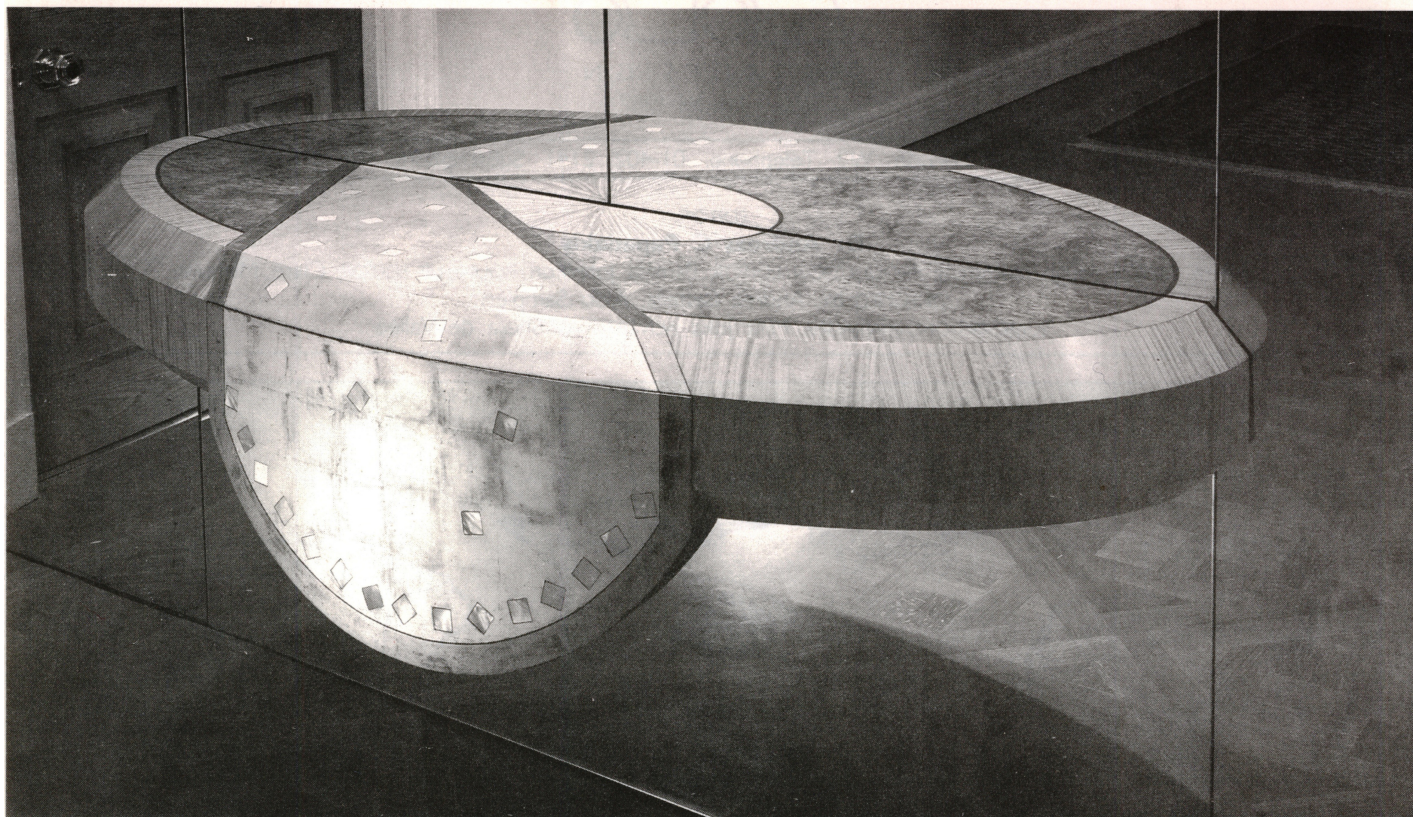




Silver Scarf console

Manifesto for opulence

Derek Frost, of Derek Frost Associates, a London-based design consultancy currently attracting attention with its break into furniture production, describes himself as passionate to the point of lunacy about sumptuous and luxurious materials. In this respect he shares much in common with his confessed hero, Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann, the French designer who dominated the furniture scene in Paris during the 20s, with his sumptuous and superbly crafted pieces directed at the luxury market.

Ruhlmann has been described as a 'magnificent anachronism', a designer whose pursuit of opulence, and unabashed use of the most expensive materials available, for the satisfaction of an extremely limited clientele, might well have struck a discordant note in post-war Paris. Can one level the same criticism at Frost? The pieces pictured here are triumphs of craftsmanship, combining materials rarely come by in contemporary furniture design. The Silver Scarf console consists of burr maple, satinwood, and blue-stained sycamore, with the scarf portion executed in distressed white gold water gilding inlaid with squares of mother-of-pearl. The Architectural end table is in grey stained cherry and satinwood with inlaid ovals of massar birch. So far, all Frost's furniture has been commissioned by, and produced for, some eight private individuals, all with a strong interest in patronising and collecting works of modern design and craftsmanship. They share Frost's conviction that it is time to overcome our present qualms with respect to Art Deco ideals

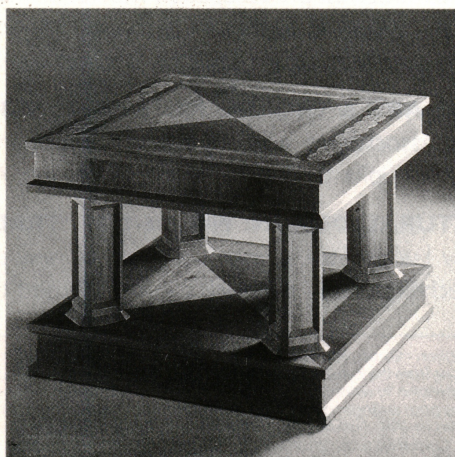
of unashamed sensuousness and artistic display in furniture design, and set aside our obsession with functionalism. They consider there to be a pressing need for the restoration of traditional standards of detail, quality, and line, and the re-establishment of modern design firmly within a historical context, acknowledging the significance and relevance of the past to contemporary workmanship.

As yet these ideals are gaining currency only slowly. While there has been a visible increase in the sums of money being directed towards the pur-

chase of works of art and sculpture for display in public places, company headquarters, and other commercial premises, investment in contemporary furniture design is proving more difficult to encourage. However, Frost is confident that change is afoot, and that the market for pieces such as he is producing, is gradually going to widen out beyond the very exclusive private realm for which he has been catering up till now. Despite the poor economic climate, the availability of vast sums of surplus money in commercial quarters is a matter of general knowledge.

Insofar as the trend both in design and architectural circles is towards greater decorative and ornamental input, Derek Frost is, if anything, ahead of his times – hardly an anachronism. He is naturally sympathetic to the revived use of classical forms and traditional materials in architecture, while less enthusiastic about the 'jokey' aspect of post-modern design. Readily describing himself as an 'architectural designer', Derek Frost is one of the trail-blazers in the exciting move towards a greater integration of architecture, furnishings, and fittings, along the lines of eighteenth-century architect-designers such as William Kent; as well as being an important maintainer of Art Deco traditions of artistry until recently lost sight of.

ECM



Architectural end table

An exhibition of Frost's furniture, plus some of his rugs and textiles, will be open to viewers at Leighton House, Holland Park, from 9th-20th June 1987.