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PLAYING THE MARQUETRY

Derek Frost combines eighteenth-century characteristics (niceness to budding craftsmen and a passion for marquetry) with twentieth-century motifs (such as inlaid piano keys). CAROLINE CLIFTON-MOGG profiles him

DEREK FROST, bright young interior designer, is a name already well known to those who take note of such things. Derek Frost, bright young designer of interesting and innovative furniture, is not such a well-known quantity. But that is all soon to change. From 10 to 20 June at Leighton House Museum, 12 Holland Park Road, W14 there

will be an exhibition of pieces of furniture designed by Frost and made by some of the specialist craftsmen whose talents he has been nurturing and promoting for the past few years. The pieces themselves are simple – almost sturdy – in shape, but surprisingly complex in texture and ornament. Finishes like lacquer, inlaid mother-of-pearl, exotic veneers, and even silver gilding are all used

'Volume', Derek Frost's yew and walnut inlaid table piano, stands at an interior-designed angle in his Pimlico mews house and studio. From the high gallery, the bold lines of his carpet can all be seen at once

with abandon, but because of the simplicity of shape, the final result is remarkably restrained.

Derek Frost has been designing furniture for several years now, starting, as do so many interior designers, by designing special pieces for specific clients or interiors. Britain has always had an abundance of fine craftsmen too often working undiscovered and unsung, as Derek Frost found when searching for people to execute the increasing intricacy of his designs. Slowly his stable of artists



Two examples of ideas brought to fruition: the mahogany legs of Derek Frost's 'Racing Chair' are in the form of horses' legs with calves and hooves. Next to it is his 'Pebble' table, in burr maple inlaid with relaxed-looking mother-of-pearl squares

grew, and with the new talents he was finding he began designing pieces of furniture for himself rather than for clients, thinking of ways that might stretch the techniques of these craftsmen further. Collaborating with specialists is always interesting, and the results can often go far beyond the ideas that either designer or craftsmen could come up with alone. So it is with these pieces. Frost of course feels that he still has far to go in combining specialist skills such as metalwork and veneers, mother-of-pearl and marquetry. One of the purposes of the Leighton House exhibition is to show a wider audience both what he can do and what he would like to do.

Furniture design is Derek Frost's new love. His old and continuing love is interior design. On his own now for three years, his career continues to expand, as it has done since he first decided to enter this often mine-strewn field. Although it seems that most interior designers come to their profession through unorthodox rather than orthodox methods, it still cannot be often that a designer as successful as Frost actually begins his career by doing a correspondence course on interior design (no doubt entitled 'How to be an interior designer'). But so it was, and after this slightly surprising start he began the long haul, working first in the GLC's then very good architects' department and subsequently for several interior designers, before finding himself at Mary Fox Linton's at a time when she was still in partnership with David Hicks. About a year later Hicks and Fox Linton went their separate ways, and Frost found himself in the right position to learn, absorb, and so develop his own ideas about interior design.

Just over three years ago he formed Derek Frost Associates, and now he works with private and corporate clients. He believes in a great deal of personal contact, likening his role to that of a couturier designing something individual and tailor-made to each new client's needs.

To describe his style is difficult. He has moved on from modern abstractions to a contemporary look that appears, conversely, to appeal as much to traditionalists as to those of more modern outlook, and although firmly rooted in the 1980s, he likes to think that his standards owe more to the ideals of eighteenth-century workmanship than to twentieth-century mass production. 

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