

DO YOU SPEAK WORLD-CLASS FURNITURE DESIGNER JOE MUNSON'S LANGUAGE?

Design & Remodeling

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All photographs by Roy Inman.

Joe Munson's prototype furniture and craftwork defies mass-market demand and invites attention from an audience informed by design.

A scarlet carpet cuts across the sidewalk at 1803 Wyandotte and leads guests into the first floor of W Lofts, where furniture designer and fabricator Joe Munson hosts what he has named, "Prototype2." The private exhibition, held March 2013, displays ten original works by Munson, road-trip inspired photography by Bob Greenspan and a sleek drink cart designed by Chris Fein of Forward Design | Architecture.

Inside the room, Joe Munson's piercing eyes and shock of curly brown hair gives him the appearance of a man to be reckoned with. His East Coast accent serves to reinforce the persona of seriousness bolstered by sheer drive and laser beam focus. He's dedicated to his work and determined to show that world-class furniture is being produced in Kansas City.

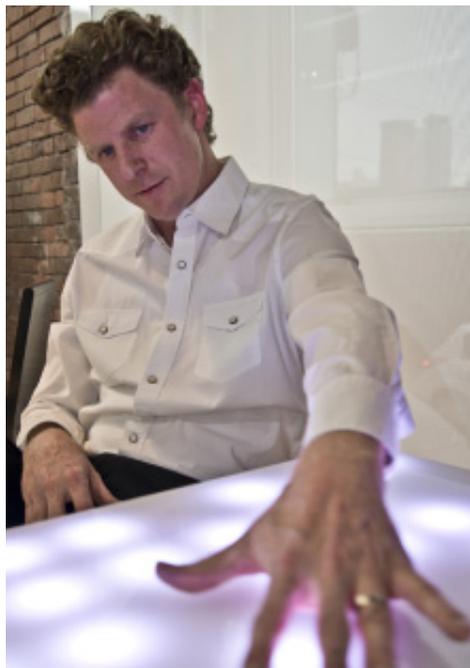
“This work exists around the world,” Munson, 38, says. “Furniture makers produce awesome work, but most consumers want cheap pieces.”



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Cheap furniture brings to mind assemble-it-yourself desks and entertainment units from mass-market retailers. These items lack elevated design and will likely wind up in a garage sale or curbside pick-up when the owner is ready to upgrade to another piece of commodity furniture.

“Artists and furniture designers are going away. There’s no career for industrial designers except at the corporate level.” ~ Joe Munson



Munson, formerly a New Yorker, operates on a completely different level. Some people appreciate the aesthetic behind designers and fabricators, such as Brooklyn's Aswone®/Susan Woods Studio's objects d'art and architectural pieces using sophisticated, reclaimed materials, Palo Samko's exquisite wood furniture or the minimalist tables of Yoshiharu Hatano of Italian firm Naos. Using raw materials and a self-taught design vocabulary, Munson creates high-end pieces that attract many interior designers, architects and residential commissions seeking furniture, sculpture and displays that last a lifetime and speak a different language than what is often found in a suburban store or from a commercial source.

To clarify, the exhibition's title "Prototype2" reflects the intent of Munson's work to serve as one-of-a-kind prototypes not developed for mass production, stamped out in a factory and shipped out through a distribution channel. Most of his pieces are the first rendering.

He wishes more people appreciated his art. "Artists and furniture designers are going away," he says. "There's no career for industrial designers except at the corporate level."

For his part, Munson shrugs off that career path and shuns suggestions such as "You should make and sell this to..." That's not his *raison d'être*. His ideas have inherent value to a select audience and, on Munson's terms, manifest in a range of functional work that demonstrate what can be accomplished as an expression of contemporary minimalism.



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Constructed of aluminum, mechanical components and mesh roller shade, the bottom roll-up window shade system (\$4,500) is an idea executed to perfection—like a work of Japanese calligraphy with the exact allocation of strokes needed—conveying visual eloquence and the power of simplicity in how effortlessly it communicates its purpose.

“I attempt to incite a passion in people about what I’m doing,” Munson says. “There are so many little details that total something much bigger. What looks simple and beautiful is hard to do.”

Each piece, hidden or exposed, of Munson’s work is custom-made. It’s intricate and complex in design to hone the totality of the furniture to its essence. This exhibition is a literal invitation for onlookers to open their eyes and cultivate an appreciation for custom work that will endure for generations. Munson says, “Everything I make is built to last 100 years. It’s solid.”

Speaking of solid, the Hull Worktable, (\$17,500) made of carbon steel, walnut and solid surface measures...

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