

A Texas team leaves its indelible imprint on furniture design



Over the years, the Fort Worth design team Minton-Corley has left a distinctive impression on many a Texas abode. If there exists a definitive style synonymous with the firm name, however, it is far from simple to pigeonhole. Yet certain salient characteristics run through the designs of both partners—in their own homes as well as in those of their clients—much as contrasting veins snake their way through great chunks of marble: a patent simplicity that brings a room to its logical conclusion instead of leaving it hanging on an atonal high note; a gratifying lack of artifice artfully achieved through the subtle blending of sharp and soft edges, smooth and rough textures, brilliant and muted colors; the sense of drama that comes from the perfect placement of accessories. And most distinctive of all is the unaffected ease that makes each sophisticated room seem at once comfortable and welcoming.

These inherent qualities have become the categorical hallmark of Minton-Corley furniture designs. Straightforward, simple, adaptable and uncontrived yet quietly spectacular, the various pieces in their collection combine integrity of material with classic contours to yield an end product that lends a rustic elegance to any but the most systematically period interiors.

Of the six series of tables, most of which have been given Italian names in deference to the country where they are produced,



each exudes an unmistakably Southwestern aura. Rust-finished hammered steel, nickel-plated brass and bronze, granite, Arizona stone and petrified wood all say Texas, yet without a trace of defiance. There is no smack of Lone Star anything about these chic new designs: They're neither trendy nor whimsical. Rather, there appears in each piece of the Minton-Corley line a forthright sense of Texas heritage that both designers find hard to deny, although the language of the finished product is decidedly continental—and even though much of the actual inspiration came from the Old World.

Distinctly aesthetic, the sophistication of the pieces bespeaks a broad-based knowledge of continental design applied without frippery to more regional roots. The handmade quality appeals to both seasoned and novice collectors, although as Corley puts it, "They're actually some-

where in between being hand- and machine-made. It's not like there's one little craftsman hammering each piece, but most are hand-assembled."

The "Albergo" is by far the most daring of the series and, as such, has a more limited application. The glass-topped table features a base of antique bronze-finished brass fashioned unexpectedly into a tree trunk with leafy fronds. Lit from above, the sculpted piece casts remarkable shadows on the floor to become a riveting focal point in any setting.

Equally surreal—and with a touch of Dali's mischievous wit—the "Zocolo" has a curiously adaptable quality. Supported by a base of three cast-bronze deer legs—*zocolo* means hoof in Italian—and with a top offered in petrified wood, granite, travert-

Combining a Southwestern flair with Italian sophistication, the Minton-Corley Collection features a series of tables incorporating such intriguing media as hammered metals, granite and petrified wood.

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DECORATIVE ARTS CONT'D

tine, wood or any number of faux-stone finishes, the table seems, on first inspection, remarkably whimsical. A closer look, however, reveals not only a precise, time-honored balance of triangular and pyramidal shapes, but again, a down-to-earth, frontier quality achieved by the simple deer's-hoof motif.

There appears in each piece of the new Minton-Corley collection a forthright sense of Texas heritage.

The petrified wood pieces, still in an embryonic stage of development, follow the same mode as the other designs, but they represent a foray into a slightly higher echelon of collecting value. A rainbow of beautiful swirling colors in each petrified slab results naturally from the breaking down of the wood and its gradual replacement by minerals; copper produces a blue-green, manganese and carbon add black and iron yields a yellow/red blend. Tremendously sought after in Europe for its value as a precious stone, the material, nearly as hard as a diamond, lends an investment quality to the designs as well as unusual good looks.

While in Europe, Joe Minton and David Corley stumbled upon the notion of experimenting with petrified wood designs. "A dealer had some pieces, small ones, in his shop," explains Corley, "and they intrigued us. He said they were from Arizona, of all places; he seemed very proud of that. We were going to buy a piece of it, but it was so expensive we decided to investigate things ourselves."

Some time later, Minton and Corley ventured into the Petrified Forest in Arizona and located a family with a ranch adjacent to it. As luck would have it, the head of the household was familiar with the mineral's propensities and agreed to fashion table tops for the collection. "He's one of about three people in this country capable of working with that material," explains Corley. "It takes almost a week to cut one of those tiny tops."

For the time being, the small slabs are mounted on the "Zocolo" base, but the designers intend to devise a more suitable shape mimicking an organ-pipe cactus.

Minton and Corley don't yet consider themselves furniture designers par excel-

lence, however, so there rings throughout their conversations a refreshingly humble modesty. "We're really just feeling our way along," says Corley. "It's the kind of thing where you design something and you almost can't believe somebody would buy it. And things just pick up from there."

The sophistication of these pieces bespeaks a continental elegance.

Truth to tell, Minton and Corley have been designing furniture for nearly 10 years. In addition to their retail antiques shop in Fort Worth—for which they plan special buying sojourns in Europe several times a year—they have amassed a collection of their own designs.

"It all started piecemeal," says Corley, "when we were on a buying trip in northern Italy near Milan. We discovered a factory where they were producing this sort of look—which really wasn't around at all back then. We discussed what we wanted and they knocked out some pieces for us. But it was just a one-time thing then, for a client or for us."

Two years ago, David Sutherland approached the firm about placing Minton-Corley antiques on the floor of his Dallas and Houston showrooms; impressed with the new designs, he also requested several of them on consignment. Today, the Minton-Corley Collection is represented in David Sutherland's two Texas showrooms and in his Denver space, as well as at LCS in New York and London-Marquis in Los Angeles. The bold, innovative elegance of the designs is ideally suited to the calibre of creativity that characterizes all three maverick showrooms.

The subtle beauty of their premier collection is just what one might expect from this talented duo. In fact, harmonious as they are with both contemporary and antique appointments, these furniture designs fit right into an interior Minton and Corley might have dreamed up. They don't fight for center stage nor steal any thunder from the carefully conglomerate balance of furnishings and accessories, colors and moods that defines a remarkable room. Rather, the Minton-Corley Collection represents the debut of very appealing, sophisticated new designs whose Texas trappings share equal time with worldly contours, all combining to enhance the successful mélange of elements that creates comfortable interior drama. □



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