotton, a goatskin rug from Stark Carpet and Foscarini's Big Bang pendant lighting fixture.

DESIGNER: Ernesto M. Santalla of Studio Santalla in Washington.



WORTH NOTING: Organic references amid quiet neutrals.

ELEMENTS: A setting of rich browns and creams is a backdrop for earthy focal points: a large-scale digital photograph of a horse and rider. And a Brunschwig & Fils rectangular metal coffee table topped with a metal tray filled with \$150 worth of white river rocks from Smith & Hawken. (Add a glass top if you don't want to spill your martini.)

DESIGNERS: Joseph Ireland and Julie Weber of J.D. Ireland Interior Architecture & Design in Washington.