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is to work in complexity.  
We must give  
the right example.”**

**—PATRICIA URQUIOLA**

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# Hand-Me-Downs

Designed to wow and created to last, these *heirlooms-in-waiting* are an antidote to throwaway consumerism in this era of disposable goods.

By Tim McKeough

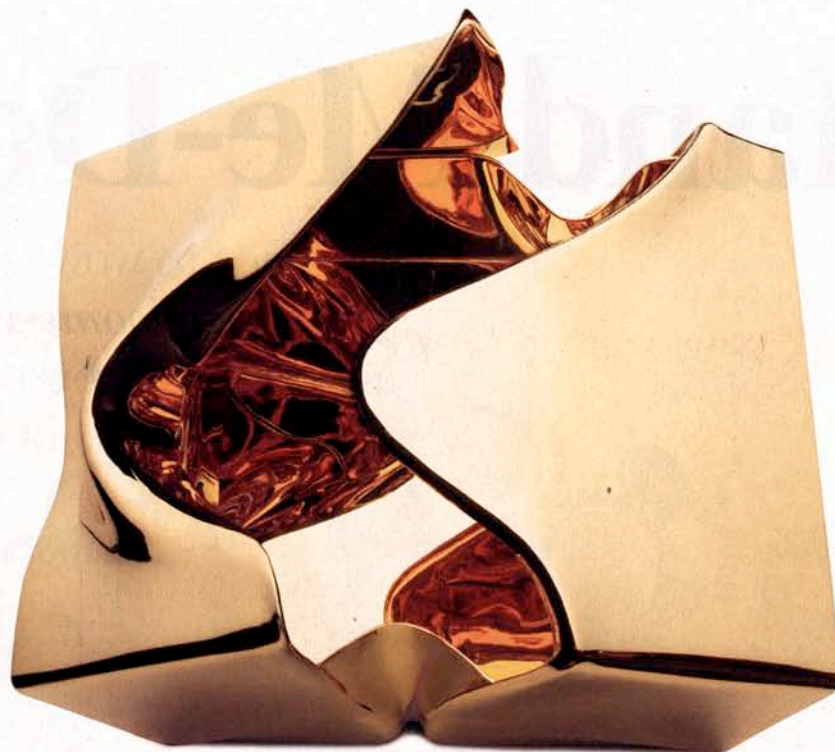
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM SCHIERLITZ





**W**e know an heirloom when we see one: old Limoges china, a Chippendale table, an Eames chair, a hand-stitched quilt passed down from generation to generation. But what are we making today that will become the heirlooms of tomorrow? What designs will not only witness the milestones of our lives (an iPhone can do that) and be with us at special moments (Snuggies!) but also endure for decades or even centuries?

Not many, you may be thinking. Indeed, the key virtues of a would-be heirloom—quality construction, exemplary materials, skilled craftsmanship, timeless design—seem particularly rare nowadays. Today's consumer culture often appears to be about more, not better, and nearly all of what we buy will end up in a landfill sooner rather than later. "Design is one of the professions that has helped create this culture of consumer waste," says Nathan Shedroff, chair of the design-strategy program at the California College of the Arts and author of *Design Is the Problem*, a call to arms for sustainable design. He argues that by responding to client demands for trendy, cheaply made goods without thinking about longer-term effects, designers have become "incredible facilitators" in a world of



Inspired by complex 18th-century French snuff boxes, Asymptote Architecture designed the **Mnemos 03** jewelry box (\$46,000) for Meta. It's made in an English atelier from gold vermeil and satinwood. [madebymeta.com](http://madebymeta.com)

disposable junk. "But the great thing about being in the midst of the problem is that you're right in the place where you can also make progress and create solutions," he says. "It's a matter of designers helping their clients do better, even if they don't initially want it."

And so some designers are, creating contemporary objects that combine present-day aesthetics with a commitment to old-fashioned craftsmanship and traditional durability. We believe that the products featured on the following pages—all made during the past five years—have a good chance of standing the tests of time and taste. Take the new Corvo chair, by French designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance for North Carolina's Bernhardt Design. At this year's Milan Furniture Fair, while other manufacturers were hawking myriad gimmicky goods—chairs with legs shaped like plastic bottles, Disney-themed stools with Mickey Mouse

ears—Bernhardt quietly unveiled just this one piece, which is hand-carved and sanded from solid walnut. Its shape is classic but curvaceous, and no two Corvos are exactly alike. The slight differences in the grain of the wood and the tiny deviations in line "could be considered imperfections, but we're saying that's perfect—bring it on," says Bernhardt's president Jerry Helling. "We want as much character in the chair as we can get. We realized that there was so much stuff already, so many products that just keep proliferating in the market. We joked about who actually needs another chair—unless it's special in some way."

The venerable London-based antiques dealer Mallett has also sought to create special somethings—antiques for the future, perhaps—with Meta, a line of collaborations

between contemporary designers and traditional master craftspeople. "We wanted to encourage a conversation between design in the contemporary, mathematical, computer-driven world, and the values of touch and aesthetics that drove the past," says Meta director Henry Neville. "Plastics do not always express shape and form best, especially when you could use something infinitely more tactile and sensuous."

*Sensuous* would certainly be a fair word to describe the swirling, almost liquid lines of the Mnemos 03 jewelry box, designed for Meta by the firm Asymptote Architecture. Inspired by intricate 18th-century gold boxes, its design was generated by computer, but realized in gold vermeil and satinwood by hand by British artisans. Like the other objects in our collection of the heirlooms of tomorrow, it's something you want to touch, you want to have—and you definitely want to hand down.



Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance designed the \$1,300 **Corvo** chair for Bernhardt in direct response to the excess he saw at the Milan Furniture Fair. The only way to justify even more product, he believes, is to create an object that is truly special, hence the Corvo, hand-crafted in North Carolina. [bernharttdesign.com](http://bernharttdesign.com)



Artisans in Nepal weave Odegard's **Navaratna**—Sanskrit for "nine gems" (\$120 per square foot). The not-for-profit Good-Weave certifies that no child labor was used in the rug's creation. [odegardinc.com](http://odegardinc.com)

